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De rode lijn die vervaagde en vervolgens verdween: De invloed van binnenlandse politieke dimensies op het niet nakomen van de door Obama gestelde rode lijn tegen Syrië

Bruijn, Jeroen de

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De rode lijn die vervaagde en vervolgens verdween

De invloed van binnenlandse politieke dimensies op het niet nakomen van de door
Obama gestelde rode lijn tegen Syrië



Universiteit
Leiden

Auteur: J.J.A.M. de Bruijn

Student No.: 2063735

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Begeleider: Dr. P.A. van Hooft

Tweede lezer: Dr. F.E. Bakker

Onderzoeksvraag: 'Hoe kunnen de visie van de president, oorlogsmoeheid in de publieke
opinie, economische beperkingen en tegenstellingen binnen het Congres daadkrachtig
handelen van de Amerikaanse regering belemmeren?'

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Abstract

Het volgende onderzoek zal pogen verheldering te geven over het uitblijven van militaire actie na de Syrische schending van de rode lijn gesteld door de Amerikaanse president Barack Obama in 2013. Het gebruik van chemische wapens van Syrië tegen haar eigen burgers vormde voor Obama (2012b) een rode lijn. Met het stellen van de rode lijn committeerde de president zichzelf tot actie bij overschrijding ervan. Bij het wel of niet nakomen hiervan zijn zowel externe als interne gevolgen aan verbonden. De literatuur kan geen verklaring geven waarom Obama, ondanks de externe gevolgen, geen gehoor gaf aan zijn eigen rode lijn. Het neoklassiek realisme kan met interveniërende variabelen verklaring geven waarom de binnenlandse omstandigheden het voor Obama niet mogelijk maakte zijn rode lijn na te komen. Door aan te tonen welke binnenlandse actoren invloed hadden op het gevoerde buitenlandbeleid na de schending van de lijn, kan dit onderzoek voorgaande literatuur aanvullen en een handvat bieden voor verdere uitwerking van deze theorie op vergelijkbare cases. Geconcludeerd wordt dat de visie van de president, oorlogsmoeheid in de publieke opinie, economische beperkingen en tegenstellingen binnen het Congres ervoor zorgde dat er voor een diplomatieke oplossing werd gekozen i.p.v. een militaire interventie.

Introductie

Op 20 augustus 2013 maakte president Barack Obama (hierna Obama genoemd) van de Verenigde Staten van Amerika (kortweg VS) een statement die doorslaggevend zou zijn voor de Amerikaanse positie t.o.v. de Syrische burgeroorlog (Nahlawi, 2016, pp. 76-77). Obama (2013b) stelde dat het ‘verplaatsen en gebruiken van chemische wapens een rode lijn is waar consequenties aan verbonden zijn’. Hierna werd deze rode lijn nogmaals benadrukt: “het gebruik van chemische wapens of de overdracht van chemische wapens voor terroristische groeperingen is een rode lijn die niet acceptabel is voor ons” (The White House: President Barack Obama, 2013).

Op 21 augustus 2013 vond er een grootschalige chemische aanval van het Syrische leger plaats in Ghouta, waarbij 1400 burgers om het leven kwamen (Human Rights Watch, 2013). De VS dreigde met vergelding, maar een aanval liet op zich wachten. Op 31 augustus diende Obama (2013a), tegen de verwachtingen in, eerst een verzoek tot aanval in bij het Congres. Op 14 september werd met Rusland diplomatieke overeenstemming bereikt over het vernietigen van de chemische wapens en was een vergeldingsaanval definitief van tafel (Gordon, 2013). Het gevolg was gezichtsverlies van de VS op het internationale podium en het machtsvacuüm in Syrië werd opgevuld door Hezbollah, Iran, ISIS en later Rusland. Het toenemende geweld had verder als gevolg dat er een vluchtelingenstroom op gang kwam en stijgende onveiligheid in de regio (Levitt, 2021, p. 724). Achteraf gezien kan gesteld worden dat het niet verstandig van Obama was om geen gehoor te geven aan zijn rode lijn.

Binnen de literatuur kan er geen duidelijk overzicht gegeven worden waarom Obama, ondanks de externe druk om te reageren, toch eerder naar de interne druk luisterde en geen gehoor gaf aan zijn eigen rode lijn. Tot op heden is er nog geen casestudie gemaakt naar het niet nakomen van de rode lijn vanuit het neoklassiek realisme. De interveniërende variabelen van deze theoretische stroming uit het realisme zouden meer duiding kunnen geven aan de plotselinge verandering in het buitenlandbeleid t.o.v. Syrië (Dück, Rieger & Stahl, 2021, p. 266). Uit de theorie blijkt dat de visie van de president, de publieke opinie, economische beperkingen en verdeeldheid binnen het Congres invloed kunnen hebben op het buitenlandbeleid van een staat. Door middel van *process tracing* zal gepoogd worden de volgende hoofdvraag te beantwoorden: ‘Hoe kunnen de visie van de president, oorlogsmoeheid in de publieke opinie, economische beperkingen en tegenstellingen binnen het Congres daadkrachtig handelen van de Amerikaanse regering belemmeren?’

Literatuur review

Binnen de literatuur worden zowel interne als externe factoren genoemd die invloed hadden op de afweging van de Amerikaanse regering om wel of niet op de rode lijn te reageren. De strategische koers van de regering Obama speelt mogelijk hierbij een rol.

De grand strategy van de Obama regering

Een begrip die veel voorkomt in het debat over welke strategische koers Obama voerde, is *Grand strategy*. Dit kan gedefinieerd worden als “de intellectuele architectuur die vorm en structuur geeft aan het buitenlandbeleid’ en een doelgericht en samenhangende reeks ideeën over wat een natie in de wereld wil bereiken en hoe het dat zou moeten doen” (Brands, 2014, p. 3). Clarke & Ricketts stellen dat Obama voorzichtiger was met ingrijpen als Amerikaanse belangen niet direct in het geding waren (2017, p. 317). Deze terughoudendheid was met name in Syrië terug te vinden, waar niet werd ingegrepen (Juneau, 2020, p. 397; Bentley, 2014, p. 1045).

Glaser & Thrall (2017) zijn het niet eens met de terughoudendheid en stellen dat de *grand strategy* van Obama meer werd gekenmerkt door *primacy* en bleef het min of meer in lijn met zijn voorgangers (p. 21). De strategie houdt in dat alleen een overwicht van de Amerikaanse macht voor vrede zorgt (Posen & Ross, 1996, p. 32). Calculli (2017) stelt dat de VS de *war on terror* en de strategie in het Midden-Oosten juist voortzette, maar dan via een “dual beleid van publieke en schaduw betrokkenheid” met name in Syrië (p. 280).

Williams (2016) stelt dat de strategie van Obama in het Midden-Oosten gekenmerkt kan worden als “strategische afwezigheid” (p. 85). Deze strategie stelt dat de Amerikaanse belangen vernauwd moeten worden en de VS internationaal conflictbeheer delegeert aan regionale betrokken actoren (pp. 85-86). Als er sprake van deze strategische afwezigheid en terughoudendheid was, rijst de vraag waarom de VS dan toch een actieve rol aannam t.o.v. Syrië.

Mogelijke externe druk

De literatuur geeft een aantal interpretaties van externe factoren die bijdroegen aan het niet nakomen van de rode lijn en de gevolgen ervan.

Een internationale consensus, zoals te zien was bij Libië, bleef uit (Cronogue, 2012, p. 126). Reden hiervoor was de verdeeldheid binnen de VN-veiligheidsraad: de EU sloeg een minder

harde toon aan en Rusland en China gebruikten hun vetorecht (Nahlawi, 2016, pp. 87-89). Rusland en China zijn belangrijke bondgenoten van Syrië: beide staten hebben handelsbelangen in het land en Rusland is de grootste wapenleverancier van het land en heeft een marinebasis in Tartus liggen (Cronogue, 2012, pp. 159-150). Deze actoren zorgden ervoor dat militair ingrijpen via de weg van het internationaal recht lastig werd.

Een andere veronderstelling die genoemd wordt, is dat het leger van Syrië beter was georganiseerd dan dat van Ghadaffi en over een geavanceerder luchtafweersysteem beschikte, wat precisiebombardementen zou bemoeilijken (p. 153). Nahlawi (2016) stelt dat de Syrische militaire eenheden zich onder de bevolking mengden, waardoor er kans was op een groot aantal civiele slachtoffers (p. 97).

In de literatuur zijn een aantal internationale gevolgen te vinden bij het niet ingrijpen van de VS. Lewis & Tertrais (2017) maken op dat Frankrijk teleurgesteld was in het uitblijven van vergelding van de VS. Ook vonden Hollande, en later Macron, dat het uitblijven van actie door de internationale gemeenschap als teken van zwakte gezien kon worden (pp. 96-97). Pearlman (2020) stelt dat de Syrische oppositie positief stond tegenover Amerikaanse actie, maar dat het uitblijven hiervan de wanhoop versterkte, wat leidde tot een versnelling van extremisme (p. 190).

Een gevolg van een diplomatieke oplossing was dat het Syrische regime weer legitimiteit werd gegeven. Dit terwijl Obama eerder stelde het regime niet als legitiem te zien en vond dat Assad moest vertrekken (Lewis & Tertrais, 2017, p. 95). Hierdoor zou het gebruik van chemische wapens onbestraft blijven (pp. 95-96). De geloofwaardigheid van de VS in de wereld had hierdoor een knauw gekregen door het bluffen van Obama (p. 97). Mitton (2015) is het hiermee eens, gezien een sterke reputatie bij kan dragen aan een betere onderhandelingspositie in toekomstige kwesties (p. 426). Ten slotte brengt het verklaren van een rode lijn het fenomeen van *'tied hands'* met zich mee: Wanneer een land een rode lijn afkondigt, beperkt het opzettelijk zijn eigen bewegingsvrijheid, vooral als de verklaring gepaard gaat met het spreken van strafmaatregelen (Guzansky, 2013, p. 24).

Mogelijke interne druk

Volgens eerder onderzoek waren er intern gezien voor Obama een aantal motivatiepunten om zijn rode lijn al dan niet uit te voeren. De literatuur interpreteert dat er interne verdeeldheid was hoe om te gaan met de schending van de rode lijn.

Binnen de Amerikaanse politiek was er onenigheid of een interventie in Syrië wenselijk was. Men was teleurgesteld in de afloop van de interventie in Libië, waar een strijd om de macht uitbrak en het Congres was verdeeld (Lewis & Tertrais, 2017, p. 78; Burns & Stravers, 2020, pp. 85-87).

Binnen de regering van Obama waren Kerry, Power, Koh, Rice en Clinton voorstanders voor een interventie en drongen hier bij Obama ook op aan (pp. 87-88). Lantis (2021) stelt dat er binnen de Amerikaanse politiek verdeeldheid was tussen wel en niet ingrijpen waarbij de afweging lag tussen morele plicht en een slepende betrokkenheid bij een conflict (pp. 7-8). Een belangrijke binnenlandse factor die in de literatuur wordt genoemd, is de publieke opinie. Mazza-Hilway (2019) maakt op dat publieke opinie “de gemeenschappelijke factor is tussen de presidentschappen en het antwoord op de vraag van de Syrische regimeverandering” (p. 29). Publieke steun kan een rol spelen in de afweging van presidenten om wel of niet ergens in te grijpen.

Bij het niet nakomen van een publiek dreigement ontstaan ‘binnenlandse publiekskosten’. Dit is een vorm van “politieke straf opgelegd aan de leider van een staat als hij geen gevolg geeft aan een openbare dreiging” (Sechser, 2017, pp. 1-5). Burns & Stravers (2020) stellen dat Obama deze publiekskosten af probeerde te wentelen op het Congres door toestemming te vragen voor zijn interventie. Nadat het Congres zich hier negatief over uitte, kon Obama dit als legitimatie gebruiken voor het niet ingrijpen (pp. 91-100).

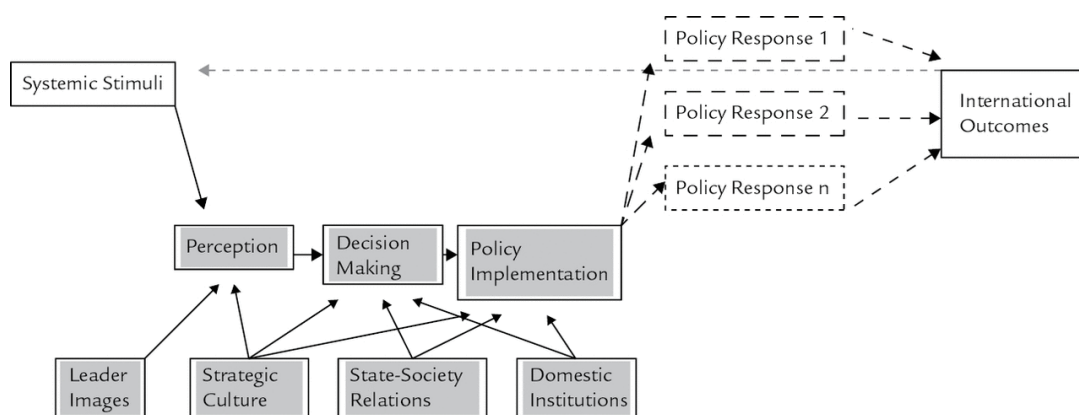
De literatuur stelt dat vanuit de *grand strategy* de rode lijn lastig te verklaren viel en er extern verdeeldheid was over de aanpak van de chemische wapens en hoe om te gaan met het Syrische leger. Verder dwong Obama zichzelf met zijn uitspraak om te reageren. Intern was er verdeeldheid hoe om te gaan met de kwestie. Echter schiet de literatuur op een aantal punten tekort. Zo wordt niet beschreven waarom de regering gevoeliger leek voor de interne dan voor de externe druk. Intern gezien was er verdeeldheid en de publieke opinie was de interventie niet positief gezind, maar ondanks dat focust de literatuur zich vooral op de externe druk en de gevolgen daarvan. Internationaal gezien leek het niet verstandig om niet op actie over te gaan na het overschrijden van de rode lijn door Syrië. Er was een externe bedreiging waar op allerlei manieren gehoor aan kon worden gegeven. Militair gezien had de VS daar ook de capaciteiten voor. Verder genoot het, ondanks het afhaken van Groot-Brittannië, nog steeds steun van bondgenoten als Frankrijk om militair in te grijpen. Om deze puzzel van interne vs. externe druk op te lossen, is verder onderzoek nodig.

Theoretisch raamwerk

Neoklassiek realisme

Het neoklassiek realisme (NKR) kan verklaring bieden voor het besluit van Obama om militair niet in te grijpen. Deze stroming binnen het realisme gaat ervan uit dat beleidskeuzes niet alleen ontstaan uit veranderingen in het systeem, maar dat binnenlandse factoren er ook een aandeel in vormen (Rose, 1998, pp. 152-153).

Het internationale systeem is de onafhankelijke variabele van de causale ketting. Het gedrag van een staat wordt bepaald door de nationale belangen in het wereldsysteem (Ripsman, Taliaferro & Lobell p. 56; Marsh, 2014, pp. 122-123).



Figuur 1: weergave van het causale verband van het NKR (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 59)

Interveniërende variabelen

Het NKR verschilt van het structureel realisme door het betrekken van “binnenlandse interveniërende variabelen die bepalen of en hoe staten reageren op de internationale systeemdruk waarvan alle realisten aannemen dat ze ten grondslag liggen aan buitenlandbeleid, *grand strategy* en internationale politiek” (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 58).

Deze interveniërende variabelen bestaan uit: de wereldperceptie van de leider, strategische cultuur, relatie tussen maatschappij en staat en binnenlandse instituties (p. 59). Deze variabelen hebben invloed op de besluiten. De variabelen van Ripsman et al. zullen als paraplu voor het raamwerk dienen en aangevuld worden met andere variabelen uit het NKR.

Wereldvisie leider

De wereldperceptie van de leider houdt de visie en waarden in van de leidinggevende van het buitenlandbeleid, zoals president, premier, belangrijke kabinetsleden of dictator (Ripsman et

al., 2016, p. 61). Dit figuur heeft grote invloed op hoe een staat reageert op een gebeurtenis en vormt een belangrijke schakel in de perceptie van een gebeurtenis of mogelijke dreiging. Een leider bezit een verzameling van normen en waarden, overtuigingen en visies die de informatie die hij of zij binnenkrijgt filtert. Dit heeft als gevolg dat percepties van gebeurtenissen in de wereld gepersonaliseerd zijn en een leider zijn of haar handelen daarop baseert (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 62-63). Verder bezit een leider een aantal ‘hoofd overtuigingen’ waarvan een drietal cognities deze overtuigingen invulling geven: “filosofische overtuigingen over politiek, instrumentele opvattingen over welke strategieën het beste zijn om belangen te bewerkstelligen, en beelden van diegene zijn vijanden en zichzelf” (p. 64). Op de korte termijn heeft deze wereldvisie de meeste invloed van de interveniërende variabelen (p. 91).

De leider van een staat geniet in het systeem van de VS van aantoonbare autonomie (Dueck, 2009, p. 147). De wereldvisie van de president en zijn adviseurs heeft een sterke invloed op de “timing, reikwijdte en publieke vertegenwoordiging van een interventie” (Marsh, 2014, p. 127). De verwachting is dat deze variabele de meeste invloed zal hebben in het causale verband.

Strategische cultuur

De strategische cultuur kan beschouwd worden als “diepgewortelde overtuigingen, wereldbeelden en gedeelde verwachtingen van een samenleving” (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 66). Deze categorie bepaalt hoe een staat naar de wereld kijkt en dit heeft invloed op hoe een staat reageert op gebeurtenissen en hoe de *grand strategy* vormgegeven moet worden. Deze variabele kan de collectieve verwachtingen van zowel politieke elites als het publiek beschrijven (p. 66). Deze strategische cultuur kan limieten stellen aan de reactie van politieke elites op internationale gebeurtenissen. Strategische keuzes dienen aangepast te worden om te voorkomen dat het conflicteert met idealen of uitgangspunten (p. 70).

Dueck (2006) beschrijft de strategische cultuur van de VS als volgt: “de klassiek-liberale veronderstellingen en de historische voorkeur voor beperkte aansprakelijkheid in strategische zaken” (p. 21). Deze kenmerken geven volgens Dueck ruimte aan verschillende “strategische subculturen die in de loop van de tijd toenemen en afnemen: namelijk internationalisten, nationalisten, progressieven en realisten (p. 21). Een gevolg hiervan is dat de VS niet altijd adequaat kan reageren, omdat de strategische cultuur de acties limiteert (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 69). Marsh (2014) ziet oorlogsmoeheid als gevolg van de interventies in Irak en

Afghanistan als belangrijke variabele (pp. 128-129). Deze variabele kan invloed hebben op de visie van de president en de besluitvoering.

Relatie staat-maatschappij

De relatie tussen maatschappij en staat kan als volgt gezien worden: de sociale cohesie, publieke steun voor buitenlandbeleid en de mate waarin de maatschappij naar de staatsleider kijkt als er onenigheid is over het buitenlandbeleid (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 70-71). Publieke steun speelt een rol in de overweging een militaire interventie te starten (Geis & Schlag, 2017, p. 297). Verder neemt publieke steun voor een interventie snel af als blijkt dat dit financieel veel gaat kosten en langdurig kan zijn (Dueck, 2009, p. 144).

Een andere belangrijke factor die invloed heeft op publieke steun voor een interventie is die van de macro-economie. Als de staat van de economie in een ongunstige positie verkeert, dan ligt de publieke focus meer op binnenlandse problemen dan op die van het buitenland (Hildebrandt et al., 2013, p. 261). Deze factor kan van toepassing zijn op de casus, gezien de economische crisis die op dat moment een rol speelde. Marsh (2014) en Boke (2016) gebruiken in hun theorie de economische crisis als determinant die invloed heeft op het wel of niet uitvoeren van een militaire interventie (p. 127; p. 7). Verwacht wordt dat deze variabele invloed heeft op de besluitvoering.

Binnenlandse instituties

Binnenlandse instituties hebben betrekking op de invloed van deze instituties op het beleid in de vorm van vetorecht, het blokkeren van voorstellen en het aanpassen ervan (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 75). Dueck (2009) stelt dat militaire interventies sociaal gezien kostbaar zijn, wat het starten ervan moeilijk maakt, omdat binnenlandse actoren overtuigd dienen te worden (p. 146). Amerikaanse instituties hebben invloed op twee manieren: “Ten eerste, hebben ambtenaren opvattingen van het nationaal belang en van potentiële bedreigingen voor dat belang. Ten tweede, wanneer externe bedreigingen militaire interventie noodzakelijk lijken te maken, overwegen functionarissen hoe ze het beste een interventie na kunnen streven in het licht van binnenlandse omstandigheden” (p. 148).

Marsh (2014) stelt dat het karakter van de operatie en de beschikbare keuzes voor de president van de VS ernstig beperkt werden door de perceptie van de politieke elite op een interventie (pp. 129-130). De staat van de nationale economie heeft ook invloed op de maatregelen die genomen worden door het Congres (Hildebrandt, Hillebrecht, Holm &

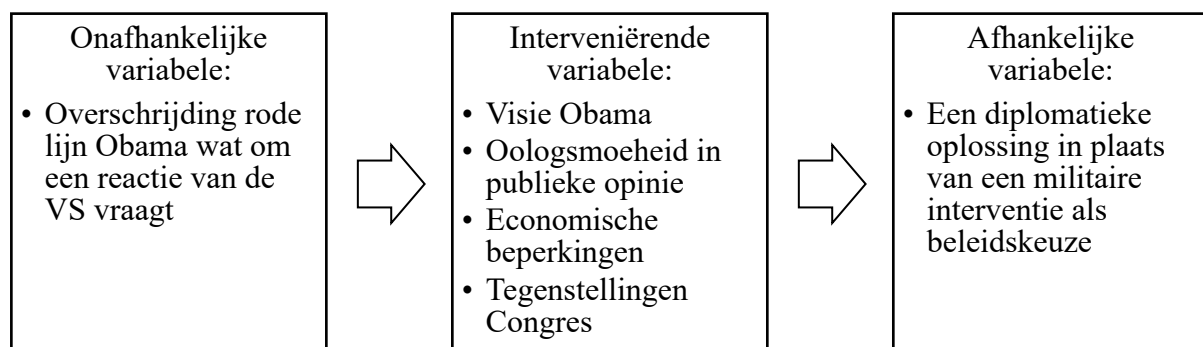
Pevehouse, 2013, p. 261). Doorslaggevende verklarende factoren die invloed hebben op de individuele stemming binnen het Congres zijn partijlidmaatschap, ideologie en de publieke opinie (pp. 260-261). Politieke elites wegen hun keuzes bij militaire interventies af op basis van de binnenlandse publieke perceptie hierop (Hildebrandt et al., 2013, p. 261).

Binnen de theorie van het NKR worden meerdere interveniërende variabelen genoemd. Juneau (2015) benoemt de volgende variabelen: de status aspiratie van een staat, de identiteit van een regime en bureaucratische competitie (p. 41). Schweller (2004) identificeert elite consensus, kwetsbaarheid van de overheid, elite cohesie en sociale cohesie (p. 169). Gezien de vorm en omvang van dit project, worden deze niet behandeld.

De afhankelijke variabelen van het model bestaan uit de beleidsreacties en de daaropvolgende internationale uitkomsten. Deze uitkomsten hebben op hun beurt, naarmate de tijd strekt, weer invloed op het wereldsysteem (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 80-81).

Conceptualisatie en operationalisatie

De interveniërende variabelen zijn sterk afhankelijk van welke casus er onderzocht wordt (Boke, 2016, p. 22). Bij het verder conceptualiseren en operationaliseren van de in de theorie gevonden variabelen zal dan ook het karakter van de casus in acht genomen worden. Het precieze karakter zal in het casusselectie hoofdstuk verder worden besproken. Het causale model wordt geïnterpreteerd vanuit de *revivalist approach*. Deze benadering stelt dat de invloed van binnenlandse factoren de belangrijkste beweegredenen zijn van buitenlandbeleid (Onea, 2012, pp. 145-146).



Figuur 2: weergave van de verwachte causale relatie

Onafhankelijke variabele

In dit onderzoek zal de onafhankelijke variabele gezien worden als de overschrijding van de door Obama gestelde rode lijn, wat om een reactie van de VS vroeg. In deze variabele worden de belangen van de VS t.o.v. Syrië weergegeven.

Marsh (2014) kent de volgende aspecten toe aan de onafhankelijke variabele:

energieveiligheid, regionale stabiliteit, waarden en internationale orde (pp. 124-126). De verstoring van regionale stabiliteit heeft invloed op de bondgenoten van de VS en indirect ook op de VS zelf. Omdat het een globale macht is, vormen waarden en internationale orde een speciale toevoeging (Boke, 2016, p. 34). Aan de hand van de door Marsh toegekende variabelen kan het concept gemeten worden.

Met het stellen van de rode lijn committeerde Obama zich aan twee theoretische aspecten, namelijk: gebonden handen en publiekskosten. Gebonden handen betekent dat als een dreigement wordt gegeven aan de uitdager en deze uitdager gaat niet in op het dreigement, dit toenemende publiekskosten met zich meebrengt. Deze publiekskosten binden de handen van de boodschapper met als gevolg dat diegene moet ingrijpen als er geen gehoor wordt gegeven aan het dreigement, omdat anders de geloofwaardigheid van de boodschapper door de publiekskosten in het geding komen (Fearon, 1997, p. 70).

Interveniërende variabelen

Dit brengt ons naar de interveniërende variabelen. De wereldvisie van de leider zal gezien worden als de visie van president Obama op de wereld en de rol van de VS hierin. Obama zijn strategische focus lag op binnenlandse doelen, het verminderen van Amerikaanse militaire aanwezigheid in de wereld en bereidwillig zijn naar vijanden om daarmee te voorkomen dat de interne agenda in gevaar zou komen (Dueck, 2015, pp. 2-3).

De zgn. Obama doctrine geeft inzage in zijn visie in het buitenlandbeleid en bestaat uit de volgende opvattingen (Boke, 2016, p. 127):

- Politiek en economisch leiderschap
- Verminderende militaire aanwezigheid en de militaire verantwoordelijkheid deels doorschuiven naar bondgenoten
- Een grotere focus op het gebruik van 'soft power' bij internationale problemen en gebruik van militaire macht als laatste optie
- Gebruik van militaire macht enkel bij het in geding komen van Amerikaanse belangen
- Kleinschaliger gebruik van militaire aanwezigheid

- Focus op onconventionele bedreigingen, zoals terrorisme

De strategische cultuur zal voor dit onderzoek genuanceerd worden tot oorlogsmoeheid in de publieke opinie. De oorlogsmoeheid was het gevolg van de langdurige en bloedige oorlogen in Irak en Afghanistan. De afkeer van oorlog leidde tot een andere strategische koers en was een factor die bijdroeg aan een terughoudende rol van de VS op het wereldtoneel.

Oorlogsmoeheid bepaalde ook in grote mate de publieke steun voor een interventie (Marsh, 2014, pp. 128-129). Omdat oorlogsmoeheid de strategische rol van de VS in Libië al veranderde, vormt dit een meetbaar concept in de causale ketting. Dit concept kan invloed hebben op het besluit om een interventie te starten of juist niet.

Publieke opinie kan gemeten worden door te kijken naar hoe de Amerikanen tegenover een militaire interventie in Syrië stonden en naar de mogelijke schaal hiervan (Boke, 2016, p. 207). Oorlogsmoeheid kan hieraan gekoppeld worden door te kijken naar de perceptie op de oorlogen in Irak en Afghanistan (Marsh, 2014, p. 128). Dit wordt geoperationaliseerd door te kijken naar uitspraken van Congresleden, aangezien zij vertegenwoordiger zijn van het publiek en vaak stemmen op basis van wat hun achterban ervan vindt.

De relatie staat-maatschappij zal verwoord worden tot economische beperkingen, gezien de economie een belangrijke determinant is voor de steun voor een interventie. Een manier waarop deze variabele gemeten kan worden, is door te kijken naar de rol van de budgettaire beperkingen in het debat over militaire actie in Syrië en de *National Security Strategy* (NSS). Boke (2016) stelt dat de budgettaire beperkingen en de economische crisis invloed had op de perceptie van Congresleden t.o.v. een interventie in Libië (pp. 150-154).

Ten slotte zullen de binnenlandse instituties geconceptualiseerd worden tot tegenstellingen binnen het Congres. Het Congres is onderdeel van de binnenlandse instituties en de politieke elite, die tot een consensus moeten komen (Marsh, 2014, p. 129; Schweller, 2004, p. 170). Deze variabele kan gemeten worden door te kijken naar de partijdigheid en perceptie van Congresleden op een interventie in Syrië (Marsh, 2014; Hildebrandt, 2013). Bij partijdigheid kan gekeken worden naar een aantal aspecten. Linkse partijen leggen meer nadruk op internationale afspraken, mensenrechten en multilateralisme. Rechtse partijen kijken meer naar militaire allianties en het verdedigen van de nationale belangen (Raunio & Wagner, 2020, p. 518). Met deze aspecten in het hoofd zal er gekeken worden wat de perceptie van de democraten en republikeinen is op de eerdere nationale belangen van de VS in Syrië. Ook zal

er gekeken worden naar de perceptie op de gevolgen voor de geloofwaardigheid en reputatie van de VS.

Aan de hand van de besproken theorie is de volgende hypothese en de daar bijbehorende alternatieve hypothese voor dit onderzoek opgesteld:

H0: De wereldvisie van de president, oorlogsmoeheid in de publieke opinie, economische problemen en politieke tegenstellingen binnen het Congres leidde tot een diplomatiek in plaats van een militair antwoord op de chemische aanvallen in Syrië.

H1: De chemische aanvallen in Syrië vormden niet voldoende gevaar voor de Amerikaanse belangen om er militair op te reageren.

Onderzoeksdesign

Om tot een gepast antwoord te kunnen komen op de hoofdvraag (Hoe kunnen de visie van de president, oorlogsmoeheid in de publieke opinie, economische beperkingen en tegenstellingen binnen het Congres daadkrachtig handelen van de Amerikaanse regering belemmeren?), zijn er een aantal beslissingen genomen betreffende het onderzoeksdesign, de selectie van de casus en data en de uitvoering van de analyse.

Design en Casusselectie

Het design van het onderzoek bestaat uit een single casestudie met als methode *process tracing*. Deze methode wordt door Halperin & Heath (2017) beschreven als “een methode voor het identificeren van de causale relaties die de veronderstelde oorzaken en uitkomsten met elkaar verbindt” (p. 247). De vorm van *process tracing* in dit onderzoek is theorie testend, omdat het bekijkt of de causale relatie in de casus aanwezig is en of het functioneert zoals is beschreven in het raamwerk (Beach, 2013, pp. 12-16).

De casus die bestudeerd zal worden is het buitenlandbeleid van de VS aangaande Syrië. De rode lijn van Obama is een bekend voorbeeld van dreigementen en de casus kan als benchmark dienen in andere casussen waar staatsleiders dezelfde retoriek gebruiken bij conflicten. Deze casus kan laten zien in hoeverre interne politiek de strategische koers van een hegemonie kan bepalen en waarom een leider zijn eigen uitspraken niet na kan komen door interne druk. De VS is representatief, omdat het een hegemonie is. Het heeft grote invloed in de politiek en speelt daardoor meestal een rol bij conflicten in de wereld. Als het

land de nationale belangen of zijn waarden bedreigd ziet worden, kan het land waar ook ter wereld ingrijpen als het dat nodig vindt. Besluiten op het gebied van buitenlandpolitiek van de VS hebben consequenties voor de rest van de wereld. Mede hierdoor worden de ogen altijd snel op dit land gericht bij conflicten of mensenrechtenschendingen. Deze case kan niet alleen licht werpen op hoe de interne gevolgen invloed hebben op het buitenlandbeleid van een liberale democratie, maar ook op dat van een hegemonie.

De tijdslijn zal de periode van 20 augustus 2012 tot 11 september 2013 beslaan. Op 20 augustus stelde Obama zijn rode lijn en op 11 september 2013 werden de laatste debatten erover gevoerd in het Congres en was duidelijk dat er een diplomatieke oplossing was gevonden.

Dataselectie

Om de variabelen binnen de causale relatie te verklaren, zal er gebruik worden gemaakt van zowel primaire als secundaire bronnen. Deze bronnen zullen vervolgens door middel van een kwalitatieve inhoudsanalyse bestudeerd worden. Inhoudsanalyse helpt bij het verkennen van wat actoren dachten en wat hun intenties waren (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 160). Het doel van deze inhoudsanalyse is kijken of de causale elementen terug te vinden zijn in de speeches en verklaringen van betrokken bewindsleden.

Voor de onafhankelijke variabelen zal gekeken worden naar literatuur die aangeeft wat de belangen van de VS in Syrië waren. De NSS en de Obama doctrine kunnen hierbij een rol vervullen, omdat hierin terug is te vinden wat de nationale belangen van de VS precies waren. Waar mogelijk zal voor deze variabelen secundaire data en speeches van Obama en zijn defensiestaf worden geselecteerd.

De data voor de analyse van de interveniërende variabelen zal hoofdzakelijk bestaan uit speeches, documenten en secundaire literatuur. De visie van de president zal geanalyseerd worden met behulp van speeches, persoonlijke interviews en aspecten uit de Obama doctrine. Voor het meten van de oorlogsmoeheid in de publieke opinie zal gekeken worden naar speeches van Congresleden die verwijzen naar hun electoraat en secundaire literatuur die inzage geeft. Voor economische beperkingen zullen speeches van Congresleden, de president en zijn stafleden geanalyseerd worden. Buiten de speeches en verslagen zal er tevens wetenschappelijke literatuur bekeken worden om te beoordelen in hoeverre het economische perspectief naar boven komt. Tegenstellingen binnen het Congres zullen verklaard worden

vanuit speeches van Congresleden. In totaal zijn er 25 debatten in het Congres verzameld van de ‘*Congressional Record*’. Hierin wordt gesproken door in totaal 19 republikeinen, 21 democraten en 2 onafhankelijken.

Speeches en opmerkingen van de president zullen verzameld worden uit ‘*the Obama White House Archives*’ en transcripten uit kranten. Het artikel van Goldberg (2016) kan inzage geven in hoe Obama over de wereld dacht. Dit is van belang, omdat in speeches de persoonlijke visie niet altijd direct naar voren kan komen. Primaire data zoals de *New York Times* zullen ook geanalyseerd worden. Ten slotte, zal voor secundaire data de sneeuwbal methode toegepast worden om het zoeken ervan te vereenvoudigen.

Categorisatie

In tabel 1 ziet u de categorieën met daarin indicatoren die verbonden zijn aan de variabele. Op basis hiervan zal de data worden geanalyseerd. Aangezien de onafhankelijke variabele zich kan laten meten d.m.v. literatuur en passages uit speeches, zullen deze buiten de categorisatie gelaten worden. Bij de visie van Obama zal worden gekeken naar wat hij van de waarden en belangen van de VS vond. Indicatoren over deze waarden kunnen overeenkomen met de indicator internationale orde, maar dit vormt geen probleem gezien deze op afzonderlijke variabelen en bronnen worden gemeten.

Bij de tegenstellingen binnen het Congres zal het uitspreken van een negatief effect van Amerikaans ingrijpen op de regionale stabiliteit, waarden en internationale orde onwaarschijnlijker maken. Het omgekeerde geldt bij een uitspraak met positief effect van een interventie. Het benoemen van de indicatoren van interveniërende variabele II en IV zal een interventie onwaarschijnlijker maken.

Tabel 1: variabelen met de daaraan verbonden categorieën en meetbare indicatoren

| Variabele: | Categorie: | Indicator: |
|---|--|---|
| Interveniërende variabele I: Visie Obama | Opvattingen wat de waarden van VS zijn | (+) <i>ideas and values, human rights, international norms, American exceptionalism</i> |
| | Opvattingen wat de belangen van de VS zijn | (-) <i>America's/US interest, threats to US interest</i> |
| | Persoonlijke visie | (-) <i>I believe, I think, I know/knew</i> |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Interveniërende variabele II: Oorlogsmoeheid publieke opinie | Betrekken Irak & Afghanistan oorlog | (-) <i>war weary, weariness, complex situation, internal problems first, another war</i> |
| Interveniërende variabele III: Tegenstellingen Congres | Partij | Democraat of republikein |
| | Reputatie VS | (-) <i>reputation, Role of America, not helping, people/nations looking at the US, commitment</i> |
| | Geloofwaardigheid VS | (-) <i>credibility, signal, taken serious, unchecked</i> |
| | Sceptisch t.o.v. interventie (Maakt interventie onwaarschijnlijker) | (-) <i>escalate, escalation, arming rebels, dangerous, last option, not engage, oppose</i> |
| | Positief t.o.v. interventie (maakt interventie waarschijnlijker) | (-) <i>costs of inaction, military pressure, intervene, we must act</i> |
| | Regionale stabiliteit | (-) <i>security of allies and partners, friends, threat, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, region, destabilize</i> |
| | Waarden | (-) <i>human rights, humanitarian, moral, American exceptionalism</i> |
| | Internationale orde | (-) <i>leading role, international, leadership, norms</i> |
| Interveniërende variabele IV: Economische beperkingen | Budgettaire beperkingen | (-) <i>crisis, economy, economic problems, unemployment, limited</i> |

| | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------|
| | Referentie naar kosten Irak en Afghanistan | (-) <i>costs of war, costly</i> |
|--|--|---------------------------------|

Resultaten

In dit hoofdstuk zullen de resultaten worden weergegeven. De resultaten zijn ingedeeld in de eerder besproken onderwerpen.

Bedreiging nationale belangen VS & noodzaak om te reageren

Uit de analyse blijkt dat de internationale belangen van de VS op de onderzochte gebieden in het geding kwam.

Op het gebied van energieveiligheid had de VS nauwelijks last van de ontwikkelingen in Syrië. De Amerikaanse olie-import vanuit Syrië bedroeg slechts 9000 vaten per dag in 2010 (Energy Information Administration, 2022). Verder was het land geen lid van de OPEC, waar dat bij Libië wel het geval was.

Voor regionale stabiliteit vormde Syrië een gevaar. Iran speelde een grote rol in de regio en zag Syrië als een tegenhanger van de soennitische staten in de omgeving en kon via dit land invloed uitoefenen op de rest van de streek. Ook bood Syrië toegang tot Libanon, waar het Iranes gestemde Hezbollah opereerde (Goodarzi 2013, pp. 37-38). Rusland oefende ondertussen ook invloed uit in de regio door het regime van Assad militair te steunen. Russische en Iranese inmenging zou de invloed van de VS in de streek afbreuk kunnen doen, de veiligheid van Israël verminderen en tevens een gevaar kunnen vormen voor soenitische bondgenoten, zoals Saoedi-Arabië en Koeweit (Boke, 2016, pp. 85-87). Deze dreiging vormt een gevaar op een paar punten van de NSS. Ten eerste bestaat er het risico dat Syrië een vrijhaven voor terroristen vormt. Ten tweede kan het ervoor zorgen dat massavernietigingswapens in verkeerde handen kunnen vallen (National Security Strategy, 2010, pp. 20-21). Volgens Obama waren de massavernietigingswapens “een kwestie die niet alleen de VS aanging, maar ook haar bondgenoten in de regio” (2012b). Ook Kerry betoogt dat de belangen van de VS in gevaar komen en er gehandeld moet worden “om te voorkomen dat er een veilige haven in Syrië wordt gecreëerd of een operatiebasis voor extremisten om deze wapens tegen onze vrienden te gebruiken” (Washington Post, 2013). Als terroristen chemische wapens in handen krijgen, zou dit als bijkomstigheid hebben dat de regio verder

destabiliseert, met als gevolg vluchtelingenstromen, wat op zowel de VS als zijn bondgenoten effect heeft (Hamid, 2013). Een andere dreiging was dat het conflict over kon slaan in het ernstig verdeelde Libanon en Irak (Boke, 2016, p. 91; Küçükkeleş, 2012). Als het conflict zich uitbreidt, kunnen vijandigheden tussen de sjiitische en soennitische bevolking oplopen, met als gevolg destabilisering van de regio en mogelijkheden voor Iran om op deze spanning in te spelen (Sorenson, 2013, pp. 7-8)

Ook op het gebied van waarden had de VS reden om te reageren. Syrië was een dictatuur, de inwoners werden onderdrukt, mensenrechten werden geschonden en ook het gebruik van chemische wapens ging tegen de waarden in (National Security Strategy, 2010, pp. 35-38). Obama stelde na de onderdrukking van de protesten het volgende: “De VS zijn tegen het gebruik van geweld tegen vreedzame demonstranten in Syrië en wij steunen de universele rechten van het Syrische volk” (Obama, 2011b). Verder stelde hij dat “Het voorkomen van massale wreedheden en genocide een kernbelang voor de nationale veiligheid is en een morele verantwoordelijkheid van de VS” (Obama, 2011a). Volgens Kerry wordt Assad de “boodschap van straffeloosheid verleend” als de rode lijn niet nagekomen wordt met als gevolg dat de betrouwbaarheid van de VS internationaal in het geding komt en landen als Noord-Korea de dreigementen van de VS minder serieus nemen (Washington Post, 2013).

Visie Obama

Er bestaat contradictie tussen de speeches die Obama hield en hoe hij er persoonlijk over dacht. Uit de analyse blijkt dat Obama “moe was van Washington dat zonder nadenken afgleed naar oorlog in moslimlanden” (Goldberg, 2016). De president had als kandidaat de grote belofte om de oorlogen in Afghanistan en Irak te beëindigen. Obama bekeek de wereld vanuit een meer realistischer perspectief en wilde militair gezien alleen nog in actie komen als Amerikaanse veiligheidsbelangen direct in het geding kwamen (Löfflman, 2019, p. 63). Dit element van realisme is terug te vinden in de Obama doctrine.

Het uitblijven van een VN-resolutie, de oorlogsmoeheid onder het Amerikaanse publiek en de terugtrekking van Groot-Brittannië uit een militaire interventie zorgde ervoor dat Obama anders ging nadenken over de kwestie (Todd, 2013). Obama geloofde in mensenrechten en democratie maar geloofde ook dat “de wereld een taaie, ingewikkelde, rommelige en gemene plaats vol ontberingen en tragedie is” (Goldberg, 2016). Deze opvatting laat zien dat er een

afweging is tussen wat de VS wel en niet kan doen voor de wereld. De president was van mening dat de VS niet langer op de voorgrond moest opereren als interventie nodig was, maar dat het aan andere staten en bondgenoten was om in te grijpen (Goldberg, 2016). Dit is een aspect wat al bij de interventie in Libië merkbaar was. Bij Libië was er sprake van internationale consensus in de vorm van een VN-mandaat, een NAVO-coalitie en de kosten waren laag (Marsh, 2014). De uitkomsten van de interventie waren Obama niet gunstig gezind en hij stelde later dat “we ons op geen enkele manier moeten verplichten om het Midden-Oosten en Noord-Afrika te regeren” (Goldberg, 2016). Ook was hij teleurgesteld in Europa dat Libië na de interventie aan zijn lot over liet. Met het afvallen van Groot-Brittannië en het ontbreken van een VN-resolutie werd een interventie in Syrië afkondigen lastig, het zou tegen Obama zijn persoonlijke opvattingen indruisen. Met het kleinschalig maken van de interventie en de stap naar het Congres, hoopte hij legitimiteit voor de missie te vergaren (Obama, 2013a).

De president was bang in de val van ‘*the playbook of Washington*’ te belanden, namelijk dat de VS moest ingrijpen, omdat de geloofwaardigheid in het geding zou komen. Bijkomend had hij de meer filosofische opvatting dat de macht van een president over de nationale veiligheid niet zonder limieten was en hij dus niet zomaar een oorlog in moest gaan (Rhodes, 2018). Ten slotte had Obama het gevoel dat de bondgenoten in het Midden-Oosten van de kracht van Amerika gebruik wilde maken om hun eigen nationale doelen te bevredigen (Goldberg, 2016).

Tegenstellingen Congres

Het Amerikaanse Congres was verdeeld over de kwestie om militair in te grijpen of niet, maar ook hoe om te gaan met de gebeurtenissen in Syrië.

Bij de speeches van de democraten in het Congres komt het internationaal recht en de waarden die de VS heeft vaak terug. Kaine, Menendez, Durbin, Reid, Cardin, Boxer en Feinstein (2013) refereerden allemaal aan het verbod op chemische wapens na de eerste wereldoorlog en dat aan de schending hiervan gehoor gegeven moet worden. Mendenez (2013) betoogt dat “het niet om diplomatie of dwang gaat, maar om de handhaving van internationale normen”. De VS is een hegemonie en moet erop toezien dat afspraken na worden gekomen, anders is er de kans dat in de toekomst deze regels vaker overtreden gaan worden, lijkt de achterliggende gedachte.

De republikeinen zijn van mening dat het niet langer aan de VS is bij problemen te interveniëren als de rest van de internationale gemeenschap niets doet. De VS is niet verantwoordelijk voor het oplossen van allerlei conflicten wereldwijd en kan niet bij elk probleem ingrijpen, zolang dat niet in het nationale belang van de VS zelf is (Fortenberry, 2013). Hier wordt dus meer verwacht van de rest van de wereld om in te grijpen.

Bentivolio (2013) vraagt zich af waarom er binnen de VN geen actie wordt ondernomen als bijna de hele wereld het verbod op chemische wapens ondertekend heeft en vindt dat de VS niet de rol van ouder van de wereld moet vervullen. Hier valt uit op te maken dat men teleurgesteld is in de internationale gemeenschap en dat de VS terughoudende rol zou moeten aannemen.

Een punt waarbij de republikeinen hun twijfels hebben is de Syrische oppositie. Sommigen vinden het onduidelijk waar deze uit bestaat.

Udall (2013) noemt de rebellen “ongeorganiseerd met een onduidelijke commandostructuur” waaruit niet duidelijk is wie wel en wie niet gematigd zijn. Paul (2012) is van mening dat het ‘niet met zekerheid vast is te stellen dat de rebellen tolerante mensen zijn met voorkeur voor een republiek of dat er een islamitische staat wordt opgericht’. Hieruit kan afgeleid worden dat er een angst bestaat dat onbedoeld extremisten geholpen worden die eigenlijk niets op hebben met democratie, wat de chaos in Syrië mogelijk meer kan vergroten.

Een laatste punt van onenigheid is wat de gevolgen zijn voor de regio bij wel of niet ingrijpen. Binnen de democraten is te horen dat niet ingrijpen negatieve consequenties heeft voor de veiligheid van de regio: “De mensen in Syrië zijn niet de enigen die gevaar lopen. Deze chemische wapens zouden gemakkelijk kunnen worden gebruikt tegen Amerikaanse bondgenoten in die regio. Het kan gebruikt worden tegen Turkije, Jordanië of Israël” (Cardin, 2013; Kaine, 2013). Niet ingrijpen heeft gevolgen voor hoe vijanden als Iran en Noord-Korea naar de situatie kijken (Casey; Feinstein; Boxer; Cardin; Nelson; Durbin; Menendez, 2013). Als er geen afschrikking komt, kan er het signaal gegeven worden dat het gebruik van deze wapens onbestraft blijft, waardoor de vijanden van de VS de grenzen zullen opzoeken wat ze wel en niet kunnen maken.

Republikeinen, zoals McConnell en Cornyn (2013), vinden dat een gelimiteerde interventie die niet goed is uitgedacht juist instabiliteit in de regio vergroot. Het land kan roekeloos overkomen en met een interventie wordt de chaos en versplintering in de omgeving mogelijk groter.

Oorlogsmoeheid in de publieke opinie

In het Congres is de afkeer van oorlog binnen de publieke opinie te zien. Bijna alle senatoren en afgevaardigden refereren in hun speeches naar de anti-oorlog stemming binnen hun electoraat.

Binnen die anti-oorlogsstemming werd ook de afkeer naar de oorlogen in Afghanistan en Irak genoemd. Democraten als Udall (2013) betogen dat “Amerikanen sceptisch zijn na het fiasco in Irak” en “willen weten of datzelfde pad in Syrië opnieuw belopen gaat worden”.

Uit de communicatie met inwoners van de staat waartoe de senatoren of afgevaardigden behoren komt vaak naar voren dat de mensen geen oorlog willen en is er de angst dat de VS weer in een conflict wordt getrokken.

Republikein Coats (2013) brengt in dat de meerderheid van zijn kiezer in e-mails, telefoongesprekken en bezoeken lieten weten “tegen militaire betrokkenheid in Syrië te zijn”. Na twaalf jaar betrokkenheid in Irak zien ze nog steeds “corruptie en slachterij” in het land. De oorlogsmoeheid onder het publiek zorgt ervoor dat de meeste Congresleden in de speeches sceptisch of voorzichtig zijn over een interventie.

De oorlogsmoeheid binnen het electoraat van de Congresleden vertaalt zich ook in bredere zin binnen de VS. Uit onderzoek van Reuters/Ipsos blijkt dat op 23 augustus 2013 25% van de Amerikanen een interventie in Syrië steunde, waar dat op 13 augustus 2013 nog 30,2% was. 89% van de Amerikanen was van mening dat de VS de Syrische rebellen niet moest steunen (Wroughton, 2013). Een groot deel van de Amerikanen was verder van mening dat de VS geen leidende rol moest aannemen in militaire interventies en dat het niet aan de VS was om regime change door te voeren in andere landen (New York Times, 2013).

Economische beperkingen

Bij de herverkiezing van Obama in 2012 speelde de economische crisis nog steeds een grote rol. De reële inkomens van Amerikanen lagen in 2012 slechts 1% hoger in vergelijking met 2009 en de werkloosheid lag nog steeds rond de 7,8% (Bartels, 2013, pp. 63-64). In 2012 kondigde Obama bezuinigingen en verlagingen van budgetten aan, waaronder het defensiebudget (The White House: President Barack Obama, z.d.).

Door de bezuinigingen kwam de relatie tussen de partijen in het Congres op gespannen voet te staan: het jaar ervoor had het land zijn eerste *fiscal deadlock* in vijftien jaar meegemaakt

(MacAskill, 2011). Naast het defensiebudget, moesten de *footprints* van militaire missies ook omlaag. Innigere samenwerking met de NAVO moest ervoor zorgen dat er minder Amerikaanse militairen nodig waren. Verder bracht het afschalen van de oorlogen de Amerikaanse krijgsmacht in een nieuw stadium: “Als we verder kijken dan de oorlogen in Irak en Afghanistan -- en het einde van langdurige natievorming met grote militaire voetafdrukken -- zullen we in staat zijn onze veiligheid te waarborgen met kleinere conventionele grondtroepen” (Obama, 2012a).

Naast de economische crisis was er nog een reden voor bezuinigingen op defensie, namelijk de hoge kosten die de oorlogen in Afghanistan en Irak met zich mee hadden gebracht. Voor de financiering ervan moest de VS 2 biljoen dollar aan schulden aangaan en droegen de oorlogen voor 20% bij aan de totale nationale schulden opgebouwd tussen 2001 en 2012 (Bilmes, 2013, p. 3). De bezuinigingen en de daarop veranderende militaire strategie was terug te leiden naar de militaire missie in Libië. De missie kostte rond de 1 miljard dollar en was, vergeleken met andere missies, vrij goedkoop (Goldberg, 2016; Ukman, 2011).

Bij de debatten in het Congres was het economische aspect met name bij Senator Sanders terug te vinden. Volgens Sanders (2013) worden de kosten van de oorlogen verhaald op de maatschappij, waar op sociale programma's bezuinigd moet worden en kan de sociale weerstand t.o.v. een interventie herleid worden naar de binnenlandse economische problemen die niet opgelost worden. De VS moet eerst de binnenlandse problemen oplossen voor het zich wil focussen op buitenlandse problemen.

Coats (2013) vreest dat door de Syrische interventie de economische situatie van de VS verslechterd, waardoor er minder goed gereageerd kan worden op dreigingen van bijvoorbeeld Iran. Door opnieuw een hoop materieel in te zetten en kosten aan te gaan, ontstaat er de dreiging dat er minder goed gereageerd kan worden op andere actoren.

Cardin (2013) refereert de hoge kosten die de oorlogen met zich meebracht aan de oorlogsmoeheid van het publiek. Een nieuw conflict kan de economie verslechteren en de interne onrust toe laten nemen.

De kosten van een mogelijke interventie in Syrië werden geschat op een half miljard, wat vanaf dat bedrag verder kon oplopen. Een *no-fly zone* zou één miljard per maand kosten (Barnes, 2013). Gezien de militaire en geografische omstandigheden in Syrië een stuk complexer waren, konden de kosten snel stijgen (Barnes, 2013). De hogere ingeschatte kosten konden weerstand t.o.v. een interventie oproepen.

Discussie

Er was voor de VS voldoende aanleiding om te reageren op de veranderingen in het internationale systeem. Naarmate het conflict duurde, werden steeds meer actoren erbij betrokken. Dit zorgde ervoor dat de kans op verspreiding van het conflict toenam en de machtsverhoudingen in de regio konden veranderen ten nadele van de VS. Met de uitspraken die Obama deed, committeerde hij zichzelf tot actie.

De interveniërende variabelen hebben grote invloed gehad op het niet nakomen van Obama zijn gestelde rode lijn. Terugkijkend op de situatie kan gesteld worden dat deze variabelen daadkrachtig optreden van de VS konden belemmeren.

Het Amerikaanse publiek was tegen een interventie en vond dat het niet aan de VS was om in te grijpen in Syrië. De oorlogsmoeheid na meer dan tien jaar Irak en Afghanistan zorgde ervoor dat het publiek huiverig was voor een interventie ver van huis en dit had invloed op zowel de perceptie, besluitvorming en de naleving van de rode lijn.

Een tweede probleem verrees uit de verdeeldheid in het Congres. Zowel de republikeinen als de democraten waren sceptisch. De uitkomst van het Congres had invloed op de besluitvorming, namelijk dat een interventie niet gewenst was en zijn legitimiteit verloor.

De economische beperkingen zorgde ervoor dat het kostenplaatje van de interventie een grotere belemmering zou vormen. Het na-ebben van de economische crisis, de bezuinigingen die doorgevoerd moesten worden en het vooruitzicht op een militair gecompliceerde missie bemoeilijkte de afkondiging en uitvoering van een interventie. Dit had invloed op het gehele besluit en woog zwaarder mee, zodat zowel binnen de politiek als het publiek de urgentie om in te grijpen ontbrak.

In het proces waarbij Obama op zijn eigen rode lijn moest reageren, werd de president geconfronteerd met de elementen uit zijn eigen doctrine. Een mogelijke interventie kon duurder uitvallen dan gedacht, wat indruiste tegen de nieuwe strategie. Er was te weinig steun vanuit de internationale gemeenschap, wat een militaire rol van de VS op de achtergrond bemoeilijkte. Obama was teleurgesteld in de afloop van de vorige interventie in Libië en dit had invloed op zijn perceptie op een mogelijke interventie in Syrië. Zonder steun van het volk en een sceptisch Congres werd hij geconfronteerd met de druk van zijn staf om te handelen enerzijds en zijn opvatting dat een president niet de volledige macht zou moeten hebben in veiligheidsbeleid anderzijds. Dit zette hem ertoe aan af te zien van een interventie.

Het gevolg van een oorlogsmoe publiek, economische beperkingen een verdeeld Congres en Obama zijn persoonlijke visie leidde ertoe dat er geen gehoor werd gegeven aan de rode lijn en men via de diplomatieke weg een oplossing zocht. De persoonlijke opvattingen van Obama was, zoals de theorie voorspelde, de meest doorslaggevende interveniërende variabele, maar zijn visie hing samen met de andere variabelen en werd ook daardoor beïnvloed.

Conclusie

Het doel van dit onderzoek was duiding geven aan de binnenlandse dimensies, die ertoe leidden dat President Obama de door hem zelf gestelde rode lijn niet nakwam. Geconcludeerd kan worden dat de visie van de president, oorlogsmoeheid in de publieke opinie, economische beperkingen en tegenstellingen in het Congres verklaren waarom er uiteindelijk werd afgeweken van de rode lijn. Verder geeft het een verklaring voor waarom de interne factoren het wonnen van de externe factoren, zoals publiekskosten en verlies van geloofwaardigheid. Met de uitkomsten van het onderzoek wordt dan ook aan de nulhypothese voldaan. Het niet nakomen van de rode lijn had als gevolg voor de VS dat andere machten als Rusland en Iran het machtsvacuüm in Syrië opvulden en de regio verder destabiliseerde.

Dit onderzoek draagt bij aan het verduidelijken van hoe de rode lijn van Obama niet nagekomen werd, ondanks de schending hiervan door Syrië. Verder het bij aan eerder onderzoek naar de invloed van publieke opinie op de besluiten van een Amerikaans president. Met het gebruik van het NKR geeft het een andere kijk op de periode van het stellen en niet nakomen van de lijn en zorgt dit voor de verrijking van deze theorie in toepassing op het wel of niet plaatsvinden van interventies. Bijkomend verrijkt dit onderzoek de theorie door te laten zien welke invloed interveniërende variabelen hebben op het nakomen van uitspraken die een staatsleider doet. Dit onderzoek vult eerdere raamwerken rondom interventies verder aan en zoomt in op een specifiekere periode. Dit onderzoek kan als handvat dienen bij het verhelderen van andere historische gebeurtenissen die wel of niet tot een interventie leidde of voor het beter begrijpen van het Amerikaanse buitenlandbeleid.

Implicaties

Bij dit onderzoek kunnen enkele kanttekeningen gesteld worden. Ten eerste zijn er een beperkt aantal interveniërende variabelen in de theorie van het NKR. Dit kan als gevolg hebben dat niet alle aspecten even goed belicht kunnen worden. Een tweede kanttekening is

dat het precies definiëren van de interveniërende variabelen lastig kan zijn, omdat er veel binnenlandse actoren en factoren hierbij komen. Het gevolg is dat deze variabelen op een ‘ad-hoc manier geselecteerd worden’ (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 60).

Ten slotte zijn er een aantal suggesties voor verder onderzoek. Het raamwerk van dit onderzoek kan voor andere, eventueel historische, casussen worden gebruikt waarbij een president zijn beloftes t.o.v. buitenlandbeleid niet waar kon maken vanwege de invloed binnenlandse dimensies. Een andere suggestie voor vervolgonderzoek is de toepassing van Syrië op de latere president Trump of verduidelijking van deze casus door toevoeging van diepte-interviews aan Congres- en stafleden.

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Appendix

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[Pages S3288-S3294]

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SYRIA

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, today I and my colleagues are here to speak about Syria. The strategic and humanitarian costs of this conflict continue to be devastating, not just for the people of Syria but for vital American interests. As today's Washington Post editorial makes clear, nearly all of the terrible consequences that those opposed to intervention predicted would happen if we intervened in Syria have happened because we have not.

There is mounting evidence that chemical weapons have been used by the Asad regime. As many of our colleagues have noted--including Senator Feinstein, the chairman of the Intelligence Committee--President Obama's redline on Syria has been crossed. But instead of acting, the Obama administration has called for additional evidence to be collected by U.N. investigators who have not yet set foot in Syria and probably never will. In the absence of more robust action, I fear it will not be long before Asad takes this delay as an invitation to use chemical weapons again on an even larger scale.

Moreover, as I have said before, by drawing a redline on chemical weapons, the President actually gave the Asad regime a green light to use every other weapon in his arsenal with impunity. More than 70,000 Syrians have been killed indiscriminately with snipers, artillery, helicopter gunships, fighter jets, and even ballistic missiles. Indeed, according to a recent Human Rights Watch report, more than 4,300 civilians have been killed by Syria's airstrikes alone since July 2012.

At the same time, Iran and its proxy Hezbollah are building a network of militias inside Syria and the al-Qaida-aligned al-Nusra Front has gained unprecedented strength on the ground. According to estimates published in the media, some believe there were no more than a few hundred al-Nusra fighters in Syria last year, but today it is widely believed there could be thousands of extremist fighters inside Syria. They are gaining strength by the day because they are the best, most experienced fighters. They are well-funded and are providing humanitarian assistance in the parts of Syria where people need it most.

At the same time, this conflict is having increasingly devastating consequences to the security and stability of our allies and partners in Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and Lebanon. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has characterized the situation in Syria as an "existential threat" for Lebanon, where the government estimates that 1 million Syrians have entered the country--1 million Syrians have entered the country of Lebanon--which has a population of just over 4 million. Similarly, over the past 2 years, more than 500,000 Syrians have flooded into Jordan, a country of only 6 million people. Consider for a moment that in proportional terms this would be equivalent to 26 million refugees, or the entire population of Texas, suddenly crossing our own borders.

In short, Syria is becoming a failed state in the heart of the Middle

East overrun by thousands of al-Qaida-affiliated fighters, with possibly tons of chemical weapons, and poised to ignite a wider sectarian conflict that could profoundly destabilize the region.

Yesterday brought news that the administration plans to organize, together with Russia, an international peace conference later this month to seek a negotiated settlement to the war in Syria. All of us--all of us--are in favor of such a political resolution to this conflict. No one wants to see this conflict turn into a fight to the death and total victory for one side or the other. We all want to work toward a political settlement that forms a new governing structure in Syria reflective of the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people.

But let's be realistic. One of the lessons of the past 2 years is that such a negotiated settlement will not be possible in Syria until the balance of power shifts more decisively against Asad and those around him. Until Asad, as well as his Iranian, Hezbollah, and Russian backers no longer believe they are winning, what incentive do they have to come to the table and make a deal? This is what two well-meaning United Nations senior envoys have already learned.

Yes, Syrian opposition forces are gaining strength and territory on the ground. But Asad still has air power--a decisive factor in that climate, in that terrain--ballistic missiles, chemical weapons, and a host of other advanced weaponry, and he is using all of

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it. Furthermore, today's news reports that Russia has agreed to sell an advanced air defense system to the Asad regime should lead us once again to ask ourselves whether the path to peace in Syria runs through Moscow.

I know Americans are war-weary and eager to focus on our domestic and economic problems and not foreign affairs. I also know the situation in Syria is complex and there are no ideal options. But the basic choice we face is not complicated: Do the costs of inaction outweigh the costs of action? I believe they do.

No one should think the United States has to act alone, put boots on the ground, or destroy every Syrian air defense system to make a difference for the better in Syria. We have more limited options at our disposal, including limited military options, that can make a positive impact on this crisis.

We could, for example, organize an overt and large-scale operation to train and arm well-vetted Syrian opposition forces--a course of action that was recommended last year by President Obama's entire national security team. I am encouraged that Senator Menendez, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, has introduced legislation this week on this very issue and that he is speaking out about the need for more robust action in Syria, including addressing Asad's air power.

As several key leaders in our own military have pointed out in testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee over the past several months--from Gen. James Mattis to ADM James Stavridis--we have the capacity--we have the capacity--to significantly weaken both the Asad regime's air power and its increasing use of ballistic missiles, which pose significant risks as delivery vehicles for chemical weapons.

To address this threat, we could use our precision strike capabilities to target Asad's aircraft and Scud missile launchers on the ground without our pilots having to fly into the teeth of Syria's air defenses. Similar weapons could be used to selectively destroy artillery pieces and make Asad's forces think twice about remaining at their posts. We could use the Patriot missile batteries outside of Syria to help protect safe zones inside Syria from Asad's aerial bombing and missile attacks.

Would any of these options immediately end the conflict? Probably not. But they could save innocent lives in Syria. They could give the moderate opposition a better chance to succeed in marginalizing radical actors and eventually provide security and responsible governance in Syria after Asad falls. However, the longer we wait, the worse the situation gets and the tougher it will be to confront, as we will inevitably be forced to do sooner or later.

I am encouraged that a consensus is emerging and many of our colleagues--Democrats and Republicans alike--share this view. I note the leadership of Senator Levin, the chairman of our Armed Services Committee, whom I joined in writing a letter to President Obama urging him to take more active steps in Syria. I also note the important voice Senator Bob Casey has lent to this debate and ask unanimous consent that his op-ed printed last week in the Huffington Post, ``Time to Act in Syria''--which calls for consideration of more options, including cruise missile strikes to neutralize the Syrian Air Force--be printed in the Record.

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

[From the Huffington Post, May 9, 2013]

Time to Act in Syria

(By Bob Casey)

Last week, I joined a bipartisan group of senators to ask the President whether the Assad regime has used chemical weapons. The administration's response suggests mounting evidence of chemical weapons underscores the imperative that the United States stand with the people of Syria during this critical period.

The fall of Assad is not only good for Syria, but will deal a significant blow to Iran and Hezbollah. Degrading the destructive power of Iran and Hezbollah is in the national security interests of the United States--Bashar al-Assad is a key link between them.

In March, Senator Rubio and I offered legislation that could offer a path forward. Since that time, several senators have cosponsored the measure including Senators Kirk, Coons, Klobuchar, Levin, Cardin, Boxer and Shaheen. This legislation would provide support to the armed and political opposition, increase humanitarian aid to Syrians inside the country and to refugees in neighboring states. This bill also lays the groundwork to address the immense humanitarian and political challenges in the post-Assad era.

A political transition to a government that reflects the will of the Syrian people is in the core interests of the United States in the region. I have made the case consistently that the U.S. should lead efforts to support the moderate Syrian armed and political opposition. I have also said that the U.S. should consider measures that would hamper the ability of the Syrian Air Force to conduct aerial attacks on civilians, including cruise missile strikes on Syrian Air Force planes as they sit on the tarmac [Foreign Policy 2/27/13]. In addition, the U.S., working with Turkey and NATO, should use Patriot missile batteries to provide cover for Syrians living in the northern part of the country who are subjected to SCUD missile attacks.

Any U.S. action should not result in U.S. boots on the ground.

It is time to act in the interests of our security in the region. Decisive action by the U.S. and our allies could help to tip the balance so that Syria can begin a transition process. Absent constructive engagement by the U.S., I am very concerned that the killing in Syria will continue and extremists will play an increasingly influential role in determining that country's future, resulting in very negative implications for the region.

Mr. McCAIN. Let me conclude with one final thought. For America, our interests are our values and our values are our interests. The moral dimension cannot be lost from our foreign policy. If ever a case should remind us of this, it is Syria.

Leon Wieseltier captured this point powerfully in the New Republic this week:

Seventy thousand people have died in the Syrian war, most of them at the hands of their ruler. Since this number has appeared in the papers for many months, the actual number must be much higher. The slaughter is unceasing. But the debate about American intervention is increasingly conducted in ``realist'' terms: the threat to American interests posed by jihadism in Syria, the intrigues of Iran and Hezbollah, the rattling of Israel, the ruination of Jordan and Lebanon and Iraq. They are all good reasons for the president of the United States to act like the president of the United States. But wouldn't the prevention of ethnic cleansing and genocidal war be reason enough? Is the death of scores and even hundreds of thousands, and the displacement of millions, less significant for American policy, and less quickening? The moral dimension must be restored to our deliberations, the moral sting, or else Obama, for all his talk about conscience, will have presided over a terrible mutilation of American discourse: the severance of conscience from action.

Nearly two decades ago, I worked with Democratic and Republican colleagues in Congress to support President Clinton as he led America to do the right thing in stopping mass atrocities in Bosnia. The question for another President today, and for all Americans, is whether we will again answer the desperate pleas for rescue that are made uniquely to us, as the United States of America.

I, first, would ask both of my colleagues one question, if it would be all right. There is news today that the Secretary of State wants to convene a conference, including the Russians, in order to try to bring about a resolution at the same time we read reports that the Russians are selling Syria the most advanced weapons. I guess I would ask my colleague from South Carolina and then Senator Levin because I know he has a statement.

Mr. GRAHAM. That would be a big contradiction.

I will just yield to Senator Levin to answer the question and make his opening statement.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I thank, first of all, the Senator from Arizona for the leadership he has taken on the question of Syria. In answer to the question, to the best of my ability, at least, it would not be the first time Russia has taken an inconsistent position. What I am hoping is that the additional military pressure on Asad, which we are all calling for this morning, would help put pressure on Russia to understand, if that military pressure is forthcoming, that they should participate in the political solution. I do not know that we can stop them, as much as we would all wish to, from taking the inconsistent position that they have, but I believe--and I think the Senator from

Arizona would probably agree, but he can speak for himself, obviously-- that if President Obama does as we are urging him to do, which is find a way to put additional military pressure on Asad, that would be an important sign to Russia that: OK, join in a solution. You participated enough in the problem already. Join in the solution.

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They are inconsistent. But I think our goal of trying to get more military pressure on Asad is very consistent with the idea that maybe there will be a political solution, but if there is, it will be promoted by military pressure on Asad and his understanding of that fact.

The worsening situation in Syria and the snowballing plight of millions in the region requires a response.

Since nonviolent demonstrations demanding democratic change began in Syria in March of 2011, Bashar Asad and his clique of supporters have unleashed a massacre that has claimed the lives of at least 70,000 Syrians, displaced more than 4 million people across a region that already suffers from a massive refugee population, sparked a civil war with a multitude of divergent ethnic groups and religious sects, and placed the security of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile--which is one of the world's largest--at risk of falling into the hands of terrorist groups.

Despite the impact of this horrific campaign, Asad's commitment to continuing the fight appears unwavering. One must look no further than the increasingly indiscriminate tactics with which he conducts his campaign. In recent months, in addition to Asad's possible use of chemical weapons, he has increased his reliance on airstrikes, Scud missiles, rockets, mortar shells, and artillery to terrorize and to kill civilians.

Asad's ability to conduct this campaign is enabled by two actors-- Iran and Russia. Iran's financial, personnel, and materiel support have been critical to ensuring Asad's military remains operable and that the impact of defections is mitigated with reinforcements. Russia's support to Syria's more advanced military weaponry, most notably air defense systems, is critical to Asad's continued ability to project power into areas of the country he no longer controls.

To add further complexity to the situation, al-Nusra Front, an al-Qaida offshoot, continues to spread its influence in some areas of Syria. Its presence is of concern and countering its spread needs to be a priority. It is also critical that we ensure that countries in the region that are seeking to force an end to the Asad regime are not enabling and enhancing the capabilities of violent extremists who will ultimately turn their weapons on moderate Syrians and on religious minorities in Syria, such as the Syrian Christians.

The combination of these circumstances in Syria demonstrates that the status quo is unacceptable and that time is not on our side. Many officials in Washington share this sentiment but in the same breath remind us that the situation in Syria is complex, volatile, and asymmetric; Syria's Government institutions are crumbling, which could create a dangerous vacuum; any action by the United States or the West, even if it is with our Arab partners, risks significant escalation; and that any security vacuum could be filled by Islamist extremists.

I have supported, and I will continue to support, the President's contributions to provide humanitarian relief to the Syrian people throughout the region, as well as the additional assistance he has pledged to Jordan to help with the devastating impact of this conflict on that country.

But it is essential that the United States, working with our allies

in the region, step up the military pressure on the Asad regime--of course, doing so in a carefully thought out and regionally supported way.

Certainly, there are significant challenges to any plan of action in Syria. But we not only have to figure out the consequences of any action, we also have to figure out the consequences of not taking additional actions. In my view, the facts on the ground make the consequences of inaction too great, and it is time for the United States and our allies to use ways to alter the course of events in Syria by increasing the military pressure on Asad until he can see that his current course is not sustainable.

Taking steps to add military pressure on Asad will also provide backing to Secretary Kerry's efforts to bring the Russians into the dialog politically, which is aimed at leading to Asad's departure. I commend Secretary Kerry for his efforts to bring Russia into that dialog.

At the same time, of course, we condemn Russia's support for the Asad regime. I happen to feel very strongly that even though we are condemning, and should condemn, Russia's support for the Asad regime, it is still in our interest that Russia participate in putting pressure on Asad politically to depart, if Secretary Kerry can possibly do so.

I have joined Senator McCain recently in writing to President Obama, urging the President to consider supporting a number of efforts, including the creation by Turkey of a safe zone inside Syria along its border, the deployment of our Patriot batteries closer to that border in order to protect populations in that safe zone and to neutralize any Syrian planes that threaten it and also to provide weapons to vetted elements of the opposition in Syria. These actions--raising the military pressure on Asad--will send the critical message to Asad that he is going to go one way or the other.

The Armed Services Committee, which I chair, recently held an open hearing on the situation in Syria and the Defense Department's efforts to plan for a full range of possible options to respond to the contingencies in Syria. Our committee is set to receive a classified briefing on Syria next week. I intend to raise these issues with our witnesses at that briefing. I know Senator McCain and Senator Graham and others are also going to forcefully raise these issues with those witnesses at that briefing and to urge them to carry the message back to the administration that it is time to up the military pressure on Asad.

I thank Senator McCain and others who are participating in this discussion.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I wish to join with my distinguished colleagues in our collective call for a greater engagement. I start off, as I always do in many years in Congress between the House and the Senate, with two questions: What is in the national interests of the United States? What is in the national security interests of the United States? The answer to those two questions is, in essence, how I determine my views, my advocacy, my votes, and the policies I want to pursue.

There are vital U.S. interests engaged in Syria. First, of course, there is a humanitarian crisis, probably the most significant humanitarian crisis at this moment--70,000 dead and climbing, 4 million displaced. That is, of course, an urgent call. Beyond that we have large chemical weapon stockpiles that potentially can fall into the wrong hands. Some have, by a whole host of public reports, already been used against the Syrian people. Unless you believe that somehow the rebels have in their possession chemical weapons, then this largely has to be from Asad. He has used them. I think once you use them, you are

willing to use them even in greater quantities. That is a real concern.

The Syrian State could collapse. That would leave a safe heaven for terrorists, constituting a new threat to the region. You already have al-Qaida affiliated al-Nusra, you have Hezbollah, you have the Iranian Guard. You have the opportunity for a safe heaven for terrorists constituting a new threat to the region with broader implications for our own security.

The refugee crisis and sectarian violence spread instability throughout the region. The King of Jordan was here 2 weeks ago and sat with our committee. He made it very clear, his population has already increased by 20 percent. At the rate it is going, the population of Jordan could double. That is not sustainable for the kingdom. This is one of the countries that has been one of our most significant and faithful allies, and a constructive ally in the region. We cannot afford for that ally to ultimately find itself in a position in which it could very well collapse. We look at all of that.

Finally, there could be no more strategic setback to Iran--which this body has spoken collectively and in a bipartisan united fashion to stop its march toward nuclear weapons--than to have the Asad regime collapse. That would be a tremendous setback to Iran and would cause a disruption in the terror pipeline between Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

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These are just some of the vital national security interests of the United States in changing the tide. Under the present set of circumstances, Asad believes he is winning. For so long, as he believes he is winning, he will continue the course he is on. There has to be a change in the tipping point.

After 2 years I believe there are those in the opposition--rebels we can and have thoroughly vetted--we can assist in trying to change that tipping point. If you have a monopoly on air power and on artillery, then the reality is you will not see a change on the ground.

So the legislation I have introduced and am working with colleagues on begins to move us in a different direction. It is to seek to arm thoroughly vetted elements of the Syrian opposition so we can change the tipping point. It is to, of course, continue to provide humanitarian assistance and at the same time work for the assistance of a transition fund to help those rebels that are already controlling parts of the civilian population to help them administrate there and prepare for the future.

The key point is unless we change the dynamics on the ground, we will not have a change in the regime. So long as the regime can continue to bomb its citizens indiscriminately--and if the reports, as we have seen from various countries, including our own, suggest that Asad has used chemical weapons against his own citizens--that is only an invitation to allow him to continue to do it unless we act.

I am willing to consider other options. I know my colleague, Senator McCain, very distinguished in this field, has suggested others. I am willing to consider those as well. But I think, finally, we strengthen the hand of the administration and Secretary Kerry. We all want to see a politically, diplomatically achieved solution. But in the absence of changing the calculus not only of Asad but of his supporters who have propped him up, unless they believe he will fall, I am not sure we have changed the calculus for the political opportunity to take place and the diplomacy to be effective.

I think these efforts strengthen the hand of the administration, create a parallel track that if diplomacy fails, we will have an opportunity to pursue our vital national interests and security

interests, end the humanitarian tragedy, and create the type of stability we want to see in the region. I appreciate my colleague bringing us together on the floor of the Senate. I look forward to continuing to work with him.

I yield the floor.

Mr. McCAIN. I thank the distinguished chairman. May I say, it has been a great pleasure for me to have the opportunity to serve on the Foreign Relations Committee, of which Senator Menendez is the chairman. I think his stewardship of that committee has been outstanding. I appreciate the very articulate argument the chairman just presented, including the strategic dimension of this whole issue which sometimes in our--particularly, when you focus so much on the humanitarian side, the strategic interest of the fall of Bashar Al-Asad is something which I think adds another dimension. I thank the Senator and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I would just like to echo what Senator McCain said about Senator Menendez. I would like to, for the record, note that the tide of war in Syria changed today because of what is happening on the floor of the Senate. That may be hard for people to understand, but I really do not think so.

How do you change the tide of battle? You make it certain to the world that Asad will go, and you provide hope to those who are fighting him that they will prevail. I would suggest that a bipartisan consensus is forming in the Senate that now is the time to do more, not less, when it comes to Syria, including arming the rebels--the right rebels, the right opposition, with the right weapons, which will eventually change the tide of battle.

So to those who have been following this debate about Syria, to those who have been in the fight trying to topple this regime, I cannot stress to you how important today is in your cause. When you get Senator Levin and Senator Menendez, two institutional, important figures because of their chairmanships, but beyond that, important because of who they are and what they bring to every debate around national security, combined with Senator McCain and others, you have turned the tide in Washington.

As to Senator McCain, he has been talking in the most eloquent terms for at least a couple of years about stopping this war in Syria, ending the Asad regime and replacing it with something better. He has been right, as he usually is. But now is not the time to look backward, it is to look forward.

I think an effort by the Senate and the House to acknowledge that the tide of war needs to change and we should be bolder in our support for the opposition is going to increase the likelihood of a peaceful solution through diplomacy.

The Russians have to know, after today, if they know anything about American politics, the game has changed when it comes to Asad, and this is a monumental sea change in terms of the war in Syria by having four Senators who care about such matters of foreign policy to speak out and say we will support arming the rebels and being more involved militarily.

To the opposition, this is a great day for you. To Asad, this seals your fate.

Now, what do we do and how do we do it? It will not all end tomorrow because of this colloquy today, but we are well on the way to ending this war. Here is the choice: The current regime, which is evil to the core, and the imperfect opposition, which has been infected by radical Islam--you can fix the second one; you cannot fix the first. It is that simple to me.

The sooner the war ends the better, not only for saving people in

Syria from further slaughter, but preventing what I think would be an erosion of our national security interests in four areas. If this war goes 6 more months, a failed state will emerge in Syria. It will be so fractured you cannot put it back together.

The 6,000 al-Qaida associated fighters will grow in number, and there will be a safe haven in Syria like there was in Afghanistan. That is not good for us. Unlike Afghanistan, there is enough chemical weapons in Syria to kill thousands if not millions of Americans and people who are our allies. I worry greatly not only that chemical weapons have been used in Syria on the opposition by the regime, but those same chemical weapons will be used in the future by radical Islamists against us.

The next bomb that goes off in America may have more than nails and glass in it. The only reason millions of Americans or thousands of Americans, hundreds of thousands have not been killed by radical Islamists is they cannot get the weapons to kill that many of us. They would if they could.

I have never seen a better opportunity for radical Islamists to get ahold of weapons of mass destruction than I see in Syria today. Every day that goes by their opportunity to acquire some of these weapons grows dramatically. If you ask me what I worry the most about with Syria and why we should get involved, it is for that very reason. If these weapons get compromised, they are going to fall into the hands of the people who will use them against us, and to believe otherwise would be incredibly naive.

Jordan. Probably the most stabilizing figure in the Mideast in these dangerous times is the King of Jordan. His country is being overrun by refugees. If this war goes on 6 more months, that is probably the end of his kingdom because it will create economic chaos and political instability. He will be a victim of the civil war in Syria, and it will have monumental consequences for our national security.

As we talk about Syria and chemical weapons falling into radical Islamists' hands, we are dealing with a radical regime in Iran that is marching toward building a nuclear weapon. If you think the ayatollahs in Iran are trying to build a nuclear powerplant at the bottom of a mountain, you are wrong. They are trying to build a nuclear weapon to ensure their survivability. God only knows what they would do with nuclear technology. But if you believe what they say, they would wipe Israel off the map, and we would be next. I tend to believe what they say.

If you allow Syria to continue to deteriorate and have a hands-off policy

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toward Asad, then I think you are sending the worst possible signal to Iran. As Senator Levin said, really the only ally Iran has today is Asad in Syria. How can we convince the Iranians we are serious about their nuclear problem when we do not seem to be very serious about Asad using chemical weapons against his own people? What a terrible signal to send at one of the most important times.

I would end with this thought: This bipartisan consensus that is emerging today is going to pay great dividends. It is going to be helpful to the President. We can end this war sooner rather than later. But no matter what happens, there is going to be a second war in Syria, unfortunately.

That second war is going to be between radical Islamists who want to turn Syria into some kind of al-Qaida-inspired state, and the overwhelming majority of Syrians who want to live a better life and be our friends, not our enemies.

This war will occur after the fall of Asad. But it will end the right

way. The sooner we get the first war over, the shorter the second war will be. I think we can bring this war to a close without boots on the ground. The sooner we act the better.

One last thought. To the opposition, you would be helping your cause if you would let the world know that you do not want Asad's chemical weapons; that the new Syria will not be a state that wants weapons of mass destruction; that you would agree these weapons should be controlled by the international community and destroyed; that you would agree to an international force coming on the ground with your blessing the day after Asad falls to secure these weapons and destroy them for all time. I think you would be helping your cause.

So I say to Senator McCain, I really appreciate his leadership for a couple of years. But persistence does matter in politics and all things that are important. I think the Senator's persistence is paying off.

I say to Senator Menendez and Senator Levin, what they have done today joining up in a bipartisan fashion is going to pay great dividends for our own national security interests. The way forward is pretty clear.

I say to President Obama, we want to be your ally. We want to be your supporter. We want you to get more involved, not less. We realize it is hard. We realize there are risks no matter what we do. But as Senator McCain said before, the risk of doing nothing by continuing on the current track is far greater than getting involved in ending the war sooner.

Mr. McCAIN. Can I just ask one question of my colleague? I understand recently he made a trip to the Middle East. There is nothing like seeing the terrible consequences of war. I understand the Senator visited a refugee camp.

Maybe for the benefit of our colleagues the Senator could take a minute to describe the horrible conditions people who have now been made refugees have been subjected to and their failure to understand why we won't be able to be of more assistance to them.

Mr. GRAHAM. I thank the Senator for his question. It was one of the most compelling trips I have ever made to the Middle East. We went to Turkey, Jordan, and we went to a refugee camp in Jordan. Some 40,000 Syrian children are now in Jordanian schools. The burden on Jordan is immense, but when you talk to the people in the camps, what they have gone through and what their loved ones have gone through is heartbreaking.

From a national point of view, once you visit the camps, you understand what is at stake. They tell you about radical Islamists moving in. They want no part of them but at the end of the day they are having more influence because we are not in the fight. You can do this without boots on the ground.

The most chilling thing they tell us, which Senator McCain, has been echoing for a long time, is their children are watching the United States. Like it or not, we have the reputation in the world that we can do almost anything.

Well, we can't do almost anything, but we are seen as a force for good. The people in Syria are beside themselves wondering where is America. America, to them, is an idea. They want to be like us because it means freedom, and it means economic opportunity. It means having a say about your children's future. They are dumbfounded that we are not more involved, given the stakes that exist in Syria. They tell us without any hesitation that the young people of Syria will remember this moment. They will hold this against us. I think I know what the Senator is telling us.

Here is the good news: There is still time to act. It doesn't have to end that way. The conditions in Syria are horrible. The refugee camps were beyond imagination. The U.N. is doing a great job, but they are running out of money. Jordan is about to fall if we don't stop this

war.

From a human point of view, we have got to get this war over and America needs to be seen as part of the solution, not part of the problem. From a national security point of view, Syria is going to become a nightmare for the whole world, including the United States.

Mr. McCain. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record a Washington Post editorial entitled "Repercussions Of Inaction," a Wall Street Journal article, "U.S. Is Warned Russia Plans Syria Arms Sale," and, finally, a piece by Leon Wieseltier that is in the Washington Diarist.

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

[From the Washington Post, May 9, 2013]

The Repercussions of Inaction

(Editorial)

There are grave risks in continuing the current U.S. policy toward Syria.

Opponents of U.S. intervention in Syria are adept at citing the risks of a more aggressive U.S. effort to bring down the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Weapons given to rebel fighters might end up in the hands of extremists, the skeptics say. U.S. air attacks or the creation of a no-fly zone would be challenged by formidable air defenses. U.S. intervention might increase the risk that the regime would resort to chemical weapons.

Above all, say the anti-interventionists, direct or even indirect U.S. engagement in the fighting would make Syria an American problem, saddling a war-weary country with another difficult, expensive and possibly unworkable nation-building mission.

These are serious objections, though we believe that some of the risks, such as the spread of weapons to jihadists, can be mitigated, while others, such as the strength of Syrian air defenses, have been exaggerated. Our greater concern is about the side of the discussion critics of intervention usually leave out--which is the risks that are incurred by failing to intervene.

What will unfold in Syria if the Obama administration persists with its policy of providing humanitarian and other non-lethal aid while standing back from the fighting? The most likely scenario is that Syria fractures along sectarian lines. An al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, is already consolidating control over a swath of northeastern Syria; remnants of the regime, backed by Shiite fighters from Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, could take over a strip of the western coastline.

Such a splintering would almost certainly spread the sectarian warfare to Iraq and Lebanon, as it has to some extent already. That could cause the collapse of the Iraqi political system that was the legacy of the U.S. mission there. Chemical weapons stocks now controlled by the Assad regime would be up for grabs, probably forcing further interventions by Israel in order to prevent their acquisition by Hezbollah or al-Qaeda. Jordan, the most fragile U.S. ally in the Middle East, could collapse under the weight of Syrian refugees. Turkey and Saudi Arabia, which have been imploring the Obama administration to take steps to end the war, could

conclude that the United States is no longer a reliable ally.

Of course, some of these consequences may come about whatever the United States does. But the best way of preventing them is to quickly tip the military balance against the Assad regime--something that would probably require an air campaign as well as arms for the moderate opposition. If the regime's fighting strength is decisively broken it might still be possible to force out the Assads and negotiate a political transition, as Secretary of State John F. Kerry aspires to do. For now, with the regime convinced it is winning, there is no such chance--and with each passing month Syria's breakup comes closer to reality.

In short, there are substantial risks for the United States if it intervenes in Syria but also grave dangers in its present policy. On Tuesday President Obama said his job was to ``constantly measure'' what actions were in the best U.S. interest. It's not an easy calculus, to be sure. But for two years, as Mr. Obama has heeded the warnings about U.S. engagement, the situation in Syria has grown more dangerous to U.S. interests. There are no good options, as everyone likes to say. But it's becoming increasingly clear

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that the greatest risk to the United States lies in failing to take decisive action to end the Assad regime.

[From the Wall Street Journal, May 9, 2013]

U.S. Is Warned Russia Plans Syria Arms Sale

(By Jay Solomon, Adam Entous and Julian E. Barnes)

Washington.--Israel has warned the U.S. that a Russian deal is imminent to sell advanced ground-to-air missile systems to Syria, weapons that would significantly boost the regime's ability to stave off intervention in its civil war.

U.S. officials said on Wednesday that they are analyzing the information Israel provided about the suspected sale of S-300 missile batteries to Syria, but wouldn't comment on whether they believed such a transfer was near.

Russian officials didn't immediately return requests to comment. The Russian Embassy in Washington has said its policy is not to comment on arms sales or transfers between Russia and other countries.

The government of President Bashar al-Assad has been seeking to purchase S-300 missile batteries--which can intercept both manned aircraft and guided missiles--from Moscow going back to the George W. Bush administration, U.S. officials said. Western nations have lobbied President Vladimir Putin's government not to go ahead with the sale. If Syria were to acquire and deploy the systems, it would make any international intervention in Syria far more complicated, according to U.S. and Middle East-based officials.

According to the information the Israelis provided in recent days, Syria has been making payments on a 2010 agreement with Moscow to buy four batteries for \$900 million. They cite financial transactions from the Syrian government, including one made this year through Russia's foreign-

development bank, known as the VEB.

The package includes six launchers and 144 operational missiles, each with a range of 125 miles, according to the information the Israelis provided. The first shipment could come over the next three months, according to the Israelis' information, and be concluded by the end of the year. Russia is also expected to send two instruction teams to train Syria's military in operating the missile system, the Israelis say.

Russia has been Mr. Assad's most important international backer, outside of Iran, since the conflict in Syria started in March 2011, and supplies Syria with arms, funding and fuel. Russia maintains a naval port in Syria, its only outlet to the Mediterranean. Moscow also has publicly voiced worries that a collapsed Syria could fuel Islamist activities in its restive Caucasus regions.

Secretary of State John Kerry met with Mr. Putin on Tuesday in Moscow. The leaders said they would stage an international conference this month aimed at ending the civil war. U.S. officials couldn't say whether Messrs. Kerry and Putin or their teams discussed the arms sale.

British Prime Minister David Cameron is scheduled to visit Mr. Putin in Russia on Friday. The White House on Wednesday said Mr. Cameron would visit Washington on Monday to discuss issues including Syria's civil war and counterterrorism, plus trade and economic issues, with President Barack Obama.

The Obama administration has argued that Mr. Assad has to leave office as part of a political transition in Damascus. The Kremlin has maintained that he retains a large base of support and should be included in negotiations over a future Syrian government.

Should Mr. Putin's government go ahead with the sale, it would mark a significant escalation in the battle between Moscow and Washington over Syria. U.S. officials said they believe Russian technicians are already helping maintain the existing Syrian air-defense units.

The first air-defense deals between Russia and Syria date back decades. Russia in recent years has stepped up shipments to modernize Syria's targeting systems and make the air defenses mobile, and therefore much more difficult for Israel--and the U.S.--to overcome.

According to a U.S. intelligence assessment, Russia began shipping SA-22 Pantsir-S1 units to Syria in 2008. The system, a combination of surface-to-air missiles and 30mm anti-aircraft guns, has a digital targeting system and is mounted on a combat vehicle, making it easy to move. Syria has 36 of the vehicles, according to the assessment.

In 2009, the Russians started upgrading Syria's outdated analog SA-3 surface-to-air missile systems, turning them into the SA-26 Pechora-2M system, which is mobile and digital, equipped with missiles with an operational range of 17 miles, according to the assessment.

The U.S. is particularly worried about another modernized system Moscow provides--the SA-5. With an operational range of 175 miles, SA-5 missiles could take out U.S. planes flying from Cyprus, a key North Atlantic Treaty Organization base that was used during Libya operations and would likely be vital in any Syrian operation.

The U.S. has stealth aircraft and ship-based, precision-guided missiles that could take out key air-defense sites. Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

has privately told the White House that shutting down the system could require weeks of bombing, putting U.S. fighter pilots in peril and diverting military resources from other priorities.

According to an analysis by the U.S. military's Joint Staff, Syrian air defenses are nearly five times more sophisticated than what existed in Libya before the NATO launched its air campaign there in 2011. Syrian air defenses are about 10 times more sophisticated than the system the U.S. and its allies faced in Serbia.

[From the Washington Diarist, May 7, 2013]

Stung!

(By Leon Wieseltier)

A reporter who visited the White House last week brought back the news that the criticism of President Obama's immobility about the Syrian disaster has ``begun to sting.'' Good. Something got through. The president's sophistries about his ``red line'' helped, of course: he spoke his way into a predicament that he cannot speak his way out of, thereby damaging the article of faith about the magical powers of his speech. The press is full of reports that our policy may be changing, that we may finally supply weapons to rebels we can ideologically support, that we have identified such rebels under the leadership of General Salim Idris, and so on. ``We are on an upward trajectory,'' a White House official told another reporter about these second thoughts, which only a short while ago it would have considered a downward trajectory. Obama, somewhat embarrassed by the implication that for two years he may have been in error about one of the most consequential crises of his presidency, is having the White House rehearse its old admonition about caution (its chin-stroking Kissingerian term for a doctrinaire timidity), but still something may be stirring. The Syrian use of sarin and the Israeli airstrikes (which were miraculously unimpeded by the mythical power of Assad's air defenses) seem to have concentrated the West Wing mind. Is Obama being stung into action? I do not really believe it--his interventionism runs deep, philosophically and temperamentally; but in any event it is not too early to record a few lessons that can be extracted from this fiasco.

The bitterness of belatedness. There is nothing we know about Assad now that we did not know a year ago and longer. Not even his use of chemical weapons changes our understanding of him. His strategy in this crisis has always been to transform a democratic rebellion into a sectarian war, and his method for doing so has been to commit crimes against humanity. In the two years of American quiescence the Syrian situation has become only more dire, so that those who now plead that there are no perfect options are right. But there are imperfect options, which is often all that the Hobbesian life of nations anyway allows: we can still create pro-Western elements in the struggle for Syria after Assad, and deny Al Qaeda a government in Damascus, and stem the tide of the refugees that is shaking the entire region. But the road to a democratic Syria is now much longer and more twisted

than it had to be. I say this not only in recrimination, but also because Obama's failure to act swiftly in the Syrian crisis reiterates one of the regular mistakes of American presidents after the cold war, which is to refuse to treat an emergency like an emergency. In many problems of statecraft, patience is a virtue and judiciousness the beginning of wisdom; but not in all. There are gross outrages against justice, such as the butchery of civilians, that must be acted against without delay or they have not been properly understood. Confronted by this degree of urgency, the difference between success and failure is time. Why do we have to keep rediscovering this? Must the learning curve of presidents always cost many thousands of lives? Has anyone at the White House read Samantha Power's book?

The cult of the exit strategy. A ``senior American official who is involved in Syria policy'' plaintively said this to Dexter Filkins of The New Yorker: ``People on the Hill ask me, `Why can't we do a no-fly zone? Why can't we do military strikes?' Of course we can do these things. The issue is, where will it stop?' The answer is, we don't know. But is the gift of prophecy really a requirement for historical action? Must we know the ending at the beginning? If so, then nobody would start a business, or a book, or a medical treatment, or a love affair, let alone an invasion of Normandy Beach. We can have certainty about our objectives but not about our circumstances. The most serious action is often improvisatory, though its purposes should always be clear. The prestige of ``the exit strategy'' in our culture is another American attempt to deny the contingency of experience and assert mastery over what cannot be mastered--in this instance, it is American control-freakishness applied to the use of American force. But we often engage with what we cannot master. No outcomes are assured, except perhaps when we do nothing. We do not need to control the realm in which we need to take action; we need only to have strong and defensible reasons and strong and defensible means, and to keep our wits, our analytical abilities, about us. After all, there are many ways, good and bad, to end a military commitment, as Obama himself has shown. All this talk of exiting is designed only to inhibit us from entering. Like its cousin ``the slippery slope,'' ``the exit strategy'' is demagoguery masquerading as prudence.

The eclipse of humanitarianism. Seventy thousand people have died in the Syrian war,

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most of them at the hands of their ruler. Since this number has appeared in the papers for many months, the actual number must be much higher. The slaughter is unceasing. But the debate about American intervention is increasingly conducted in ``realist'' terms: the threat to American interests posed by jihadism in Syria, the intrigues of Iran and Hezbollah, the rattling of Israel, the ruination of Jordan and Lebanon and Iraq. Those are all good reasons for the president of the United States to act like the president of the United States. But wouldn't the prevention of ethnic cleansing and genocidal war be reason enough? Is the death of scores and even hundreds of thousands, and the displacement of millions, less significant for American policy, and less quickening? The moral dimension must be restored to our deliberations, the

moral sting, or else Obama, for all his talk about conscience, will have presided over a terrible mutilation of American discourse: the severance of conscience from action.

Mr. McCAIN. I thank my colleagues. I yield.

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From the Congressional Record Online through the Government Publishing Office [www.gpo.gov]

SYRIA

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Madam President, like many others, I am deeply disturbed by the current situation in Syria, the appalling atrocities, the tragic loss of life, the reported use of chemical weapons. This deserves the clear condemnation of the international community.

I am also concerned by the push for intervention in this war, by the rush to judgment for the United States to yet again become entangled in a civil war. The President has decided to send arms to the rebels to fight the government of the Bashar al-Asad. The full scope of this intervention is not yet clear, but this path is dangerous and unnecessary.

The Asad regime is cruel and corrupt. We can all agree on that point. Many of the groups fighting against him do not share our values and could be worse. They may pose long-term risks to us and our allies. Asad's enemies may very well be America's enemies. The fact is that we do not know. A number of experts, including our military brass, have sounded alarms warning that the options to intervene in Syria range from bad to worse and could prove damaging to America's strategic interests. By flooding Syria with weapons, we risk arming those who ultimately may seek to do us harm.

We have been down this road before. Recent history tells a cautionary tale. In the 1980s the United States supported a rebel insurgency to repel the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Back then as now, many Members of Congress pushed for arming these rebels. The United States supplied weapons, intelligence, and training, with the goal to defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Our short-term victory had tragic consequences for the future. Radical members of the insurgency formed the Taliban regime, giving safe haven to terrorist training camps, providing material support to Osama bin Laden and his fledgling al-Qaida movement. Through state-sponsored terrorism in Afghanistan, al-Qaida thrived and perpetrated attacks on the USS Cole and the World Trade Center on 9/11. The aftermath has been more than a decade of war, with tragic loss of American lives and treasure.

This is history to learn from, not repeat, and yet many who advocated for previously disastrous Middle East interventions are leading the charge to arm groups we know little about and to declare war through air strikes on another Middle Eastern country.

What little we do know about the Syrian rebels is extremely disturbing. The opposition is fractured. Some are sympathetic to the enemies of the United States and our allies, including Israel and Turkey. There are reliable reports that some of the rebels even include Iraqi Sunni insurgents--the same groups who killed many U.S. troops and still target the current Iraqi Army and Government.

We know American law currently considers some of the rebel elements to be terrorist groups. The United States has designated one of the key opposition factions, the Nursa Front, as a terrorist organization for being an al-Qaida-affiliated group.

The Syrian opposition is very unorganized. They lack a chain of command, they are subject to deadly infighting, and if they are able to defeat Asad, they may turn on each other or worse the United States or our allies.

Simply put, once we have introduced arms, neither we nor their fighters may be able to guarantee control over them. Such weapons could end up in the hands of groups and people who do not represent our interests, possibly including terrorists who target the United States, our allies, such as Israel and Turkey, and the Iraqi Army and Government--an Iraq that we spent billions of dollars and thousands of American lives to establish.

Given this reality, those who are pushing for military intervention should answer three basic questions: Can arms be reasonably accounted for and kept out of the hands of terrorists and extremist groups? Can they assure us those arms will not become a threat to our regional allies and friends, including Israel, Turkey, and the Government of Iraq? And if the answer to the two previous questions is no, can they then explain why transferring our weapons to the rebels, whose members may themselves be affiliated with terrorist and extremist groups, is a sensible option for the American people? What national interest does this serve?

I do not believe those questions have been answered. I think the majority of the American people agree. They do not see the justification of our intervention in this civil war. We need to slow down this clamor for more weapons to Syria and war and take a step back from this plunge into very muddy and dangerous waters.

Stopping radicalism and protecting our allies is of vital importance; however, we come to the ultimate question, one that has not been adequately answered: Will this hasty march to intervene in another Middle East conflict achieve these goals or will it ultimately harm the interests of the United States, leading to yet another bloody, costly, overseas conflict and, ironically, worsening the terrorist threat?

We should listen to the lessons of history. After over a decade of war overseas, now is not the time to arm an unorganized, unfamiliar, and unpredictable group of rebels. Now is not the time to rush headlong into another Middle Eastern civil war. The winds of war are blowing yet again, and we should be ever vigilant before we venture into another storm.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

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Pages S6106-S6108]

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SYRIA

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, as we prepare to head out for the August recess, I have returned to the floor today to speak, once again, about the horrific and worsening situation in Syria--a conflict that, we learned this week, has now claimed 100,000 lives.

I would like to take a few minutes to read from a remarkable statement that was delivered on Monday by Mr. Paulo Pinheiro, the chair of the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria. The excerpts I wish to read are long, but they are shocking, and worth quoting in full.

Here is the assessment Mr. Pinheiro gave to the U.N., and I quote:

Syria is in free-fall. Relentless shelling has killed thousands of civilians and displaced the populations of entire towns. An untold number of men and women have disappeared while passing through the ubiquitous checkpoints. Those freed from detention are living with the physical and mental scars of torture. Hospitals have been bombarded, leaving the sick and wounded to languish without care. With the destruction of thousands of schools, a generation of children now struggle to obtain an education. The country has become a battlefield. Its civilians are repeatedly victims of acts of terror.

Mr. Pinheiro concludes with this powerful plea for action:

That civilians should come under such sustained unlawful attacks should shock your conscience and spur you to action. But it has not. As the conflict drags on, you--and the world--have become accustomed to levels of violence that were previously unthinkable . . .

It is time for the international community to act decisively. There are no easy choices. To evade choice, however, is to countenance the continuation of this war and its many violations . . . The world must hear the cry of the people--stop the violence, put an end to this carnage, halt the destruction of the great country of Syria!

Again, this is not my assessment; it is that of a senior United Nations leader. And I applaud Mr. Pinheiro for his moral leadership on behalf of the Syrian people. At the same time, I say with the utmost respect that I disagree with Mr. Pinheiro's counsel for what is required to achieve the goal we share, which is to create conditions that favor a negotiated end to the conflict in Syria. I continue to believe that, while there is not a purely military solution to the conflict in Syria, I find it difficult to avoid the conclusion that military intervention by the United States and our allies must be a critical part of the solution we seek. Indeed it is unrealistic to think we can arrive at a diplomatic solution otherwise.

Let's be absolutely clear about the realities in Syria today and where this conflict is headed. Asad is never going to negotiate himself out of power or seek to end the conflict diplomatically so long as he believes he is winning on the battlefield, and right now, he clearly has the advantage on the ground. This is thanks, in critical part, to his air power, which not only allows Asad to pound opposition military positions and civilian populations--including with chemical weapons,

which nearly everyone believes he has used and will use again--but also to move his troops and supplies around the battlefield in ways that he cannot do on the ground.

Asad's growing military advantage is also thanks to the influx of thousands of Hezbollah fighters who are leading offensives in key parts of the country, Iranian special forces who are training and advising Asad's troops and private militias, Shia militants from Iraq and Lebanon, as well as a steady and decisive flow of weapons and other assistance from Iran and Russia, which is being brought into Syria with impunity, including through overflights of Iraq.

The consequences of this onslaught for Syria are bad enough. The strategically vital city of Homs is expected to fall imminently, which would be a major victory for Asad that would strengthen his position immeasurably. The consequences for the region, however, are arguably worse. Syria's main export today is its civilian population, which is flooding into Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, by the hundreds of thousands. Indeed, 15 percent of Jordan's population is now Syrian refugees, and the fourth largest city in the country is now a Syria refugee camp.

At the same time, Syria's primary import today seems to be foreign extremists from all across the region and indeed the world. It is well known from estimates in published reports that as many as several thousand people from all across the Middle East have moved into Syria to fight with Al Qaeda and other extremist groups. But, in addition, the New York Times reported this week that Western counterterrorism and intelligence officials now believe that hundreds of Muslims from Western countries have joined the fight in Syria, including 140 French, 75 Spaniards, 60 Germans, a few dozen Canadians and Australians, as well as fighters from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands. As many as a dozen Americans are believed to be among them. It is difficult to conclude that Al Qaeda does not enjoy safe haven in Syria today, and no one should believe that it won't be used eventually to launch attacks against us.

Make no mistake, this is where we are headed. Syria is becoming a failed state in the heart of the Middle East and a safe haven for Al Qaeda and its allies. It is becoming a regional and sectarian conflict that threatens the national security interests of the United States. And it is becoming the decisive battleground on which Iran and its allies are defying the United

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States and our allies and prevailing in a test of wills, which is fundamentally undermining America's credibility among both our friends and enemies throughout the region and the world.

Some may see this as an acceptable outcome. I do not.

I know Americans are war weary. I know the situation in Syria is complex, and there are no easy answers. That said, all of us must ask ourselves one basic question: Are the costs, and risks, and potential benefits associated with our current course of action better or worse than those associated with America becoming more involved militarily in Syria? I believe our current course of action is worse, because it virtually guarantees all of the bad outcomes that are unfolding before our eyes and getting worse and worse the longer this conflict grinds on.

Now, some would have us believe that military action of even a limited nature is too cost intensive, too high risk, and too marginal in its potential impact in Syria. In a letter dated July 19, 2013, to the chairman of the Armed Services Committee and myself, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, GEN Martin Dempsey, described the

requirements to conduct various military options in Syria. He spoke of scenarios that would demand hundreds of military assets and thousands of special forces to resource military options that no one is seriously considering.

Now, in my many years, I have seen a lot of military commanders overstate what is needed to conduct military action for one reason or another. But rarely have I seen an effort as disingenuous and exaggerated as what General Dempsey proposed.

The option that many of us have proposed is limited standoff strikes to degrade Asad's air power and ballistic missile capability. But here is General Dempsey's description of what would be needed to conduct ``limited standoff strikes'':

Potential targets include high-value regime air defense, air, ground, missile, and naval forces as well as the supporting military facilities and command nodes. Stand-off air and missile systems could be used to strike hundreds of targets at a tempo of our choosing. Force requirements would include hundreds of aircraft, ships, submarines, and other enablers. Depending on duration, the costs would be in the billions.

This is a completely disingenuous description of both the problem and the solution. No one is seriously talking about striking Asad's naval forces as part of a limited campaign. And no one seriously thinks that degrading Asad's air power would require hundreds of American military assets. The whole thing is completely misleading to the Congress and the American people, and it is shameful.

For a serious accounting of a realistic limited military option in Syria, I would strongly recommend a new study that is being released today by the Institute for the Study of War, or ISW, which was overseen by GEN Jack Keane, the author of the surge strategy that enabled us to turn around the war in Iraq. This new study confirms what I and many others have long argued: **That it is militarily feasible for the United States and our friends and allies to significantly degrade Asad's air power at relatively low cost, low risk to our personnel, and in very short order--and to do so, I want to stress, without putting any U.S. boots on the ground.**

Specifically, the ISW study reports that Asad's forces are only flying a maximum of 100 operational strike aircraft at present, an estimate that ISW concedes is likely very generous to the Asad regime. The real figure, they maintain, is more likely around 50. What is more, these aircraft are only being flown out of 6 primary airfields, with an additional 12 secondary airfields playing a supporting role. What this means is that the real-world military problem of how to significantly degrade Asad's air power is very manageable--again, as I and others have maintained.

ISW calculates that U.S. and allied forces could significantly degrade Asad's air power using standoff weapons that would not require one of our pilots to enter Syrian airspace or confront one Syrian air defense system. With a limited number of these precision strikes against each of Asad's eight primary airfields, we could crater their runways, destroy their fuel and maintenance capabilities, knock out key command and control, and destroy a significant portion of their aircraft on the ground. The ISW study estimates that this limited intervention could be achieved in 1 day and would involve a total of 3 Navy surface ships and 24 strike aircraft, each deploying a limited number of precision-guided munitions--all fired from outside of Syria, without ever confronting Syrian air defenses.

This should not come as a surprise. After all, hitting static targets from a distance is what the U.S. military does best. And hitting static

targets in Syria, without ever confronting Syrian air defenses inside of Syrian airspace, is something that our Israeli allies now seem to have done on several occasions. Surely we can too.

There are other things we should do in conjunction with targeted strikes against Asad's air power. We could expand the list of targets to include Asad's ballistic missiles, as well as key regime command-and-control sites. This would be an equally minimal number of targets that could be hit with the same standoff weapons. We should also stand up a far larger train-and-equip operation than what published reports suggest has been authorized to date. What all of the Syrian opposition leaders have told me their forces need most of all is antitank weapons that can destroy Asad's artillery and armor, which would remain a major threat even if we significantly degrade Asad's air power. We should give the Syrian opposition these kinds of capabilities to level the playing field themselves.

If we were to do all of these things--degrade Asad's air power and ballistic missiles and train, equip and advise the opposition on a large scale--it probably would not end the conflict in Syria immediately. But it could turn the tide of battle against Asad's forces and in favor of the opposition, and begin to create conditions on the ground that could make a negotiated end to the conflict possible.

We cannot afford to lose the moral dimension from our foreign policy. If ever a case should remind us of this, it is Syria. Leon Wieseltier captured this point powerfully in The New Republic last month. His words are as true today as they were then, and I quote:

The slaughter is unceasing. But the debate about American intervention is increasingly conducted in ``realist'' terms: the threat to American interests posed by jihadism in Syria, the intrigues of Iran and Hezbollah, the rattling of Israel, the ruination of Jordan and Lebanon and Iraq. Those are all good reasons for the president of the United States to act like the president of the United States. But wouldn't the prevention of ethnic cleansing and genocidal war be reason enough? Is the death of scores and even hundreds of thousands, and the displacement of millions, less significant for American policy, and less quickening? The moral dimension must be restored to our deliberations, the moral sting, or else Obama, for all his talk about conscience, will have presided over a terrible mutilation of American discourse: the severance of conscience from action.

We have had these debates before. In Bosnia, and later in Kosovo, we heard many arguments against military intervention that we now hear about Syria. It was said that there was no international consensus for action, that the situation on the ground was messy and confused, that it was not clear who we would actually be helping, and that our involvement could actually make matters worse. Fortunately, we had a President who led--who explained to the American people what the stakes were in the Balkans, and why we needed to rise to the role that only America could play. Here is how President Bill Clinton described Bosnia in 1995:

There are times and places where our leadership can mean the difference between peace and war, and where we can defend our fundamental values as a people and serve our most basic, strategic interests. [T]here are still times when America and America alone can and should make the difference for peace.

Nearly two decades ago, I worked with both my Democratic and Republican colleagues in Congress to support President Clinton as he

led America to do the right thing in stopping mass atrocities in Bosnia. The question for another President today, and for all of my colleagues in this body, indeed for all Americans, is whether we will once again answer the desperate pleas for rescue that are made uniquely to us, as the United States of America.

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SYRIA

Mr. KAINÉ. Madam President, I rise to speak to the grave issue of the Syria resolution currently pending before the body.

It is September 11. I know many Members have expressed thoughts, and we are all thinking about that day and what it means to our country. In a few minutes I will leave and go to the Pentagon to be with Pentagon staffers and family members as they commemorate the anniversary of this horrible tragedy in American life. The shadow of that tragedy and its rippling effects even today, 12 years later, definitely are a matter on my mind and heart as I think about this issue with respect to Syria.

Also on my mind and heart as I think about this grave issue is its connection to Virginia. I believe Virginia is the most militarily connected State in our country. Our map is a map of American military history: the battle at Yorktown, the surrender at Appomattox Court House, the attack on the Pentagon on 9/11. Our map is a map of American military history. We are more connected to the military in the sense that one in nine of our citizens is a veteran. We have Active Duty at the Pentagon, training to be officers at Quantico, the largest concentration of naval power in the world at Hampton Roads. We have DOD contractors. We have DOD civilians such as Army nurses. We have ROTC cadets, Guard and Reserve members, and military families, all of whom care very deeply about the issue we are grappling with as a nation.

I am sure in the Presiding Officer's State, as in mine and across the country, there is a war weariness on this 12th anniversary of 9/11, and that affects the way we look at this question of whether the United States should potentially engage in military action.

I cast a vote last week in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to authorize limited military action, and I have spent the days since that vote talking to Virginians and hearing from them and hearing from some who aren't happy with the vote I cast.

I spent 1 day talking to ROTC cadets at Virginia State University, folks who are training to be officers who might fight in future conflicts for this country. Then I spent Friday in Hampton Roads with veterans and military families talking about the choices before us.

I heard a teenager last night say something that truly struck me. This is a teenager who doesn't have any direct connection to the

military herself, no family members in service. But at an event I was attending, she stood and said: I don't know war, but all my generation and I know is war. Think about that: I don't know war, but all my generation and I know is war. During her entire life that she has been kind of a thinking person, aware of the outside world, we have been at war. That makes us tremendously war-weary, and I understand that. So trying to separate out all those feelings and do what is right is hard.

Similar to many Virginians, I have family in the military who are going to be directly affected by what we do or what we don't do. I think about those family members and all Virginians and all Americans who have loved ones in service as I contemplate this difficult issue.

I wish to say three things. First, I wish to praise the President for bringing this matter to Congress, which I believe is courageous and historic. Secondly, I wish to talk about why I believe authorizing limited military action makes sense. Third, I wish to talk about the need to exhaust all diplomatic opportunities and openings, including the ones that were reported beginning Monday of this week by Russia and Syria.

First, on the President coming to Congress. This was what was intended by the Framers of the Constitution; that prior to the initiation of significant military action--and this would be significant by all accounts--that Congress should have to weigh in. The Framers wanted that to be so. They had read history. They knew executives might be a little too prone to initiating military action, and they wanted to make sure the people's elected representatives had a vote about whether an action should be initiated. Once initiated, there is only one Commander in Chief. But at the initiation, Congress needs to be involved. That was the intent from the very beginning of this Nation from 1787. There was an understanding that in an emergency, a President might need to act immediately, but even in that case there would need to be a reckoning, a coming back to Congress and seeking approval of Presidential action.

In my view, the President, by bringing this matter to Congress, has acted in accord with law, acted in accord with the intent of the Framers of the Constitution, and actually has done so in a way that has cleared up some sloppiness about the way this institution and the President has actually done this over time.

Only five times in the history of the Nation has Congress declared war. Over 120 times Presidents have initiated military action without congressional approval--at least prior congressional approval. Presidents have overreached their power, and Congress has often made a decision to avoid being accountable for this most grave decision that we make as a nation.

I praise the President for bringing it to Congress, the people's body, because I think it is in accord with law. But I praise him for a second reason. It is not just about the constitutional allocation of responsibility. Responsibilities were allocated in the Constitution, in my view, for a very important moral reason. The moral reason is this: We cannot ask our men and women in service to put their lives on the line if there is not a consensus of the legislative and executive branches that the mission is worthwhile.

That is why it is important for Congress to weigh in on a decision to initiate military hostility because, absent that, we face the situation that would be a very real possibility in this instance that a President would make a decision that an action or a war was worth fighting but a Congress would not support it. That would put the men and women who have to face the risk

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and potentially risk their lives in a very difficult situation. If we

are going to ask people to risk their lives in any kind of a military action, we shouldn't be asking them to do it if the legislative and political branches haven't reached some consensus that it should be done.

That is the first point I wish to make. I wish to thank the President for cleaning up this sloppiness in the historical allocation of responsibilities between a President and Congress, for taking a historic step--as he said he would as a candidate--of bringing a question such as this to Congress.

We may be unable to act in certain cases because we are divided. But if we act and we act united, we are much stronger both militarily and in the moral example that we pose to the world. It is the right thing to do for the troops who bear the burden of battle.

Second, I wish to talk about the actual authorization. We grappled with this. The news came out about the chemical weapons attack on August 21, and 18 of us members of the Foreign Relations Committee returned last week. The Presiding Officer came and attended some of our classified meetings. We grappled with the question about whether in this circumstance a limited military authorization was appropriate, and I voted yes. I voted yes for a very simple reason. I believe there has to be a consequence for using chemical weapons against civilians.

It is pretty simple. There are a lot of nuances, a lot of subtleties, and a lot of questions about whether the plans might accomplish the particular objective we hope. Those are all legitimate questions. But at the end of the day, I feel so very strongly that if chemical weapons have been used--and in this case they were and used on a massive scale and used against civilians--there must be a consequence for that. There must be a sharp consequence for it. If there isn't, the whole world will be worse off.

I believe that if the United States acts in this way to uphold an important international norm--perhaps the most important international norm that weapons of mass destruction can't be used against civilians--if we act to uphold the norm, we will have partners. How many partners? We will see. Maybe not as many as we would wish, but we will have partners. But I am also convinced that if the United States does not act to uphold this principle, I don't think anyone will act. If we act, we will have partners; if we don't, I don't think anyone will act. That is the burden of leadership that is on this country's shoulders.

We know about the history of the chemical weapons ban, and we are so used to it that it seems normal. But just to kind of step back from it, if we think about it, it is not that normal at all.

The chemical weapons ban came out of World War I. World War I was a mechanized slaughter with over 10 million deaths, a slaughter unlike anything that had ever been seen in global history. There were all kinds of weapons used in World War I that had never been used before, including dropping bombs out of airplanes. Dropping bombs out of airplanes, new kinds of artillery, new kinds of munitions, new kinds of machine guns, chemical weapons, all kinds of mechanized and industrialized weapons were used in World War I. The American troops who served in 1917 and 1918 were gassed. They would be sleeping in a trench, trying to get a couple hours of sleep, and they would wake up coughing their lungs out or blinded--or they wouldn't wake up because some of the gases were invisible and silent. With no knowledge, you could suddenly lose your life or be disabled for life because of chemical weapons.

The number of casualties in World War I because of chemical weapons was small as a percentage of the total casualties. But it is interesting what happened. After World War I, the nations of the world that had been at each other's throats, that had battled each other, gathered a few years later. It is interesting to think what they banned

and didn't ban. They didn't ban aerial bombardment. They didn't ban machine guns. They didn't ban rockets. They didn't ban shells. They didn't ban artillery. But they did decide to ban chemical weapons. They were able to all agree, as combatants, that chemical weapons were unacceptable and should neither be manufactured nor used.

It can seem maybe a little bit illogical or even absurd: Why is it worse to be killed by a chemical weapon than a machine gun or by an artillery shell? I don't know what the logic is to it. All I can assume is that the experience of that day and moment had inspired some common spark of humanity in all of these cultures and combating nations, and they all agreed the use of chemical weapons should be banned heretofore on the Earth.

Nations agreed with that ban. The Soviet Union was on board. The United States was on board. So many nations were on board. Syria ultimately signed that accord in 1968. Even in the midst of horrific wars where humans have done horrific things to each other, since 1925 and the passage of the ban, the ban has stuck. The international community has kept that ember of humanity alive that says these weapons should not be used, and only two dictators until now have used these weapons--Adolph Hitler using these weapons against millions of Jews and others and Saddam Hussein using the weapons against Kurds, his own people, and then against Iranians in the Iraq-Iran war.

When we think about it, it is pretty amazing. With all the barbarity that has happened since 1925, this has generally stuck, with the exception of Adolph Hitler and Saddam Hussein, until now. The beneficiaries of this policy have been civilians, but they have also been American service men and women. The service men and women who fought in World War I were gassed from this country, but the Americans who fought in World War II, in Europe and North Africa and the Pacific, who fought in Korea, who fought in Vietnam, who fought in Afghanistan, who fought in Iraq, who fought in other minor military involvements have never had to worry about facing chemical weapons. No matter how bad the opponent was, American troops haven't had to worry about it, and the troops of other nations haven't had to worry about it either. This is a very important principle, and it is a positive thing for humanity that we reached this accord and we have honored it.

So what happens now if there isn't a consequence for Bashar al-Assad's escalating use of chemical weapons, to include chemical weapons against civilians.

What happens if we let go of the norm and we say: Look, that may have been OK for the 20th century, but we are tougher and more cynical now. There are not any more limits now, so we don't have to abide by any norms now. What I believe the lesson is--and I think the lessons of history will demonstrate that this will apply--is that an atrocity unpunished will engender future atrocities. We will see more atrocities in Syria against civilians and others. We will see more atrocities abroad. We will see atrocities, and we will have to face the likely consequence that our servicemembers, who have not had to face chemical weapons since 1925, will now have to prepare to face them on the battlefield.

If countries can use chemical weapons and there is no serious consequence, guess what else they can do. They can manufacture chemical weapons. Guess what else. They can sell chemical weapons and proliferate chemical weapons. It is not just a matter that the use of chemical weapons would be encouraged, but the manufacture and sale of chemical weapons by individuals or companies or countries that want to make money will proliferate.

This has a devastating potential effect on allies of the United States and the neighbors around Syria such as Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and Turkey. It would have a devastating impact on other allies, such as South Korea, that border nations that use chemical weapons. It could

encourage other nations that have nonchemical weapons of mass destruction, for example, nuclear weapons, to think that the world will not stand up, there is no consequence for their use so they can violate treaties, violate norms, and no one is willing to stand and oppose it.

That was the reason I voted last week in the Foreign Relations Committee for this limited authorization of military force. I was fully aware the debate on the floor might amend or change it, and I was open to that possibility. But I thought it was important

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to stand as a representative of Virginia and a representative of this country to say: The use of chemical weapons may suddenly be OK in the 21st century for Bashar al-Asad, it may suddenly be OK to Vladimir Putin and others, but it is not OK to the United States of America, and we are willing to stand and oppose them.

The limited military authorization that is on this floor, as the Presiding Officer knows, talks about action to punish, deter, and degrade the ability of the Syrian regime to use chemical weapons. The goal is to take the chemical weapons stockpile of that nation out of the battlefield equation. The civil war will continue. We don't have the power, as the United States, to dictate the outcome of that war. But chemical weapons should not be part of that war, and they should not be part of any war.

The authorization was limited. There will be no ground troops. It was limited in scope and duration, but make no mistake, the authorization was a clear statement of American resolve that there has to be a consequence for use of these weapons in violation of international norms that have been in place since 1925.

Finally, I want to talk about diplomacy and the urgent need that I know we all feel in this body, and as Americans, to pursue diplomatic alternatives--including some current alternatives on the table--that would be far preferable to military action. It is very important that we be creative. It is very important that we have direct talks with the perpetrators and enablers of these crimes, but also important to look to intermediaries and independent nations for diplomatic alternatives.

We have been trying to do so until recently and have been blocked in the United Nations. But the authorization for military force actually had that as its first caveat. The authorization said: Mr. President, if this passes, we authorize you to use military force, but before you do, you have to come back to Congress and stipulate that all diplomatic angles, options, and possibilities have been exhausted.

So on the committee, and with the wording of this authorization, we were very focused on the need to continue a diplomatic effort, and that is why it was so gratifying on Monday, on my way back to DC after a long week, to hear that Russia had come to the table with a proposal inspired by a discussion with administration figures. It is a proposal that the Syrian chemical weapons stockpile--one of the largest in the world--would be placed under international control.

Then a few hours later--and this was no coincidence--Syria, essentially Russia's client state, spoke up and said: We will very much entertain placing our chemical weapons under international control. Syria has even suggested, beyond that, they would finally sign on to the 1990s-era Chemical Weapons Convention. They are one of six nations in the world that refused to sign it. Syria would not even acknowledge they had chemical weapons until 2012--even though the world knew it.

Over the last 48 hours, we have seen diplomatic options emerge that are very serious and meaningful. In fact--and it is too early to tell--if we can have these discussions and find an accord where Syria will sign on to the convention and put these weapons under international control, we will not only have avoided a bad thing, such as military

action, which none of us want unless it is necessary, but we will have accomplished a good thing for Syrians and humanity by taking this massive chemical weapons stockpile off the battlefield and submitting it to international control and eventually destruction.

The offer that is on the table, and the action that has happened since Monday is very serious, very significant, and very encouraging, and it could be a game changer in this discussion. I said it is serious, but what we still need to determine is if it is sincere. It is serious and significant, but obviously what the administration needs to do in tandem with the U.N. is to determine whether it is sincere.

I will conclude by saying I think it is very important for Americans, for citizens, and for the Members of Congress to understand--we should make no mistake about this--that the diplomatic offer that is on the table was not on the table until America demonstrated it was prepared to stand for the proposition that chemical weapons cannot be used.

I have no doubt that had we not taken the action in Congress last week in the Foreign Relations Committee to show America is resolved to do something, if no one else in the world is resolved to do something, at least we would be resolved to do something, had we not taken that action, Russia would not have suddenly changed its position--they have been blocking action after action in the Security Council--and come forward with this serious recommendation. Had we not taken that action, and had they not been frightened of what America might do, Syria--which was willing to use with impunity these weapons against civilians--would not have come forward either.

So American resolve is important. American resolve is important to show the world that we value this norm and we will enforce it, even to the point of limited military action. But even more important, American resolve is important because it encourages other nations--even the perpetrators and enablers of the use of these weapons--to come forward and shoulder the responsibilities they have, or so we pray, in the days ahead.

What I ask of my colleagues and my countrymen is that because it has been our resolve that has produced a possibility for a huge diplomatic breakthrough and win, I ask we continue to be resolved, continue to show strength, continue to hold out the option that there will be a consequence for this international crime, that America will play a leading role in making sure there is a consequence, and as long as we stand strong with this resolve, we will maximize the chance that we will be able to obtain the diplomatic result we want.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. Baldwin). The minority whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, my dad was a pilot in the Army Air Corps in World War II. He served in the Eighth Air Force, the 303rd Bomb Group stationed in Molesworth, England. On his 26th bombing mission over Nazi Germany, he was shot down and captured as a prisoner of war where he served for the remainder of the war. So I learned at a very young age that when we start talking about matters of war and peace, we must take these very seriously.

I appreciate the fact that President Obama came to Capitol Hill yesterday and spoke to both the Democratic conference and the Republican conference. I further appreciate very much the fact that President Obama spoke to the American people last night. I actually wish he had done it a little earlier since the chemical weapons attacks occurred on the 21st of August. It was roughly 3 weeks after that that he finally spoke to the American people. I think it would have been better for him and better for the country if he had done it sooner and demonstrated a greater urgency, but I am glad he did it.

When a President asks the American people to support our U.S. military and the use of military force, he has a solemn obligation to

communicate to the American people how it will protect America's vital interests. He has an obligation to tell the American people why going to war is absolutely essential to U.S. national security. He has an obligation to lay out clear and realistic objectives; and finally, he has an obligation to explain how military intervention fits within America's broader foreign policy strategy.

I have used the word war advisedly because sometimes I think we get caught up in political correctness around here--talking about workplace violence at Fort Hood and overseas contingency operations.

As a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps who served 40 years told me last week when I asked for his advice on what the President was asking us to do, he said: Anytime you kill people in the name of the U.S. Government, it is an act of war.

So like others in this Chamber over the last few weeks, I have attended meetings with the President where I had the honor of being in his presence and listening to him in person on two occasions. I listened to other administration officials. Like all of us, I sat

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through hours of classified briefings with the Central Intelligence Agency, the Department of Defense, and the State Department.

I have listened intently as Senator Kerry described in what I thought at first was an inadvertent statement made as a result of fatigue. I can only imagine what he must have been going through. He has been shuttled back and forth around the world to try to resolve this issue. But he described this strike as unbelievably small. I was further surprised when I heard the White House press secretary say: No, it wasn't a gaffe; he didn't misspeak. I mean, we all misspeak from time to time, so I expected him to say: Well, he should have used other words or might have used other words. Then Senator Kerry himself--now Secretary Kerry--said: No, I didn't misspeak.

I was encouraged to hear the President address the Nation because I believe before we take our case overseas to American allies, we should first make the case here at home to the American people.

In making their case for a brief, limited attack against Syria, administration officials have repeatedly said U.S. military intervention would not seek to topple the Asad regime even though regime change has been the policy of the U.S. Government since at least August 2011. They said their military campaign would not seek to change the momentum in Syria's civil war, even though, as I mentioned a moment ago, our government's official policy is one of regime change, that Asad must go.

My view is a U.S. attack that allowed Asad to remain in power with one of the world's largest stockpiles of chemical weapons would not promote U.S. national security interests. Indeed, it is not hard to imagine how that kind of intervention could actually backfire and end up being a propaganda disaster.

Many of us are concerned about upholding America's credibility, particularly when it comes to matters such as this, and I share their concern. But it would help if before we launch a halfhearted, ineffectual attack which gives our enemies a major propaganda victory that we come up with a more coherent plan and strategy for accomplishing our public policy goals.

Murphy's law says what can go wrong will go wrong. Well, there is a Murphy's law of war too--perhaps many of them but one of them is no plan to go to war survives the first contact intact. In other words, we can plan to shoot the first bullet, but we can't control what happens after that.

In all likelihood, such an attack would hurt our credibility and reduce U.S. public support for future interventions. This is what I

mean: If we were to undertake a limited military attack against Asad in order to punish him for using chemical weapons--which is a horrific act on his part, a barbaric act on his part--but it left Asad in power, what is he going to tell the rest of the world? He is going to say: The world's greatest military force took a shot at me and I am still here. I am still in power. I won and America lost. That is how I can see this backfiring in a very serious way, undermining America's credibility--credibility we must keep intact, particularly as we look at larger, looming threats such as the Iranian aspiration for nuclear weapons.

I wish to be clear, though: I would be willing to support a military operation in Syria but only if our intervention met certain criteria. No. 1: If it directly addressed the nightmare scenario of Asad's use of chemical weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. It is not just his use of chemical weapons on his own people; it is the potential that those chemical weapons could get into the hands of Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations and harm either Americans or American interests around the world.

No. 2: I could support a resolution if it involved the use of decisive and overwhelming force, without self-imposed limitations, and without leaking to our enemies what our tactics are and what it is we would not do, and ruining one of the greatest tools in war, which is the element of surprise. Why in the world would we tell Asad what we are going to do--and Secretary Kerry said it would be a small attack--and why would we tell Asad what we won't do, thereby eliminating both the ambiguity of our position and the potential threat of even more serious and overwhelming military force?

No. 3: I would be willing to support an authorization if it were an integral part of a larger coherent Syria policy that clearly defined the political end state. I still remember General Petraeus, the head of Central Command covering Iraq and Afghanistan, talking about our policy in those countries. He said, The most important question, perhaps, when we go to war is how does this end. We need a clearly defined political end state that we are trying to achieve by what the President requested and we need an outline of a realistic path to get there.

No. 4: I believe it is important that we have a sizable international coalition of nations, each of which is contributing to the war effort.

This is an amazing reversal for the President since the time he was a Senator and a Presidential candidate. To say we are not going to the United Nations--and I understand why; because of China and Russia, their veto of any resolution out of the Security Council, we are not going to go to NATO. Indeed, the President seemed content, or at least resigned, to going it alone. And if it is true this redline is the international community's redline, then the international community needs to contribute to the effort to hold Asad accountable.

The problem is President Obama's requested authorization for the use of military force under these circumstances fails to meet each of those criteria. He has failed to make the case that a short, limited military campaign would promote our vital interests and our national security. He has failed to lay out clear and realistic objectives that could be obtained through the use of military force. And he has failed to offer a compelling description of how his proposed intervention would advance America's broader foreign policy strategy; indeed, how it would advance his own policy of regime change. Therefore, if we were asked to vote on an authorization under these circumstances, I would vote no.

I am under no illusion--none of us are--about the utter depravity of Bashar al-Asad. Over the last 2\1/2\ years his regime has committed unspeakable acts of rape, torture, and murder. The chemical weapons attacks, by the way, as described by Secretary Kerry's own testimony in the House of Representatives, included 11 earlier uses of chemical weapons, but they were smaller. Can we imagine the difficulty of trying to impose a redline when that redline is crossed 11 times before the

President finally decides to try to enforce it? But there is no question that the use of chemical weapons shows an appalling disregard for human life and a cruel desire to terrorize the Syrian population. I, as others, have consistently demanded that Russia stop arming Asad and stop defending him and blocking U.N. Security Council resolutions, and aiding and abetting his barbaric atrocities against his own people. I want to see a free democratic Syria as much as anyone else. But that does not mean I will vote to support a reckless, ill-advised military intervention that could jeopardize our most important national security interests.

There have been a lot of people who have opined on the President's request, some better informed than others. One opinion I found particularly convincing was that of retired Army MG Robert Scales who has written that the path to war chosen by the Obama administration ``violates every principle of war, including the element of surprise, achieving mass and having a clearly defined and obtainable objective.''

As I said, we know the latest chemical weapons attack occurred on August 21. Yet President Obama didn't address the Nation until 3 weeks later. The Syrians, of course, have now had weeks to prepare for any pending military intervention and no doubt have moved the chemical weapons to other locations and their military equipment to civilian population centers in order to protect them from any attack. With no element of surprise, it makes the potential for success of any military intervention much less and reveals there is no real coherent policy in this regard.

Consider what happened last Monday. Secretary of State Kerry made what he calls an off-the-cuff remark about the possibility of canceling a missile strike if Asad turned over all of his chemical weapons. In the same statement he

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said he wasn't sure that would work or that he would ever be serious about it, but he did say it. Russia, of course, immediately responded by offering to broker a transfer of Syria's WMD to international monitors.

After spending weeks trying to make the case for war, President Obama has asked that the vote in this Chamber be canceled and is apparently treating the Russian-Syrian proposal as a serious diplomatic breakthrough. I would caution all of us--the American people and all of our colleagues--to be skeptical, for good reason, at this lifeline Vladimir Putin has now thrown the administration. I would remind the President and our colleagues that Russia itself is not in full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, nor is it even in compliance with nuclear arms control obligations that are subject to an international treaty. The litany of Russian offenses is long, but I would remind President Obama that since he launched the so-called Russian reset, Moscow has vetoed U.N. resolutions on Syria, sent advanced weaponry to the Asad regime, stolen elections, stoked anti-Americanism, made threats over our possible deployment of missile defense systems; it has expelled USAID from Russia, pulled out of the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program; it has banned U.S. citizens from adopting Russian children, and offered asylum to NSA leaker Edward Snowden. In short, we have very little reason to believe Moscow is a reliable diplomatic partner. The Russians are part of the problem in Syria, not part of the solution. Let me say that clearly. The Russians are part of the problem in Syria; they are not credibly part of the solution.

Moreover, I am curious to learn how international monitors would adequately confirm the disposal of chemical weapons by a terrorist-

sponsoring dictatorship among a ferocious civil war. While this strike the President talked about might have been limited in his imagination, if you are Bashar al-Asad, this is total war, because he realizes the only way he will leave power is in a pine box. He knows that. This is total war. I asked the President yesterday: What happens if, in order to punish Asad, we intervene militarily and it doesn't work? In his fight for his survival and the survival of his regime, he uses them again in an act of desperation? The President said, We will hit him again. Well, clearly, what had become a limited strike could quickly spiral out of control into a full-blown engagement in Syria. I think the President's own words suggest that.

But, of course, the Asad regime is the same one that refuses to acknowledge the full extent of its chemical arsenal--and this is something we will be hearing more about. It has bioweapons capability. Bioweapons capability is actually a much greater threat to American interests than chemical weapons, which are more difficult to transport and much harder to handle. And this is the same dictatorship that was secretly working on a nuclear weapons program before the Israelis took care of it in 2007.

We have been told that however unfortunate President Obama's 'redline' comment might have been, upholding his threat is about maintaining American credibility. And I admit, American credibility in matters of war and peace and national security are very, very important. But America's credibility on the world stage is about more than just Presidential rhetoric. It is about defining clear objectives and establishing a coherent strategy for achieving them. In the case of Syria, President Obama has not offered a clear strategy or clearly laid out his objectives.

Given all that, I am not surprised that the American people do not support the President's call for the use of limited military force in Syria. Those are the calls I got in my office. As I went back to Texas, I kept hearing people--who I would think under almost any other circumstances would say: If America's national security interests are at stake, then we are behind the President, we are behind military intervention, but they simply saw an incoherent policy and objectives that were not clearly laid out to obtain the result the President himself said is our policy.

Well, the most recent experience we have had as a country with limited war has been Libya, and I have heard the President tout that as perhaps an example about how we can get in and get out. The 2011 military operation that deposed Muammar Qadhafi was supposed to be a showcase example of a limited operation in which America led from behind and still obtained its objectives without putting U.S. boots on the ground. Unfortunately, the administration had no real plan for what happened after Qadhafi fell.

We all know it was 1 year ago today in Benghazi when terrorists linked to Al Qaeda massacred four brave Americans, including U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens. Today Libya is spiraling into chaos and rapidly becoming a failed state. Earlier this month a leading British newspaper reported that ``Libya has almost entirely stopped producing oil as the government loses control of much of the country to militia fighters.'' All sorts of bad actors, including terrorist groups, are flooding into the security vacuum, and ``Libyans are increasingly at the mercy of militias which act outside the law.''

Before I conclude, I want to say a few words about America's Armed Forces and America's role in the world.

We all know and are extraordinarily proud of our men and women who wear the uniform of the U.S. military. No military in history has been more powerful. No military has ever been more courageous. No military has been more selfless and fought and bled and died to protect innocent people in far-flung places across the planet. No military has ever done

more to promote peace and prosperity around the world. I have every confidence that if called upon to act our men and women in uniform will do just that. They will perform their duties with the utmost skill, bravery, and professionalism. But we should never send them to war tying one hand behind their back and ask them to wage limited war against a dictator for whom, as I said earlier, this is total war. This is win or die. Military force is like a hammer, and you cannot thread the needle President Obama wants to thread with a hammer.

I would like to conclude by saying that this debate--which is important and serious and one the American people expect us to have--is not about isolationism versus internationalism. Believe me, I am no isolationist, and I fully support the global security role America has played since World War II, since my dad was a POW. A world without American military dominance would be, as Ronald Reagan noted, a much more dangerous place. I believe peace comes with American strength.

However, it will be harder to maintain our global military dominance if we waste precious resources, our credibility, and political capital on hasty, misguided, unbelievably small interventions.

Once again, I would be willing to support an authorization for a military strike against Syria if it met certain basic criteria I have laid out. But I cannot support an operation that is so poorly conceived, so foolishly telegraphed, and virtually guaranteed to fail.

I yield the floor.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Good afternoon, Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 25 minutes.

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

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Thank you very much, Madam President.

I rise to speak on the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and the decision that is before the Senate on how to respond to such inhumanity. I also come to the floor with the hope that the use of military force will not prove necessary and that the proposal to place Syria's chemical weapons program under United Nations control will, in fact, be successful.

Last night, in my view, the President delivered a strong, straightforward speech that directly outlined the current situation in Syria. He asked that a vote by the Congress to authorize military force against the Asad regime be delayed so that a strategy could be developed with Russia and the United Nations Security Council that would eliminate Syria's deadly chemical weapons program. I believe this is the appropriate path forward, and I appreciate very much the majority leader's holding off on bringing this resolution

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for a vote so that negotiations can continue. Here in the Senate, there are discussions going on about how to amend the resolution passed by the Foreign Relations Committee to provide time for diplomacy.

I would also like to take a minute to give Russia credit for bringing forward this plan for a negotiated solution to the conflict. I disagree with the Senator from Texas. As the Russian Ambassador described to me on Monday of this week, he said Russia is sincere, wants to see a United Nations resolution, and supports the Geneva II process which would accompany a negotiated settlement to Syria's civil war. Based on my conversation with Ambassador Kislyak, I believe Russia's goal is now, in fact, to eliminate these weapons, and I would point out that is also our goal.

So I very much hope that the path to settlement--although complicated, no doubt, but if well-intentioned by all participants, it can be accomplished, and I deeply believe that. If the United Nations

Security Council can agree on a resolution to put this proposal into practice, it would put the world's imprimatur on an important plan to safeguard and then to destroy Syria's chemical weapons program.

Russia's responsibility to get this done is enormous, and they must move with all deliberate speed. I think Russia and Syria must understand that the only way to forestall a U.S. strike on Syria is for there to be a good-faith agreement and process underway to put all of Syria's chemical weapons--including munitions, delivery systems, and chemicals themselves--under international control for eventual demolition.

Syria's chemical weapons program is maintained and stored across Syria in more than three dozen sites. There are indications that Syria currently has chemical weapons loaded and ready for immediate use in bombs, artillery, and rockets and already loaded on planes and helicopters. All of it needs to be inventoried, collected, and then destroyed as soon as possible if the effort is to succeed. This will be a large and complicated process, and the agreement may take some time to put in place. But if it can be done, we should take the time to get it done right. At the same time, we cannot allow there to be so much delay and hesitation, as has characterized some arms control efforts in the past.

It is clear to me that the United States is moving quickly already. Tomorrow Secretary Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will meet in Geneva to discuss the specifics of how to move forward.

I cannot stress enough the importance of this process. Not only is it a possible solution to the specter of future use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and a way to ensure that extremist elements of the opposition do not gain control of these weapons, but it also sets an important precedent for the United Nations to act to resolve conflict before there is large military confrontation.

But it should be clear by now that the Asad regime has repeatedly used chemical weapons. So I would like to speak as chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and lay out some of the unclassified intelligence that shows the regime was indeed behind this largest use of chemical weapons in more than two decades. The unclassified assessment is based on classified intelligence we have seen on the Intelligence Committee and it has been available to all Senators. So here is the case.

The intelligence community assesses today, with ``high confidence,'' that the Syrian regime used chemical weapons--specifically sarin--in the Damascus suburbs in the early morning of August 21. This assessment is supported by all 16 of our intelligence agencies as well as other countries, including the United Kingdom and France.

The Obama administration has publicly laid out its case at an unclassified level, and I have carefully reviewed the classified information that supports those findings.

First, there is intelligence indicating that the Asad regime--specifically its military and the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center, which manages its chemical weapons program--has used chemical weapons roughly a dozen times over the past year.

On June 13, 2 months before this latest attack, the administration stated that it had completed a review of all available intelligence and had concluded that the intelligence community had ``high confidence'' that the Asad regime used chemical weapons, ``including the nerve agent sarin, on a small scale against the opposition multiple times.'' This followed similar assessments by France, the United Kingdom, Israel, and Turkey earlier this year. In some of these cases the regime may have been testing its delivery vehicles or various amounts of chemical agents. Some were small-scale tactical uses against the opposition. Perhaps Asad was just trying to find out how the world would react to his use of chemical weapons.

It has been more than a year since top intelligence officials learned of Syrian preparations to use sarin in large quantities. Since then, at numerous other briefings and hearings, the Intelligence Committee has followed this issue closely. On September 11, 2012--exactly a year ago--while protests against our Embassy in Cairo were underway and the attack on our diplomatic facility in Benghazi was imminent, I was again briefed on the administration's plans should Asad conduct such an attack.

So the attack on August 21 in Damascus was not a first-time use, rather it was a major escalation in the regime's willingness to employ weapons long held as anathema by almost the entire world population.

Let me lay out the intelligence case that the Asad regime used chemical weapons on August 21. Much of this is described in a four-page August 30 unclassified document entitled ``U.S. Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013.''

I ask unanimous consent that the document be printed in the Record.

We know that 3 days before the attack of August 21, Syrian officials involved in the preparation and use of chemical weapons and associated with the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center were ``preparing chemical munitions'' in the Damascus suburb of Adra. That is according to the intelligence community.

The intelligence specifically relates to an area in Adra that the regime has used for mixing chemical weapons, including sarin. The Syrian chemical weapons personnel were operating and present there from August 18 to the early morning of August 21, and finished their work shortly before the attack began.

Some of the intelligence collected on the preparations for the attack is highly sensitive. So the details of the Syrian actions cannot be described publicly without jeopardizing our ability to collect this kind of intelligence in the future. But in numerous classified briefings over the past 2 weeks, Members of Congress have been provided with additional detail on the names of the officials involved and the stream of human signals and geospatial intelligence that indicates that regime was preparing to use chemical weapons. So we actually have names.

It is from the specificity of this intelligence reporting that the intelligence community has drawn its high level of confidence that the regime was behind the use of chemical weapons. The strike began in the early morning hours on Wednesday, August 21. It is beyond doubt that large amounts of artillery and rockets were launched from regime-controlled territory in Damascus and rained down on the opposition-controlled areas of the Damascus suburbs. There is satellite imagery actually showing this, as well as thousands of firsthand accounts that began showing up on social media sites at around 2:30 a.m.

The barrage continued for 5 days, though the use of chemical weapons appears to have been deliberately suspended by the regime after the first few hours. Since the attack, physical samples from the area have been analyzed. The intelligence community assesses with high confidence that ``laboratory analysis of physiological samples obtained from a number of individuals revealed exposure to Sarin.''

More than 100 videos were posted online showing the effects of the chemical weapons on hundreds of men, women and, most troubling, sleeping children who were dead or showing the

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signs of exposure to the nerve agent. At my request, the intelligence community compiled a representative sample of 13 videos which have been corroborated and verified. According to the intelligence community, ``At least 12 locations are portrayed in the publicly available videos,

and a sampling of those videos confirmed that some were shot at general times and locations described in the footage.'

These videos clearly show the suffering and death caused by these weapons. The intelligence committee has posted these videos on our Web site, www.intelligence.senate.gov. I would urge all Americans to look at this. They are absolutely horrendous and should shock the conscience of all humanity.

The videos show the physical manifestations of a nerve agent attack: foaming mouth, pinpointed and constricted pupils, convulsions, gasping for breath, all happening as the nervous system begins to shut down.

One video shows a lifeless toddler receiving emergency respiratory assistance. Another shows a young boy struggling to breathe, gasping while his eyes are swollen shut and covered in mucous. A third heinous video shows rows and rows of bodies lined up in an improvised morgue. Another shows a man foaming at the mouth and convulsing, both indications of sarin exposure. It goes on and on.

Last night, the President urged all Americans to watch these videos to see how hideous the use of these chemicals actually is. Seeing these images firsthand makes clear why chemical weapons have been banned and why Assad must be prevented from using them again.

What truly affected me was a video I saw of a little Syrian girl with long dark hair who was wearing pajamas. The little girl looked just like my daughter at that age--same hair, same pajamas, same innocence, except the little Syrian girl was lifeless. She had died from exposure to sarin, a chemical the world has essentially outlawed. For me, watching the videos shows the abhorrence of chemical weapons. It shows why we must do something. Fired into densely populated areas such as cities, they have an indiscriminate effect, killing everyone in their path and causing suffering and eventual death to others nearby.

We have evidence that the chemical attack was premeditated and planned as part of the regime's heinous tactics against the rebels. Specifically, there is intelligence that Syrian regime personnel were prepared with gas masks for its people in the area, so it could clear these areas in the Damascus suburbs that were attacked in order to wrest control from the opposition. Additional intelligence collected following the attacks includes communications from regime officials that confirms their knowledge that chemical weapons were used.

Let me repeat that. Additional intelligence following the attack includes communications from regime officials that confirms their knowledge that chemical weapons were used. The official unclassified intelligence assessment distributed by the administration states: ``We intercepted communications involving a senior official intimately familiar with the offensive who confirmed that chemical weapons were used by the regime on August 21 and was concerned with the U.N. inspectors obtaining evidence.'` On the afternoon of August 21, we have intelligence that Syrian chemical weapons personnel were directed to ``cease operations.'` This is specific evidence.

To sum up the intelligence case, I have no doubt the regime ordered the use of chemical weapons on August 21. I also have no doubt the use of these weapons by the military and under the guidance of Syria's chemical weapons team, Branch 450, operates under the command and control of the regime, under the ultimate leadership and responsibility of President Assad.

Let me move now from the intelligence case of Syria's use of sarin on August 21 to the question before the Senate of how to respond. As I said in the beginning, it would be my strong hope that the United States and Russia can come to an agreement with other U.N. Security Council members on a way to resolve this situation peacefully.

Not only is a peaceful solution preferred to the use of force, but if Syria's chemical weapons program, including all of its precursors, chemicals, equipment, delivery systems, and loaded bombs, can be put in

the custody of the United Nations for its eventual destruction, that would provide a much stronger protection against future use.

It also sets an important precedent for the future for the world to settle other disputes of this nature. I have urged the Obama administration to take all possible steps to make this proposal work. I appreciate the President's decision to ask us to delay any use-of-force resolution so diplomacy can be given a chance. However, the Senate may still face a resolution to authorize the use of force in the event that all diplomatic options fail. Many of my colleagues have noted that the threat of force has helped push forward the diplomatic option.

The Asad regime has clearly used chemical weapons to gas its own people. I believe it will most likely do so again, unless it is confronted with a major condemnation by the world. That now is beginning to happen.

The regime has escalated its attacks from small scale ones that killed 6 or 8 to 10 people with sarin to an attack that killed more than 1,000. We know the regime has munitions that could kill tens of thousands of Syrians in Aleppo or Homs. **If the world does not respond now, we bear the responsibility if a larger tragedy happens later.**

Of course, it is not only Syria who is looking at preparing and using weapons long banned by the international community. Iran is watching intently what the world will do in Syria and will apply the lessons it learns to its current development of nuclear weapons.

North Korea, which has refrained from using both the nuclear weapons it has and the chemical weapons stockpile that actually dwarfs that of Syria, may well use the Asad example to fire on South Korea. Remember, we have 28,000-plus troops right over the border of the DMZ, within a half hour.

More generally, countries around the world will see the United States as a paper tiger if it promises to take action but fails to do so. Former Secretary of Defense, Bob Gates, whom I have great respect for, who worked in both the Bush and Obama administrations, said exactly that when he came out in support on the resolution for use of force against Syria.

Gates said this:

I strongly urge the Congress, both Democrats and Republicans, to approve the President's request for authorization to use force. Whatever one's views on the current United States policy towards Syria, failure by Congress to approve the request would, in my view, have profoundly negative and dangerous consequences for the United States, not just in the Middle East, but around the world both now and in the future.

I strongly believe the major powers in the world have a responsibility to take action when a country not only slaughters 100,000 of its own citizens, makes millions homeless within Syria, and makes millions into refugees in Turkey and Jordan, but especially when it is willing to use weapons against them that have been banned as an affront to all humanity because they are outlawed by a treaty joined by 189 nations representing 98 percent of the world's population.

If the United Nations does not act in such cases, I believe it becomes irrelevant. If nothing is done to stop this use of chemical weapons, they will be used in future conflicts. I am confident of that.

American servicemen in World War I were gassed with their allied partners. In our briefings over the past week, the military has made clear to us that if we allow the prohibition on chemical weapons use to erode, our men and women in uniform may again suffer from these weapons on the battlefield.

Chemical weapons are not like conventional weapons. Consider for a

moment how sarin, for example, can kill so indiscriminately. The closer you are to the release, such as from a mortar or an artillery shell, the more certain you are to death. It spreads over a wide geographic area. It can shift from one neighborhood to another if the wind shifts.

During World War I, chemical weapons, primarily chlorine, phosgene, and mustard gas were used by both sides of the war. They caused an estimated 100,000 fatalities and 1.3 million injuries, 1,462 American soldiers were killed, and 72,807 were injured by chemical weapons, which represented one-

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third of all U.S. casualties during World War I.

Since World War I, not a single U.S. soldier has died in battle from exposure to chemical weapons. However, according to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, ``since World War I, chemical weapons have caused more than 1 million casualties globally.''

During World War II, Nazi Germany used carbon monoxide and pesticides such as Zyklon B in gas chambers during the Holocaust, killing an estimated 3 million people.

An additional document will be printed in the Record that details the history and uses of chemical weapons around the world since World War I.

These past uses of chemical weapons make clear that they should never be used again and that the entire world must stand up and take action if they are.

In Syria, the intentional use of chemical weapons on civilians, on men, women, and children gassed to death during the middle of the night while they were sleeping, is a travesty that reflects hatred and increasing desperation of the Asad regime. I also believe there are other chemical weapons that have been mixed and loaded into delivery vehicles with the potential to kill thousands more.

Think about that. If Asad can slaughter 100,000 of his own people without a second thought, what is he going to do next if we do nothing to hold him accountable? What is he going to do next if the United Nations does nothing? What is he going to do next if this effort to reach consensus on the Security Council doesn't work? He will use them again. I believe they are ready to go.

Why would the Asad regime load bombs with chemical weapons and not use them?

If the United States does nothing in the face of this atrocity, it sends such a signal of weakness to the rest of the world that we are, yes, a paper tiger. That is going to be the conclusion in Iran and in North Korea.

The answer is we cannot turn our backs. The use of chemical weapons is prohibited by international law and it must now be condemned by the world with action.

Albert Einstein said in a well-known quote: ``The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.''

For more than 90 years, our country has played the leading role in the world in prohibiting the atrocities of World War I and then World War II. We are the Nation that others look upon to stop repressive dictators and massive violations of human rights. We must act in Syria. We cannot withdraw into our own borders, do nothing, and let the slaughter continue.

I hope military force will not be needed, that we will allow the time for the United Nations and the parties on the Security Council to put an agreement together, and that the threat of force will be sufficient to change President Asad's behavior.

If these diplomatic efforts at the U.N. fail, I know we are going to

be back here on the floor to consider the authorization for use of military force, but I sincerely hope it won't be necessary.

When the Ambassador from Russia described Russia's intentions to me on Monday, he told me it was sincere. Now the ball is in Russia's court. Russia and the United States will need to come together, bring the other parties together, and make it possible for the United Nations to act so the United States won't have to.

I yield the floor.

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

U.S. Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013

The United States Government assesses with high confidence that the Syrian government carried out a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus suburbs on August 21, 2013. We further assess that the regime used a nerve agent in the attack. These all-source assessments are based on human, signals, and geospatial intelligence as well as a significant body of open source reporting. Our classified assessments have been shared with the U.S. Congress and key international partners. To protect sources and methods, we cannot publicly release all available intelligence--but what follows is an unclassified summary of the U.S. Intelligence Community's analysis of what took place.

Syrian Government Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21

A large body of independent sources indicates that a chemical weapons attack took place in the Damascus suburbs on August 21. In addition to U.S. intelligence information, there are accounts from international and Syrian medical personnel; videos; witness accounts; thousands of social media reports from at least 12 different locations in the Damascus area; journalist accounts; and reports from highly credible nongovernmental organizations.

A preliminary U.S. government assessment determined that 1,429 people were killed in the chemical weapons attack, including at least 426 children, though this assessment will certainly evolve as we obtain more information.

We assess with high confidence that the Syrian government carried out the chemical weapons attack against opposition elements in the Damascus suburbs on August 21. We assess that the scenario in which the opposition executed the attack on August 21 is highly unlikely. The body of information used to make this assessment includes intelligence pertaining to the regime's preparations for this attack and its means of delivery, multiple streams of intelligence about the attack itself and its effect, our post-attack observations, and the differences between the capabilities of the regime and the opposition. Our high confidence assessment is the strongest position that the U.S. Intelligence Community can take short of confirmation. We will continue to seek additional information to close gaps in our understanding of what took place.

Background

The Syrian regime maintains a stockpile of numerous chemical agents, including mustard, sarin, and VX and has thousands of munitions that can be used to deliver chemical warfare agents.

Syrian President Bashar al-Asad is the ultimate decision maker for the chemical weapons program and members of the program are carefully vetted to ensure security and loyalty. The Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC)-- which is subordinate to the Syrian Ministry of Defense-- manages Syria's chemical weapons program.

We assess with high confidence that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons on a small scale against the opposition multiple times in the last year, including in the Damascus suburbs. This assessment is based on multiple streams of information including reporting of Syrian officials planning and executing chemical weapons attacks and laboratory analysis of physiological samples obtained from a number of individuals, which revealed exposure to sarin. We assess that the opposition has not used chemical weapons.

The Syrian regime has the types of munitions that we assess were used to carry out the attack on August 21, and has the ability to strike simultaneously in multiple locations. We have seen no indication that the opposition has carried out a large-scale, coordinated rocket and artillery attack like the one that occurred on August 21.

We assess that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons over the last year primarily to gain the upper hand or break a stalemate in areas where it has struggled to seize and hold strategically valuable territory. In this regard, we continue to judge that the Syrian regime views chemical weapons as one of many tools in its arsenal, including air power and ballistic missiles, which they indiscriminately use against the opposition.

The Syrian regime has initiated an effort to rid the Damascus suburbs of opposition forces using the area as a base to stage attacks against regime targets in the capital. The regime has failed to clear dozens of Damascus neighborhoods of opposition elements, including neighborhoods targeted on August 21, despite employing nearly all of its conventional weapons systems. We assess that the regime's frustration with its inability to secure large portions of Damascus may have contributed to its decision to use chemical weapons on August 21.

Preparation

We have intelligence that leads us to assess that Syrian chemical weapons personnel--including personnel assessed to be associated with the SSRC--were preparing chemical munitions prior to the attack. In the three days prior to the attack, we collected streams of human, signals and geospatial intelligence that reveal regime activities that we assess were associated with preparations for a chemical weapons attack.

Syrian chemical weapons personnel were operating in the Damascus suburb of Adra from Sunday, August 18 until early in the morning on Wednesday, August 21 near an area that the regime uses to mix chemical weapons, including sarin. On August 21, a Syrian regime element prepared for a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus area, including through the

utilization of gas masks. Our intelligence sources in the Damascus area did not detect any indications in the days prior to the attack that opposition affiliates were planning to use chemical weapons.

The Attack

Multiple streams of intelligence indicate that the regime executed a rocket and artillery attack against the Damascus suburbs in the early hours of August 21. Satellite detections corroborate that attacks from a regime-controlled area struck neighborhoods

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where the chemical attacks reportedly occurred--including Kafr Batna, Jawbar, Ayn Tarma, Darayya, and Mu'addamiyah. This includes the detection of rocket launches from regime controlled territory early in the morning, approximately 90 minutes before the first report of a chemical attack appeared in social media. The lack of flight activity or missile launches also leads us to conclude that the regime used rockets in the attack.

Local social media reports of a chemical attack in the Damascus suburbs began at 2:30 a.m. local time on August 21. Within the next four hours there were thousands of social media reports on this attack from at least 12 different locations in the Damascus area. Multiple accounts described chemical-filled rockets impacting opposition-controlled areas.

Three hospitals in the Damascus area received approximately 3,600 patients displaying symptoms consistent with nerve agent exposure in less than three hours on the morning of August 21, according to a highly credible international humanitarian organization. The reported symptoms, and the epidemiological pattern of events--characterized by the massive influx of patients in a short period of time, the origin of the patients, and the contamination of medical and first aid workers--were consistent with mass exposure to a nerve agent. We also received reports from international and Syrian medical personnel on the ground.

We have identified one hundred videos attributed to the attack, many of which show large numbers of bodies exhibiting physical signs consistent with, but not unique to, nerve agent exposure. The reported symptoms of victims included unconsciousness, foaming from the nose and mouth, constricted pupils, rapid heartbeat, and difficulty breathing. Several of the videos show what appear to be numerous fatalities with no visible injuries, which is consistent with death from chemical weapons, and inconsistent with death from small-arms, high-explosive munitions or blister agents. At least 12 locations are portrayed in the publicly available videos, and a sampling of those videos confirmed that some were shot at the general times and locations described in the footage.

We assess the Syrian opposition does not have the capability to fabricate all of the videos, physical symptoms verified by medical personnel and NGOs, and other information associated with this chemical attack.

We have a body of information, including past Syrian practice, that leads us to conclude that regime officials

were witting of and directed the attack on August 21. We intercepted communications involving a senior official intimately familiar with the offensive who confirmed that chemical weapons were used by the regime on August 21 and was concerned with the U.N. inspectors obtaining evidence. On the afternoon of August 21, we have intelligence that Syrian chemical weapons personnel were directed to cease operations. At the same time, the regime intensified the artillery barrage targeting many of the neighborhoods where chemical attacks occurred. In the 24 hour period after the attack, we detected indications of artillery and rocket fire at a rate approximately four times higher than the ten preceding days. We continued to see indications of sustained shelling in the neighborhoods up until the morning of August 26.

To conclude, there is a substantial body of information that implicates the Syrian government's responsibility in the chemical weapons attack that took place on August 21. As indicated, there is additional intelligence that remains classified because of sources and methods concerns that is being provided to Congress and international partners.

Chemical Weapons Usage Since World War I

1,462 American soldiers were killed and 72,807 injured by chemical weapons in World War I, one-third of all U.S. casualties during the war. No Americans have died in battle from chemical weapons since World War I.

According to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, ``Since World War I, chemical weapons have caused more than one million casualties globally.''

1914-1918--During World War I, chemical weapons (primarily chlorine, phosgene, and mustard gas) were used by both sides and caused an estimated 100,000 fatalities and 1.3 million injuries.

During the war, Germany used 68,000 tons of gas, the French used 36,000 tons, and the British used 25,000.

April 1915--Germany used chlorine gas at the Battle of Ypres. This is the first significant use of chemical weapons in World War I.

September 1915--The British used chlorine gas against the Germans at the Battle of Loos.

February 1918--Germans used phosgene and chloropicrin artillery shells against American troops. This is the first major use of chemical weapons against U.S. forces.

June 1918--The United States employed a wide variety of chemical weapons against Axis forces using British and French artillery shells.

1918-1921--The Bolshevik army used chemical weapons to suppress at least three uprisings following the Bolshevik revolution.

1919--The British Air Force used Adamsite gas, a vomiting agent, against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War.

1921-1927--Spanish forces used mustard gas against Berber rebels during the Third Rif War in Morocco.

1936--Italy used mustard gas during its invasion of Ethiopia. No precise estimate of chemical weapon-specific casualties, but contemporary Soviet estimates stated 15,000 Ethiopian casualties from chemical weapons.

1937-1945--Japan used chemical weapons (sulfur mustard, chlorine, chloropicrin, phosgene, and lewisite) during its invasion of China. The Japanese were the only country to use chemical weapons during World War II and did not use them against Western forces. Estimated 10,000 Chinese fatalities and 80,000 casualties as a result of chemical weapons.

1939-1945--Nazi Germany used carbon monoxide and pesticides, such as Zyklon B (hydrocyanic acid), in gas chambers during the Holocaust. Estimated 3 million killed.

1941--Mobile vans were used following the German invasion of the Soviet Union to murder an unknown number of Jews, Roma, and mental patients using exhaust from the vans to gas victims. Vans were also used at the Chelmno concentration camp in Poland.

1942--Nazi Germany began using diesel gas chambers at the Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka camps in Poland.

Zyklon B was used to kill up to 6,000 Jews per day at Auschwitz. Zyklon B was also used at Stutthoff, Mauthausen, Sachsenhausen, and Ravensbrueck concentration camps.

1963-1967--Egypt used phosgene and mustard gas against Yemeni royalist forces during the North Yemen Civil War between royalists and republicans. Egypt denied their use, but the Red Cross affirmed their use after forensic investigation.

1975-1982--Las and Vietnamese forces used chemical weapons against Hmong rebels. At least 6,504 killed.

1978-1982--Vietnamese forces used chemical weapons against Kampuchean troops and Khmer villages. At least 1,014 fatalities.

1979-1992--The United States alleged that the Soviet Union used mustard gas and other chemical weapons against mujahidin rebels in Afghanistan. At least 3,000 fatalities.

1980-1988--During the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq employed mustard gas and Tabun nerve agent. Iran retaliated with mustard, phosgene, and hydrogen cyanide gas. Estimated 1 million chemical weapons casualties.

1987--Libya allegedly used Iranian-supplied mustard gas against Chadian forces. However, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons did not find the allegations sufficiently persuasive to send investigators.

1988--Iraq used hydrogen cyanide and mustard gas against the Kurdish village of Halabja. Estimated 5,000 casualties.

1994--Aum Shinrikyo, a Japanese terrorist group, released sarin gas in Matsumoto, Japan. 8 fatalities and 200 injuries.

1995--Aum Shinrikyo released sarin gas in the Tokyo subway system. 12 fatalities and 5,000 estimated casualties.

Sources: Monterey Institute of International Studies, The Nonproliferation Review, declassified CIA report, Encyclopedia Britannica, The Washington Post, Reuters, New York Times, NPR.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Congressional Record House Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/9/10/house-section/article/H5441-3>

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OPPOSE MILITARY ACTION IN SYRIA

(Mr. MARCHANT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. MARCHANT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge the President and my colleagues to oppose any U.S. military action in Syria. Based on the evidence given to Congress, I have serious reservations about authorizing the use of military force in another Middle Eastern country. The President has not convinced me that we have vital national security interests at stake in Syria or a clear military objective. There are far too many unanswered questions and unclear objectives. My constituents in the 24th District of Texas are deeply skeptical about the value of military intervention in Syria. I fully agree with their concerns. On behalf of my constituents and many concerned Americans, I respectfully urge my colleagues to weigh the evidence fully and to be realistic about what can be achieved in military intervention. Let us vote for what's best for the United States. Keep the U.S. military out of Syria.

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Congressional Record House Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/9/10/house-section/article/H5441-4>

THE ALTERNATIVE PLAN IN SYRIA

(Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the Obama administration for its willingness to consider a new alternative proposal for dealing with Syria. The proposal is to hand over all--and I stress all--of Syria's chemical weapons under the oversight of the international community and to safely and verifiably destroy them. This could actually remove those weapons from the battlefield and peacefully prevent the further use of them against the people of Syria or her neighbors. This idea has gained support from U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, as well as Russia and France.

Mr. Speaker, this proposal needs to be vigorously pursued. The Syrian regime's attack against its own people using poisonous gas is morally reprehensible. If this plan is successful, it could produce an outcome that everyone desires: preventing the Assad regime from using chemical weapons.

Congressional Record House Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/9/10/house-section/article/h5437-5>

[Pages H5437-H5438]

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THE WAR ON SYRIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. McClintock) for 5 minutes.

Mr. McCLINTOCK. Madam Speaker, Russia's diplomatic intervention in the Syrian crisis is indeed welcome news. But whether it is real or illusory, the President needs to step back from the dangerous precipice that he has brought us to.

Certainly, he's made his case for war with Syria very clearly, that the United States must punish the use of chemical weapons, and if we don't, they're more likely to be used again. He assures us that the strike will be limited and that it will aid moderates fighting the regime. He warns that American credibility is at stake. The case is quite clear: **it is simply not convincing.**

It's possible that an attack on Syria will convince Assad not to use chemical weapons in the future. But it is just as likely to convince him that, being in for a penny, he might as well be in for a pound and unleash his entire chemical arsenal.

It is just as likely that an American strike on Syria will produce a retaliatory strike, possibly by Hezbollah against Israel, requiring a retaliatory strike by Israel, possibly on Iran, in a catastrophic chain reaction.

We don't know where it will lead, but we can be sure that the morning after the attack we would confront a most uncomfortable irony. In retaliation for Assad killing Syrian civilians with chemical weapons, the United States will have killed Syrian civilians with

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conventional weapons, for civilian casualties are an unavoidable tragedy of war.

Well, who would be our new allies in this war?

They'd be the Islamic forces that are responsible for their own litany of atrocities, including the massacre of Syrian Christians, the beheading of political opponents, summary executions of war prisoners and acts of barbarity too depraved to be discussed in this forum. We would be aiding and abetting those forces.

We're told that al Qaeda's not more than a fourth of our new coalition and that the rest are moderates. Well, we were told the same thing about Libya. We were told the same thing about the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

The problem with moderates in the Middle East is that there aren't very many of them, and they're quickly overwhelmed in any coalition they attempt.

Nor can such an attack be limited in duration or scope. The fact is, once you have attacked another country, you are at war with that country and its allies, whatever you wish to call it, and whatever you later decide to do.

And wars have a very nasty way of taking turns that no one can predict or control. World War I began with a series of obscure incidents that quickly escalated into world war. And the Middle East today is a veritable powder keg compared to the antebellum Europe of a

century ago.

Finally, we're told American credibility is on the line. Well, chemical weapons are barbaric, but this isn't the first time they've been used in modern times. They were used previously in Syria, in the Yemeni civil war, by Iraq against Iran, by the Vietnamese against the Cambodians, by Libya against Chad.

The only unique thing about this incident is that it is the first time an American President has declared their use to be a "red line." Our credibility was harmed by a foolish and reckless statement by the President. Let us not further damage it with a foolish and reckless act by Congress.

Wars are not something to be taken lightly. From the podium right behind me, General MacArthur warned that, "In war there is no substitute for victory."

If you're going to start a war, you'd better be prepared to put the entire resources of the country behind it, to endure every setback along the way, to utterly annihilate every vestige of the enemy, and to install, by force, a government of our design and choosing, and to maintain that government until all opposition is ceased. If you are not willing to do that, then you have no business firing the first shot.

More than a decade of irresolute and aimless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan should have taught us this lesson: that victory, and not stalemate, must be the objective of any war. Yet, this would be a war whose avowed objective is stalemate. That is self-defeating. It is immoral.

The President has already made his case very clearly, and he is very clearly wrong.

Congressional Record House Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/9/10/house-section/article/H5438-2>

[Pages H5438-H5439]

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THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE PRESIDENT BEATS THE DRUMS FOR WAR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Poe) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Madam Speaker, the drums of war are being beaten by the President who, ironically, won the Nobel Peace Prize. The "Peace President" wants to fire missiles into Syria because tyrant Assad is violating the rules of war by allegedly using chemical weapons. The President's goal is not to remove Assad, not to destroy the chemical weapons, but to send Assad a message.

To be clear, there is no imminent national security threat or interest for the United States by us starting this war. And make no mistake, shooting rockets into another country is an act of war.

War has consequences. What if the outlaw Assad chooses then to use chemical weapons again or chooses to shoot back? He could retaliate against the United States, one of our embassies, the Navy that fired the rockets, or other U.S. military installations, or even specific troops, or retaliate against his neighbor, Turkey, or Israel, using our aggression as an excuse. In any of these situations, this limited war escalates with more U.S. response, intervention, and involvement.

Now, who are the players in this war that is taking place already? On one side you have Syria, tyrant Assad, with the aid of Russia, with the aid of Iran that news reports say has 10,000 Iranian troops in Syria, and Hezbollah. Hezbollah, as you remember, Madam Speaker, is a terrorist group.

Then, on the other side, you have the Free Syrian Army. You have patriots. You have mercenaries, paid soldiers from other countries. You have criminals that have come in to just pillage the land and use this as an opportunity. You also have al Nusra, an al Qaeda affiliate. You also have al Qaeda from Iraq. Now, last time I recall, the United States is already at war with al Qaeda. They are the enemy of the United States.

{time} 1015

And it looks like now you've got the terrorist group Hezbollah on one side and the terrorist group al Qaeda on the other side. And we want to get involved in this civil religious war to send a message not to use chemical weapons?

Of course, you not only just have these players, but you've got Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar lined up on the side of the Free Syrian Army. Turkey is a next-door neighbor to Syria. A year ago, a Turkish F-4 built by the United States was flying along the Syrian border, and it was shot down. We don't know who shot it down.

Meanwhile, the United States already has, along with its NATO parties, patriot batteries on the Syrian border facing Syria that are in Turkey. The Dutch, the Germans, and the Americans have manned those batteries. Why? To make sure that our NATO ally is protected from incoming rockets. If we escalate this regional conflict in one country, it may escalate to other regions, like Turkey. Then we've got real issues because Turkey is a NATO ally. We are obligated to help them if they get into a war with Syria.

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And then about the terrorists. As I mentioned, they are really on both sides. And we hear from the administration, with all due respect, that the minority of fighters on the rebel side are al Qaeda. I respectfully disagree with the Secretary of State. What seems to be happening is the Free Syrian Army is going through Syria liberating Syrians, and al Qaeda is in the background, coming in and occupying the territory and imposing strict Islamic sharia law. We can see this play out. If the rebels eventually are successful, then we may have a second civil war between the Free Syrian Army and al Qaeda.

All of that may be down the road. And why would the United States want to get involved in this situation?

So today, Madam Speaker, I have filed a resolution stating that no U.S. funds will be used for this war with Syria. This religious civil war is not our war. So no money for the 'Peace President's' war. And if he starts a war with Syria, I suggest the President return the Nobel Peace Prize. If he really wants to send a message, he should follow Samuel Goldwyn's advice: 'try Western Union.'

And that's just the way it is.

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THE SYRIAN CRISIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. Smith of Missouri). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. King) for 30 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the privilege to be recognized to address you here on the floor of the House of Representatives. And I appreciate the presentation that's come forward from my colleagues from Pennsylvania and Nebraska with regard to the Syrian situation and the international issue that's in front of all of us.

I don't always find myself in complete agreement with the wisdom that emerges here from this microphone; but, generally speaking, that's where I stand this evening on the Syrian issue.

And I think that it would be of interest to the gentleman from Pennsylvania that I and a couple of other Members, yesterday morning, perhaps the day before yesterday, in the morning--my days blend together--we sat down with Syrian Christians who were expatriates who had escaped from Syria and are very interested in the cause there. And I understand that the gentleman from Pennsylvania has a good number of constituents that would be representative of the same cause.

It was a very interesting conversation that we had at breakfast day before yesterday at Brussels. And the concern that they expressed essentially came back to it's hard to choose a good side in Syria, in that Assad, of course, he's an evil dictator. We've known that for a long time.

We have the Free Syrian Army that emerged as a force for good that seems to now be taken over by forces that are not so good. So it appears to them, and it appears to me, that whether it would be the Assad forces that prevail in the end, or whether it would be the forces that are taking over the Free Syrian Army, it's not going to be good for Christians in Syria.

And I'm concerned that, for us to find a way forward, the best hope for Christians in Syria is likely to be the moderate groups that began the Free Syrian Army in the first place, those groups that want to have a secular Syria that respects everyone's right to freedom of religion and freedom to associate, and respects the rights of humanity that we all defend here.

So I reiterate the statements that the gentleman from Pennsylvania has made. And we stand, certainly, with the Christians in Syria, but also the secular forces in Syria, however they've been marginalized by the forces of the Muslim Brotherhood, the forces that are Assad, and the anti-freedom forces that seem to want to take Syria over and use it for their own evil aims.

So having traveled, Mr. Speaker, over into that part of the world, not into Syria specifically, but into the Middle East--and we just came back last night from a trip that was to Tokyo. We spent several days there dealing with the top leadership in Japan, including Prime Minister Abe,

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and then from there to the United Arab Emirates, where we had a meeting set up with a number of officials.

The first meeting was at 11:00 in the morning. We were scheduled to meet with the Crown Prince about 1 or 1:30 in the afternoon. Instead, he gave us a very pleasant surprise and arrived at our 11:00 meeting. And we were able to have a long, engaging conversation, doors closed, which gave us a very good perspective on the Middle East and on Syria.

So I appreciate my colleagues' focus and interest on this, and mine is also focused the same.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. KING of Iowa. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I want to thank the gentleman from Iowa for his kind comments about his experiences with various folks who are in Syria.

I just wanted to say one other thing too. This past Sunday I attended a church service at my own church that has a large Syrian community; and a woman made a presentation at the church who represents the Presbyterian Church of Lebanon and Syria, and spoke in my church in very moderate, secular tones about why she thought it was not in anyone's interest for the United States to intervene at this point in the Syrian civil war.

{time} 1900

It was a very compelling statement. Then, after that church service, I stopped by another at St. George Antioch Orthodox Church after their services had ended and met with some of the parishioners whose family members are over there, in many cases, and some told me their family members had been killed. And there was a lot of crying and wailing and deep sadness. It's quite emotional for them, as you can well imagine. They feel so strongly that this intervention is only going to make the plight of the Christians that much more dire and difficult in Syria and that it could lead to their ultimate extermination in many cases. This was their term, not mine.

That's how serious this is to them in a country, that I believe, the last I checked, is somewhere between 15 to 20 percent Christian, although the numbers are diminishing, given this turmoil. We've seen that in many Middle Eastern countries. The Christian communities are just not able to endure in this type of environment.

So I appreciate your interest in this issue, Mr. King, and thank you for allowing me to speak. Keep up the good work.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Dent).

I would add that there was some dialogue in that breakfast meeting with the Syrian Christians that took place the day before yesterday, in the morning, about how there was a concerted effort to push and eradicate Christians out of all the areas in the Middle East. That seems to be something that they have embarked upon. And I know that there's a long history of it of over a thousand years. But it's been accelerated here, I believe, Mr. Speaker, within the last few years. In fact, the date of this meeting goes back to 1982 when that began.

We're hearing similar narratives about Christians that are being persecuted by both sides in this. The population percentage in Syria of around 15 to 20 percent fits with what I'm told. I added up the data that they gave me from different sections of the Syrian Christians and my number came to about 2.6 million Syrian Christians.

There are also about 2 million Syrians that are refugees that have left Syria and that are now housed in refugee camps in the surrounding country. There's about 2 million refugees. There are about 2.6 million Christians in or around Syria altogether. I see that as almost the equivalent of the population of the State of Iowa.

So we've watched as Assad has persecuted his people--the people that were not his. Anybody but his political allies were persecuted by him over the years. I remember that he was identified by the Bush

administration as, I believe, an evildoer. I remember some communications being opened up with Bashar al-Assad that took place sometime in 2007 or 2008. I remember some pictures that came back from there. This individual now has been identified as head of the regime that has launched chemical weapons against his own people.

The evidence that we see doesn't necessarily confirm that it would be Assad himself that gave the order, but it does appear that there were chemical attacks. It also appears that there were conventional artillery assaults into the same neighborhood that brought about many casualties. To sort out whether they were chemical casualties or whether they were kinetic action casualties is a question that's not been answered yet.

I'm hesitant to get very far into this from a factual standpoint because of what's classified and what isn't, Mr. Speaker. I want to make this point. It doesn't get brought out in this Congress enough, if at all. The forces are lined up on the side of either Sunni or Shia. Of course, the Alawite sect of the Shia is the sect that is Assad himself. And he's supported by them. When you look at his allies--Hezbollah and Iran--they are Shia. If you look at his enemies, generally speaking, his enemies are al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood. There's a list of those Sunni interests that have poured into Syria.

At the beginning, this was a conflict that was formed by the Free Syrian Army that wanted to unseat Assad and establish a government that would be of, by, and for the people of Syria and consistent with American ideals and American principles of a government that's empowered by the will of the people instead of by the will of a dictator or a king.

So as the Free Syrian Army began, their forces were growing and they were strong and they were taking over territory. Since that period of time, we've watched as the sometimes-labeled "rebel effect" has diminished. And it's almost been in direct proportion to the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, al Qaeda, and other radical interests stepping in to take over and pick up some of the resources that are being used to support the opposition to Assad.

As I've watched this and from what I know and from the information that's come to me, continually the Free Syrian Army is more representative of the Muslim Brotherhood than it is of the free Syrian people. And not by a majority of the population of the army itself, but by the leadership, by who commands the resources, by who's being trained. This is now ever more clear that there's not a side that's easy to get on in this conflict and be confident that the forces are the forces of good. In other words, to identify the good guys has gotten ever more difficult month by month. It's more difficult today than it was a month ago or 2 or 3 or 4 or 6 months ago.

But it doesn't mean that there aren't good influences, that there aren't good cores of people that we should be identifying with and that we should be strengthening and empowering. But from my view, anybody that supports al Qaeda or is of al Qaeda is our enemy. Anybody that is Muslim Brotherhood or supports Muslim Brotherhood turns out to be our enemy. The difference between the Muslim Brotherhood and al Qaeda is they both have the same military wing. The Muslim Brotherhood has got a lot broader political approach to this. But in the end, they're looking to establish the Islamic caliphate everywhere in the world they can and establish sharia law everywhere in the world they can. And they don't view individual rights, human rights, or this God-given liberty and freedom here that our Founding Fathers claimed for us here over 200 years ago. They don't have respect for that. They reject it. And their approach is not compatible with human rights.

So we see the sectarian interests in Syria taking over the secular initiatives in Syria. I believe that there's an ability--if we can identify the good guys--to empower them, to train them, to fund them,

to supply them. But there's a way to bring this around and bring it to a good conclusion. But the people that need to be empowered in Syria are a long way from power. The people that don't need to be in power, whether it's the Muslim Brotherhood side of this and the Sunni radical Islamists or whether it be the Shia interests and Assad, they are competing with each other now for dominance. They fought each other for centuries as well.

There's no good result that can come easy in Syria. There is a good result that could come over a long period of time if our administration identified

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the people that we should be allying ourselves with and if they could emerge as the strong force. But while that's going on, we've been offered something from Putin and the Russians that I don't think anyone expected, a little more than 24 hours ago, and that is a way to avoid a military conflict in engaging U.S. forces in Syria.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that the mail that I'm getting and the phone calls that I'm getting are almost universally in opposition to going into any kind of military action whatsoever in Syria. Almost universal. All of my calls today were against going into Syria. **Almost every call the last week were against going into Syria.**

It's not that I make decisions exclusively off of constituent input or American communications input. I have an obligation and I owe my constituents and I owe Iowans and the people in this country my best effort and my best judgment. And that includes the input that comes from them, weighed more heavily than if it were not directly from my constituents. And I owe them my best effort and best judgment--and that is to go out and gather information. I have probably the best access to the broadest amount of information, including myself, among my constituents.

So I owe them my best effort. Part of that is to go and see with my own eyes and get into those parts of the world so that I can be fully informed, because this Congress is being called upon to make decisions that redirect the destiny of the United States of America. We should not do that in an uninformed way. We should not do it in a willfully ignorant way.

There are many things going on in the world that you cannot learn by listening to just briefings here or reading the paper. We should know from long history that you've got to drill into these things. You've got to look the right people in the eye and you've got to verify the information that they give you. I've done that. I've done that over the last week. I kept my powder dry on Syria throughout that period of time because I wanted to gather all the information that I could.

I didn't want to take a public position until I had seen as much as I can with my own eyes and hear as much as I can with my own ears. And even though we've done a trip into Cairo and the United Arab Emirates and the Middle East and we had briefings in countries beyond that and briefings from our State Department, we met with, as I said, Syrian Christians and we also met with refugees from Libya. We met with Special Forces interests and different perspectives on the Middle East entirely and different perspectives on the Syrian operation.

You put that altogether, from the State Department's position on, I came back with stacks of notes on it, Mr. Speaker. But I didn't want to speak on my Syrian position until such time as I had sat through the classified briefing that I knew over a week ago was scheduled for five o'clock yesterday. And that went on from five o'clock until about a quarter to seven last night.

That briefing was useful. The people that were there to brief us were

Susan Rice and Director Clapper and Secretary Kerry. We also had Secretary of Defense Hagel and General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Five people of the highest level you could ask for assured the President of the United States. He gave us a briefing with the data that they have and what they know. And they told us what was classified and what wasn't. They told us the conclusions they had drawn and some method about how they arrived at those conclusions.

But my independent assessment doesn't agree with the course of action that seems to be the direction from the President of the United States. It doesn't mean that I disagree with the data that they have, but the conclusion and how to move forward, I do disagree with. And I have taken a position today that if there were a vote on the floor today to authorize military force in Syria, I would not support that. Mr. Speaker, I would vote 'no.'

I want to make it clear that I believe the President has constitutional authority to order action in Syria or anywhere else. The President of the United States has to have that authority to order our military into action in an instant. Our Continental Congress was not very functional when it came to fighting a war by consensus. When they finally got through the Revolutionary War and put a country together and built a Constitution that could be ratified by the majority of the States--the 13 original colonies--they concluded that we needed to have a President of the United States who was also the Commander in Chief of the United States military who was in full control of the military. And subsequent to that, there was a piece of legislation passed within the 20th century that was the War Powers Act that was designed to restrain the activities of the Commander in Chief, the President of the United States.

Those two conditions were, one, the constitutional authority of the Commander in Chief to order our military into battle in an instant without consulting Congress. And the other, the War Powers Act, requires the President to come back after a period of time and consult with Congress. Those two, the Constitution and the War Powers Act, are compatible as long as they are respected by the Congress and by the President of the United States.

Anytime we're engaged in a long military engagement, I think the President should come consult with Congress. If it's a short operation and it's over before it can be consulted, that's consistent with the Constitution.

I would point out when President Reagan ordered our military into Grenada, that was an operation that took place quickly. He came before the American people and let us know after it was launched that he had ordered military action in Grenada. It was a successful operation, and we pulled out of there when the objective was achieved. That was Ronald Reagan.

When George Herbert Walker Bush--Bush 41--ordered our military into action in Panama to put an end to dictator and drug smuggler Noriega, that order was issued and our military took to the field. And as that operation was unfolding, then we found out about the order of our Commander in Chief.

This operation that's proposed in Syria is an operation that the President of the United States has the authority to order. He has the constitutional authority to do so. And if he had identified targets in Syria, and was determined that was the right course for America, the President should have then issued the order to engage our military in the fashion that his best judgment said he should.

{time} 1915

But what has happened instead is there has been a vacillation that

has taken place. He has sought to sell this to the American people while the message and the warning is going out to Assad. The red line that was drawn in the sand back during the Presidential campaign, it appears that the administration thinks that line has been crossed multiple times. And if you cross a red line in the sand enough times, it gets pretty blurry after awhile. Now they've decided that August 21 was the bright red line that was crossed by Assad. And here we are on the eve of the anniversary of the Benghazi attack--tomorrow is September 11--and on the anniversary of course of the September 11, 2001, attack; now we're negotiating with Congress to get support to go into military action in Syria.

My position, Mr. Speaker, is if the President thought it was a good idea, in a very limited way, as Secretary of State Kerry said, he should have done that. He should have issued the order, gotten it over with. If they're right and it's a very narrow operation, he could have pulled back and we would be done by now. But he watched as David Cameron and the United Kingdom took the issue before the British Parliament. The British Parliament voted down the initiative to strike Syria over the chemical weapons, and that put the brakes on the United Kingdom supporting us or any other entity in an operation in Syria. I think when the President saw that, maybe he concluded, Well, I'll ask Congress. If Congress says no, then I'll have this responsibility, this cup taken from him, so to speak--the one that he asked for when he put out the red line statement during the campaign in a debate with Mitt Romney.

So we're now in this situation where we've had a protracted national and

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global debate. And each stop around the world where we have gone into--into Tokyo, into the UAE, into Cairo, into Brussels--and met with multiple entities along the way, Syria is the discussion matter. But they look to the United States to lead.

Some of the countries don't think it's a very good idea to go in there, but they say they will support us anyway because they want America to succeed. They understand that if we're not strong in the world, if we don't lead in the world, then this becomes a very precarious place.

I had it expressed to me a number of times: We don't think it's a very good idea, but if you do this, we'll support you; or, We think it's a bad idea; we have to support you anyway. But I didn't find anybody that said that they were really happy about the idea that America might strike someplace inside Syria to send a message to Assad. Some said don't pave the road to Damascus for the Muslim Brotherhood, that the devil we know may not be as bad as the devil we don't know. And we're starting to learn that.

So as this has unfolded--and I heard the gentleman from Pennsylvania, I believe it was, mention NATO and a NATO operation. We aren't going to have the support of NATO in an operation in Syria. NATO operates off of a consensus. The 28 nations or so that are NATO now have a lot of trouble getting to a consensus. If some of those countries decide they don't want to participate, they will just simply not commit their forces. In the end, it comes down to what will the U.S. do, what won't the U.S. do.

We're not going to have the support of the United Nations. There has already been that effort to bring it before the United Nations, and we've got opposition from Russia and opposition from China. Now, maybe they would reconsider. Maybe China would reconsider; maybe Russia would reconsider. But the United Nations is not going to be there behind us, Mr. Speaker. NATO is not going to be there behind us. We will have

perhaps a coalition--not of the willing, but a coalition of the unwilling, those unwilling to allow the United States to, let's say, be embarrassed by this policy.

So the best course forward appears to be the lifeline that was tossed to us within the last 24 hours by Putin from Russia. He said, Let's take you up on your offer, Secretary Kerry, and see if we can gather up these chemical weapons and eradicate them from Syria. If doing so will prevent a military strike, then let's give it a go. That's a British expression, by the way, Mr. Speaker, ``give it a go.''

Well, I'm for giving it a go. I think that is the best alternative we have. I think the military strike is a mistake because it runs the risk of paving the road to Damascus for Muslim Brotherhood and other radical Islamist entities that are part of that constellation that have been systematically marginalizing the true free Syrian Army and empowering themselves, and some of them with resources that we would see as sourced back to the U.S. taxpayers.

Well, the best course forward now is to work with the Russians and see if we can get the chemical weapons gathered together. I would want Americans involved in any kind of a mission to gather those chemical weapons. I think the United Nations showed an ability to go into Iraq before 2003 and do the nuclear inspection that was there. I was uneasy with their conclusions--in fact, I didn't agree with their conclusions, but they're the force on the planet that has an opportunity to have the global credibility. If they get to that point where they say we've got all these weapons picked up, or they will qualify their answer, that's the kind of thing that should be going on, Mr. Speaker. But in any case, any kind of inspection team, any kind of chemical weapon collection team, under the auspices perhaps of the United Nations so that it isn't directly under, say, Russia or the United States, but with Americans there on the ground to verify the actions that are taking place and give us a sense of credibility and confidence.

Mr. Speaker, I point out that it won't work to go there and just get the job done to eradicate the chemical weapons. We must do so in a way that has credibility so that especially the American people will accept a conclusion and we can perhaps move on. But picking up chemical weapons and gathering up that entire inventory, which is tons and tons of that inventory, if it's done so in a precision way, perhaps doesn't change the balance of the regime versus the forces for good and those evil forces that align themselves with the forces for good, perhaps doesn't change that balance, or changes it in a more minimal way than a military strike would, and it would send the message that we will put an end to the abuse of chemical weapons.

It is also curious to me, Mr. Speaker, that this level of concern and outrage didn't seem to exist when chemical weapons were being used between Iraq and Iran during the Iraq and Iran war in the eighties. It doesn't mean it's all right. I think it's a good position to take against the abuse and the use of chemical weapons, but the red line itself, as far as a reason for America to put ourselves into a military conflict in a nation that we don't have much strategic interest in is, I think, a mistake and I would oppose that. We should remember, again, who are the forces there, the messages they send to the world.

What have we seen happen in the Arab Spring? An Arab Spring that has emerged now--we are a couple years into that. It looks to me like the forces that have emerged on top have invariably been the Muslim Brotherhood. So it isn't always good to see a change within a regime or administration.

We saw President Carter support the return of the Shah in Iran and support ousting the current power, the power that was in Iran and put the Shah in, thinking that there would be a representation that was a religious movement--excuse me, the opposition to the Shah in Iran. In

any case, the Ayatollah was viewed by President Carter as being a religious movement that was a voice for the people. What we ended up with the Ayatollah instead of the Shah was the beginnings of radical Islam within Iran, and the flow that came from 1979 until today might have been different had we taken a different position in Iran. Where we had friends in Iran, now we have enemies in Iran. As we have developed friends in Iraq, we are watching that friendship diminish. As we developed the foundational support in Afghanistan, we are watching that diminish.

As we see, we have strong friends and a military alliance with Egypt. We supported Mubarak and he was our friend. We built military operations going on in the Sinai Desert. That took place with--a good number of Iowans served there and people from probably every State served in the Sinai in operations with the Egyptians. Then Mubarak was essentially pushed out. And the message that came from our administration was he needs to leave yesterday. Well, the Morsi forces were able to push Mubarak out. They held one election. 5.8 million of the 83 million Egyptians voted for Morsi. Morsi came in as an incompetent Muslim Brotherhood, and the Muslim Brotherhood came out of that on top again like every other situation in the Arab Spring that has unfolded in the last couple of years, Mr. Speaker.

Now the best break we've seen in Egypt is that 30 to 33 million Egyptians took to the streets. Their peak day was the 3rd of July. They took their country back; and, yes, they had the support of the military. And some call it a coup, but there is no constitutional provision for them to impeach the incompetent Morsi. The Egyptian people had had enough. You can't mobilize that kind of support unless there are many good reasons--the economic shambles that they allowed to take place and the injustices that were taking place under the Morsi regime.

So now we have a new leadership that has taken hold in Egypt. I have met with the interim President of Egypt, President Mansour. He makes it clear he is the interim President, that they are going to hand the country of Egypt over to an elective representative government. They're going to pass a constitution that they're busy writing now. And the military will let go of their control over the country and submit to the civilian leadership that emerges in a constitutional fashion. They have laid out a timetable and a roadmap, Mr. Speaker. So this is the best future that Egypt can hope for.

Morsi was a mistake. He is Muslim Brotherhood. These forces are anti-

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Muslim Brotherhood. They are pro-Egyptian people. I'm supporting the forces that are in place in Egypt now, and I would, face to face, encourage them, move forward with the timetable that you have. It appears to be aggressive and it has some risk. But writing a constitution, ratifying a constitution, having elections and establishing a civilian government in Egypt and then handing the control of the military over to that civilian government is the right thing to do. It sets the right destiny for Egypt. And I think that the United States needs to do a 180 on the support of the people that are now in charge in Egypt.

I appreciate, Mr. Speaker, your attention and an opportunity to address you here this evening, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Congressional Record Senate Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/9/10/senate-section/article/s6301-5>

[Pages S6301-S6304]

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AUTHORIZING THE LIMITED AND SPECIFIED USE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES AGAINST SYRIA--MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 166, S.J. Res. 21.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to S.J. Res. 21 to authorize the limited and specified use of the United States Armed Forces against Syria.

Recognition of the Minority Leader

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

Syria

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, first, I would like to welcome the President to the Capitol today. Members on both sides of the aisle are eager to hear from him and to share their own thoughts. We look forward to a spirited and constructive exchange.

It is often said that of all the questions we face as lawmakers, none is more serious or indeed more difficult than the question of whether to commit ourselves to military action. That is why it is so important for us to have this debate, to lay out the arguments for and against military action in Syria, to let the public know where we stand on this issue and why.

If debates such as this are always challenging, in some ways this one has been even more difficult, not because of some political calculus--though cynics will always suspect that--no, this debate has been made more difficult because even those of us who truly want to support the Commander in Chief have struggled to understand the purpose of the mission.

Over the past several days I have spoken with a lot of people--a lot of Kentuckians--and most of them are not exactly clear about the mission or shy about saying so. What I have told them is that I understand their concerns, and I share them. I also appreciate the war weariness out there, but then I tell them there are other potential concerns we cannot ignore either. Chief among them is the fact that the credibility of the Commander in Chief matters, and related to that is the fact that we cannot afford, as a country, to withdraw from the world stage. So no one should be faulted for being skeptical about this proposal, regardless of what party they are in, or for being dumbfounded--literally dumbfounded--at the ham-handed manner in which the White House announced it.

There is absolutely no reason to signal to the enemy when, how, and for how long we plan to strike them--none. As I have said before, we

don't send out a save-the-date card to the enemy. Yet there are other important considerations to keep in mind as well that go beyond the wisdom or the marketing of the proposal.

I have spent a lot of time weighing all of these things. I thought a lot about America's obligations and the irreplaceable role I have always believed, and still believe, America plays in the world. I have also thought a lot about the context, about this President's vision and his record and what it says about whether we should be confident in his ability to bring about a favorable outcome in Syria because how we got to this point says a lot about where we may be headed. That is why, before announcing my vote, I think it is important to look back at some of the President's other decisions on matters of foreign policy and national security and then turn back to what he is proposing now in Syria because, in the end, these things simply cannot be separated.

It is not exactly a State secret that I am no fan of this President's foreign policy. On the deepest level I think it comes down to a fundamentally different view of America's role in the world. Unlike the President, I have always been a firm and unapologetic believer in the idea that America isn't just another Nation among many; that we are, indeed, exceptional. As I have said, I believe we have a duty as a superpower, without imperialistic aims, to help maintain an international order and balance of power that we and other allies have worked very hard to achieve over the years.

The President, on the other hand, has always been a very reluctant Commander in Chief. We saw that in the rhetoric of his famous Cairo speech and in speeches he gave in other foreign capitals in the early days of his administration. The tone, and the policies that followed, were meant to project a humbler, more withdrawn America. Frankly, I am hard pressed to see any good that came from any of that.

Any list would have to start with the arbitrary deadlines for military withdrawal and the triumphant declaration that Guantanamo would be closed within a year, without any plan of what to do with its detainees. There were the executive orders that ended the CIA's detention and interrogation programs.

We all saw the so-called ``reset'' with Russia and how the President's stated commitment to a world without nuclear weapons led him to hastily sign an arms treaty with Russia that did nothing to substantially reduce its nuclear stockpile or its tactical nuclear weapons. We saw the President announce a strategic pivot to the Asia-Pacific region, without any real plan to fund it, and an effort to end the capture, interrogation, and detention of terrorists, as well as the return of the old idea that terrorism should be treated as a law enforcement matter. After a decade-long counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, we have seen the President's failure to invest in the kind of strategic modernization that is needed to make this pivot to Asia meaningful. Specifically, his failure to make the kind of investments that are needed to maintain our dominance in the Asia-Pacific theater in the kind of naval, air, and Marine Corps forces that we will need in the years ahead could have tragic consequences down the road.

His domestic agenda has also obviously had serious implications for our global standing. While borrowing trillions and wasting taxpayer dollars here at home, the President has imposed a policy of austerity at the Pentagon that threatens to undermine our stabilizing presence around the globe. Of course, we have seen how eager the President is to declare an end to the war on terror. Unfortunately, the world hasn't cooperated. It hasn't cooperated with the President's vision or his hopes. Far from responding favorably to this gentler approach, it has become arguably more dangerous. We have learned the hard way that being nice to our enemies doesn't make them like us or clear a path to peace.

I understand the President ran for office on an antiwar platform, that his rise to political power was marked by his determination to get

us out of Afghanistan and Iraq, and to declare an end to the war on terror. I know he would rather focus on his domestic agenda. But the ongoing threat from Al Qaeda and its affiliates and the turmoil unleashed by uprisings in north Africa and the broader Middle East, not to mention the rise of Chinese military power, make it clear to me, at least, that this is not the time for America to shrink from the world stage.

The world is a dangerous place. In the wake of the Arab spring, large parts of the Sinai, of Libya, of Syria, are now basically ungoverned. We have seen prison breaks in Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, and the release of hundreds of prisoners in Egypt. Terrorists have also escaped from prisons in Yemen, a

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country that is no more ready to detain the terrorists at Guantanamo now than they were back in 2009. And the flow of foreign fighters into Syria suggests that the civil war there will last for years, regardless of whether Asad is still in power.

Yes, the President deserves praise for weakening Al Qaeda's senior leadership. But the threat we face from Al Qaeda affiliates is very real. These terrorists are adaptable. They are versatile, lethal, resilient, and they aren't going away. Pockets of these terrorists extend from north Africa to the Persian Gulf and it is time he faced up to it.

It is time to face up to something else as well: International order is not maintained by some global police force which only exists in a liberal fantasy. International order is maintained--its backbone is American military might, which brings me back to Syria.

For 2 years now Syria has been mired in a ferocious civil war with more than 100,000 killed with conventional arms. That is according to U.N. estimates. This tragic situation has prompted many to look to the United States for help. So 1 year ago President Obama made a declaration: If Asad used or started moving chemical weapons, he would do something about it.

Well, as we all know, on August 21 of this year, that redline was crossed. The President's delayed response was to call for a show of force for targeted, limited strikes against the regime. We have been told the purpose of these strikes is to deter and degrade Asad's regime's ability to use chemical weapons. So let's take a closer look at these aims.

First, no one disputes that the atrocities committed in Syria in recent weeks are unspeakable. No one disputes that those responsible for these crimes against the innocent should be held to account. We were absolutely right, of course, to condemn these crimes. But let's be very clear about something: These attacks, monstrous as they are, were not a direct attack against the United States or one of its treaty allies. And just so there is no confusion, let me assure everyone that if a weapon of mass destruction were used against the United States or one of our allies, Congress would react immediately with an authorization for the use of force in support of an overwhelming response. I would introduce the resolution myself. So no leader in North Korea or Iran or any other enemy of the United States should take any solace if the United States were not to respond to these attacks with an action against Syria. We will never--never--tolerate the use of chemical weapons against the United States or any of its treaty allies.

Second, in the course of administration hearings and briefings over the past several days, Secretary of State Kerry has revealed that Asad has used chemical weapons repeatedly--repeatedly--over the last year. So there is a further question here about why the administration didn't respond on those occasions.

Third, Asad, as I have indicated, has killed tens of thousands of people with conventional weapons. Is there any reason to believe he won't continue if the President's strikes are as limited as we are told they would be?

Fourth, what if, in degrading Asad's control of those weapons, we make it easier for other extremist elements such as those associated with the al-Nusra Front and Al Qaeda to actually get hold of them themselves or what if, by weakening the Syrian military, we end up tilting the military balance toward a fractured opposition that is in no position to govern or control anything right now?

I think the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dempsey, put this particular best when he recently suggested in a letter to Congress that the issue here isn't about choosing between two sides in Syria, it is about choosing one among many sides; and that, in his estimation, even if we were to choose sides, the side we chose wouldn't be in a position to promote their own interests or ours. That is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

Then there is the question of how Asad himself will react to U.S. action in Syria. If Asad views an air campaign as preparation for regime change, then he may lose all constraint in the use of his arsenal, chemical or otherwise, and lose any incentive whatsoever to move to the negotiating table. It is very clear that the unintended consequences of this strike could very well be a new cycle of escalation, which then drags us into a larger war that we are all seeking to avoid. Some have even suggested that the humanitarian crisis surrounding the Syrian civil war could actually be made worse as a result of even targeted U.S. strikes.

In the end, then, the President's proposal seems fundamentally flawed since, if it is too narrow, it may not deter Asad's further use of chemical weapons. But if it is too broad, it risks jeopardizing the security of these same stockpiles, potentially putting them into the hands of extremists.

That is why I think we are compelled in this case to apply a more traditional standard on whether to proceed with a use of force, one that asks a simple question: Does Asad's use of chemical weapons pose a threat to the vital national security interests of the United States? And the answer to that question is fairly obvious; even the President himself says it doesn't.

One could argue, as I have suggested, that there is an important national security concern at play, that we have a very strong interest in preserving the credibility of our Commander in Chief, regardless of the party in power, and in giving him the political support that reinforces that credibility. This is an issue I take very seriously. It is the main reason I have wanted to take my time in making a final decision. But, ultimately, I have concluded that being credible on Syria requires presenting a credible response and having a credible strategy. For all of the reasons I have indicated, this proposal doesn't pass muster.

Indeed, if, through this limited strike, the President's credibility is not restored because Asad uses chemical weapons again, what then? And new targets aimed at toppling the regime which end up jeopardizing control of these same chemical weapons stashes--allowing them to fall into the hands of Al Qaeda and others intent on using them against the United States or our allies. Where would the cycle of escalation end?

Last night we learned about a Russian diplomatic gambit to forestall U.S. military action through a proposal to secure and eventually destroy the Syrian chemical weapons stockpile. This morning there are initial reports that suggest Syria is supportive of them. Let me remind everyone that even if this is agreed to, it is a still a long way off to reaching an agreement at the United Nations, to Syria gaining entry

to the chemical weapons convention, and to eventually securing and destroying the stockpile. As we have seen in my own State of Kentucky where we have been working for 30 years to finally destroy a stockpile of chemical weapons, destroying chemical weapons is extremely challenging and requires a great deal of attention to detail and safety. Nonetheless, this proposal is obviously worth exploring.

But, more broadly--and this is my larger point--this one punitive strike we are debating could not make up for the President's performance over the last 5 years. The only way--the only way--for him to achieve the credibility he seeks is by embracing the kind of serious, integrated, national security plan that matches strategy to resources, capabilities to commitments, and which shows our allies around the world that the United States is fully engaged and ready to act at a moment's notice in all the major areas of concern around the globe, whether it is the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, or in the South China Sea, and, just as importantly, that he is willing to invest in that strategy for the long term.

In Syria, a limited strike would not resolve the civil war there, nor will it remove Asad from power. There appears to be no broader strategy to train, advise, and assist a vetted opposition group on a meaningful scale, as we did during the Cold War. What is needed in Syria is what is needed almost everywhere else in the world from America right now: a clear strategy and a President determined to carry it out.

When it comes to Syria, our partners in the Middle East--countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Israel--all of them face real consequences from instability, refugee

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flows, and the growth of terrorist networks. Responding to this crisis requires a regional strategy and leadership. What we have gotten instead is an administration that seems more interested in telling us what the mission is not--more interested in telling us what the mission is not--rather than what it is. We have gotten the same timid, reluctant leadership that I have seen from the President for nearly 5 years.

As I have said, this decision was not easy. When the President of the United States asks you to take a question like this seriously, you do so. Because just as our credibility in Syria is tied up with our credibility in places such as Iran and North Korea, so too is the credibility of the Commander in Chief tied up, to a large extent, with America's credibility in general. There is no doubt about that. So let me repeat: I will stand shoulder to shoulder with this President or any other in any case where our vital national security interests are threatened, our treaty allies are attacked, or we face an imminent threat.

As for Israel, very few people, if anyone, expect that Syria would test its readiness to respond on its own, which just goes to show you the importance of credibility on the world stage. As Prime Minister Netanyahu put it last week, the enemies of Israel have very good reason not to test its might. But the Prime Minister should know nonetheless that America stands with him.

I have never been an isolationist, and a vote against this resolution should not be confused by anyone as a turn in that direction. But just as the most committed isolationist could be convinced of the need for intervention under the right circumstances when confronted with a threat, so too do the internationalists among us believe that all interventions are not created equal. And this proposal just does not stand up.

So I will be voting against this resolution. A vital national

security risk is clearly not at play, there are too many unanswered questions about our long-term strategy in Syria, including the fact that this proposal is utterly detached from a wider strategy to end the civil war there, and on the specific question of deterring the use of chemical weapons, the President's proposal appears to be based actually on a contradiction: either we will strike targets that threaten the stability of the regime--something the President says he does not intend to do--or we will execute a strike so narrow as to be a mere demonstration.

It is not enough, as General Dempsey has noted, to simply alter the balance of military power without carefully considering what is needed to preserve a functioning state after the fact. We cannot ignore the unintended consequences of our actions.

But we also cannot ignore our broader obligations in the world. I firmly believe the international system that was constructed on the ashes of World War II rests upon the stability provided by the American military, and by our commitments to our allies. It is a necessary role that only we can continue to fulfill in the decades to come. And especially in times like this, the United States cannot afford to withdraw from the world stage. My record reflects that belief and that commitment regardless of which party has controlled the White House. We either choose to be dominant in the world or we resign ourselves and our allies to the mercy of our enemies. We either defend our freedoms and our civilization or it crumbles.

So as we shift our military focus to the Asia Pacific, we cannot ignore our commitments to the Middle East, to stability in the Persian Gulf, to an enduring presence in Afghanistan, to hunting down the terrorists who would threaten the United States and its people. And when the Commander in Chief sets his mind to action, the world should think he believes in it. When the Commander in Chief sets his mind to an action, the world should think he believes in it. Frankly, the President did not exactly inspire confidence when he distanced himself from his own redlines in Stockholm last week.

It is long past time the President drops the pose of the reluctant warrior and lead. You cannot build an effective foreign policy on the vilification of your predecessor alone. At some point, you have to take responsibility for your own actions and see the world the way it is, not the way you would like it to be.

If you wish to engage countries that have been hostile, so be it. But be a realist, know the limits of rhetoric, and prepare for the worst.

For too long this President has put his faith in the power of his own rhetoric to change the minds of America's enemies. For too long he has been more interested in showing the world that America is somehow different now than it has been in the past; it is humbler; it is not interested in meddling in the affairs of others or in shaping events.

But in his eagerness to turn the page, he has blinded himself to worrisome trends and developments from Tunisia to Damascus to Tehran and in countless places in between.

A year ago this month four Americans were senselessly murdered on sovereign U.S. territory in Benghazi. Last month the President ordered the closing of more than two dozen diplomatic posts stretching from west Africa to the Bay of Bengal. As I have indicated, and as the decision to close these embassies clearly shows, the terrorist threat continues to be real. Expressions of anti-Americanism are rampant throughout Africa and the Middle East, even more so perhaps than when the President first took office.

So the President's new approach has clearly come with a cost. And for the sake of our own security and that of our allies, it is time he recognized it. Because if America does not meet its international commitments, who will? That is one question that those on the left who are comfortable with a weakened America cannot answer, because the

answer is too frightening. No one will. That is the answer.

If this episode has shown us anything, it is that the time has come for the President to finally acknowledge that there is no substitute for American might. It is time for America to lead again, this time from the front. But we need strategic vision, in the Middle East and in many other places around the world, to do it.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Reservation Of Leader Time

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

Congressional Record Senate Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/9/10/senate-section/article/s6312-2>

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AUTHORIZING THE LIMITED AND SPECIFIED USE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES AGAINST SYRIA--MOTION TO PROCEED--Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the time until 5 p.m. be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 20 minutes at this time.

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

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, today there are hopeful signs that the international community will act to secure Syria's chemical weapons which have caused so much pain and so much suffering, including the suffering of little infants and children. A peaceful resolution to the Assad regime's use of these lethal, outlawed weapons would certainly be the best outcome. I commend the resolve of President Obama, without which we wouldn't be looking at a potential diplomatic solution.

I wish to lay out for the record why we must act in response to the use of chemical weapons. Of course, I prefer it to be done through the international community. **But I wish to be clear: There are certain norms, there are certain rules, there are certain laws that must be respected and obeyed; otherwise, we lose our humanity, and this is an example.**

Famous leaders throughout history have called war various things. They have called war a contagion. They have called war hell. They have called war a scourge, murder, a crime, despicable. But even in the chaos and in the darkness of war, there are rules. There are red lines. There are boundaries. There are limits. There are norms and there are laws. That is why in our Nation, as difficult and as painful as it has been, we have held our servicemembers accountable when they acted outside those norms. We did it just last month with the conviction of a

soldier for war crimes committed in Afghanistan.

The use of chemical weapons is way outside international laws, rules, boundaries, limits, and norms, and has been so since the end of World War I, when the world uniformly condemned them. We know--we know without a shadow of a doubt--that they have been used by Syria in a big way, and it is time for all Members of Congress and, frankly, all members of civilized society to look into our hearts, to look into our souls, and to look into our consciences. The painful way to do it is to look at the shocking acts committed against innocent, men, women, and children in Syria. Look at those videos, as difficult as it might be, of children and their families dying horrible, ghastly deaths, writhing in pain, gasping for air, foaming at the mouth as the gas attacks their nervous systems.

Do we have a conscience? I pray we do. Albert Einstein once said: ``The world is a dangerous place not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.''

Let me repeat it. ``The world is a dangerous place not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.''

Doing nothing can sometimes be an attractive alternative. I understand it. But each of us who looks at these videos, who reads about what happened, each of us must ask ourselves, as human beings, as citizens of our great Nation: Can we respond to these atrocities by doing nothing? Can we sit back and do nothing in the face of Syria's use of chemical weapons on its own people, its own children?

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When the President said he had a red line on this, he wasn't speaking for himself alone; he was speaking for the world that disavowed these weapons. I have to say that, to me, the Senate has a red line on this. Anyone who voted for the Syria Accountability Act in 2003, be it in the House or Senate, drew a red line, because in it, we condemned and we decried the development of chemical weapons by the Assad regime, and we tied that program to our own national security. There is no way our national security is unaffected when these weapons are used and no one is held accountable.

Did we mean it when we voted for the Syria Accountability Act? Did we mean it when we passed the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997, which I was proud to vote for. Did we mean it? Words are good, but tyrants do not heed words. History is replete with tyrants who stood in the face of the worst condemnation and annihilated people. If we stand by and do nothing, what message do we send to those who have these weapons?

I mentioned the ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997, and I will tell my colleagues, as we look at the world--and there is a lot to complain about and be ashamed of and worry about--one of the good things is that since we passed the Chemical Weapons Convention and ratified it, 80 percent of the chemical weapons of the world have been destroyed.

I think we should listen again to colleagues who spoke during the Senate debate on the Chemical Weapons Convention. Here is what Joe Biden, our Vice President, said:

Norms are created so that we have standards for civilized conduct by which to judge others. Without them, we leave the rogue countries to behave as free actors.

Our own Pat Leahy said:

We will advise and consent so the President can ratify this treaty. I truly believe we will. It will show the moral leadership that the Senate should show and the United States

should show. We will act as the conscience of this Nation, and we will advise and consent to this treaty. We will show the moral leadership because we began this by saying we would act unilaterally, if need be, renouncing our own use of chemical weapons with or without a treaty. That was true leadership.

So we hear the words ``morality'' and ``conscience'' and ``leadership.'' These shouldn't be just words. We should show that courage. Here are words from John Warner, our former colleague. He said:

I first learned of chemical weapons at the knee of my father who was a surgeon in the trenches in World War I. He described to me in vivid detail how he cared for the helpless victims of that weapon . . . we cannot turn back now from that leadership role.

Sixteen years later, in this very Chamber where I stood and proudly cast my vote for the Chemical Weapons Convention, we are facing a clear violation of law and humanity.

How do we react? If we do nothing, what is the signal to Assad? What is the signal to Kim Jong Un in North Korea, who has what has been described as a massive array of chemical weapons in an area where we have 28,000 American troops keeping the peace. The message we send if we do nothing is not a good one. It will send a message that says we don't mean what we say; We don't stand behind the laws we pass or the conventions we ratify. These chemical weapons kill people like cockroaches. When we read history, we know these weapons were used on the Iranians by Saddam Hussein and one Iraqi military official called these weapons an ``annihilation insecticide.''

That is what they have been called. These weapons cause excruciating death. That is why a monster such as Hitler chose them to wipe out millions of those he considered subhuman. We all know the history. He didn't use them on troops; he used them on those groups that he considered subhuman. Yet, while the rest of the world was eliminating chemical weapons, Syria was stockpiling precursor chemicals and building one of the largest chemical weapons arsenals in the world.

A Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman said in 2012 that Syria reserved the right to use these weapons against external forces. His statement already is a violation of international law. He said: We reserve the right to use these weapons against external forces. But he went on to say--and we have his name: ``Any stock of WMD or unconventional weapons that the Syrian Army possesses will never, never be used against the Syrian people or civilians during this crisis, under any circumstances.''

 Remarkably, Syria violated its own red line.

Chris Miller is a U.S. Army veteran and he is an expert in the area of chemical and biological weapons. Here is what he wrote in ``The Guardian.''

 He said we must: ``jealously guard what progress has been made in working toward a more peaceful world.''

He added:

The steady worldwide reduction of chemical weapons is a prime example of that progress--one that we cannot allow to be eroded so easily.

I can't underscore this enough. In a world full of challenges and disappointments and for people such as the Presiding Officer and me who believe so much that we can have a peaceful world, this is one of the few areas we can point to--where 80 percent of the world's arsenal of chemical weapons has been destroyed. If we turn our back on this tyrant

and on this use, clearly, the chemical weapons will go right back into production. They will be marketing chemical weapons, and we know what will happen when they get into certain hands. We should not ignore history or we are doomed to repeat it.

The British soldier and poet Wilfred Owen wrote this in an effort to depict the horrors of chemical warfare in World War I. This is what he said: ``If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood / Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs.''

He saw it firsthand in World War I, where 90,000 troops were killed by these heinous weapons, including 6,000 French, British, Canadian, and Belgian troops killed by German forces in one battle alone. Nations flocked to sign the Geneva Protocol after World War I. Syria joined them, and now more than 1,000 Syrian civilians lay dead due to Assad's decision to bring back these horrors.

How will we react?

Our former colleague and respected national security leader Dick Lugar says chemical weapons ``may be the greatest threat to our country of any security risk that we have, much more than any other government, for example, or another Nation because they can be used by terrorists, by very small groups' '--Dick Lugar, who played such a great role in securing nuclear weapons after the Cold War; Dick Lugar, who understands what could happen if we turn our back now.

I respectfully say to my colleagues: Don't look away. Don't rationalize inaction. We cannot stay silent. If we fail to act in the face of such a brazen violation of international norms, in the face of an assault on conscience, then outlawing these weapons becomes meaningless and we put the security of all of us at risk. If we fail to act, we make it more likely that these weapons will be used again in Syria and elsewhere. If we fail to act, we send a terrible message to brutal regimes such as North Korea and Iran, which are seeking to develop nuclear weapons. In the case of North Korea, they have what has been described by Secretary Hagel as a massive amount of chemical weapons. If we fail to act, we make it more likely that these horrific weapons could be used against our allies such as Israel and our troops. That is for sure. If we fail to act, we make it more likely that chemical weapons will fall into the hands of terrorists and others who would do us harm. If we fail to act, we send a message that the civilized world will permit the use of these ghastly and inhumane weapons, not just on the battlefield but against children and families sleeping in their beds.

I ask my colleagues and the American people, do not look away. It is easier to look away.

We had a chance to see some of the videos, Madam President, as you know, during our luncheon meeting. We cannot sit by and do nothing in the face of such horror. We cannot.

So here is the thing: We have a chance now--because of President Obama's resolve, because of the resolve of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, because of the resolve of many people inside government and outside government, we have the resolve to do something. And the best something would be an international response.

I am proud of our President for making sure this alternative was in Vladimir Putin's mind when they met. And

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I am glad Secretary Kerry said: Look, there is an alternative. Let them hand over their weapons. Let's dismantle them and do it right and verify it and hold them accountable, and we get past this. That is the route I believe we all want to see happen. We want to see the world stand up against this inhumanity, but let's not be naive about it. When you are dealing with tyrants, you have to enforce that kind of a plan.

I am hopeful today but not sanguine. I am hopeful that the United Nations will take this as an opportunity to stand firm, to say that the outlawing of chemical weapons meant something in reality, not just on paper. And when we said people should not die like cockroaches, we meant it. So I am hopeful we will have a small pause here and we will give diplomacy a chance to work between the nations, and I praise our leadership in the Obama administration and France's leadership and British leadership. I hope the Russians meant it when they said: Let's try to resolve this in a way that will result in the absolute destruction of the chemical weapons Syria has. I hope they mean it.

We cannot walk away from an inhumane act that caused innocent children to die in unspeakable ways because, I will tell you, if we walk away, then I think the message is that there are no limits on gross violations of international norms, there are no limits on gross violations of international laws, and there are no limits on violations of human decency.

I am very pleased the President took this to the Congress. I think it was right. But I want to be clear: The President, as our Commander in Chief, has the authority--if he believes there is an imminent threat or danger to us, he has the authority to act. And I think Richard Lugar is sending us a very powerful message when he says one of our greatest national security threats--he said even greater than a threat posed by any nation--is the possibility that a small terrorist group could get their hands on these weapons. I will tell you, Madam President, that is an unacceptable situation, and I know the President worries about this every day, and every night when he goes to sleep, it is on his mind. One way to make sure the chance of that happening is lessened greatly is to make sure one of the largest caches of these weapons is controlled internationally and then destroyed. That will, in fact, mean we will have a more peaceful world.

There is a civil war going on in Syria. No one wants to get in the middle of it--least of all those of us who voted against the Iraq war because we saw what would happen. And years and years and years later, unfortunately, we were proven right. I was proud to vote no on that war. I think I have a little credibility here for not wanting to go to war, for making sure the intelligence is right, for making sure there is a limited mission, for making sure this is well thought out.

I would say in closing that the best ending to this crisis is for the international community to take hold of this--together, all of us--and work to see that these weapons of mass destruction are first accounted for, then controlled, and then destroyed. If we can do that, then the horrifying deaths we have witnessed and we have seen on tape today and the American people have been witnessing--at least there will be something good that could come out of this because otherwise, if there is no action, their deaths will not mean anything, they will be forgotten.

So we need to keep a credible plan before us, which means we want to see international rules apply, we want to see the international community take hold of this and have a good outcome. But I will tell you this--and I believe this with every fiber of my being--such a gross violation of humanity cannot go unanswered.

Thank you very much.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that time during all the quorum calls be charged equally to both sides.

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

Mrs. BOXER. 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. SANDERS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I wanted to use this opportunity to say a few words about the issue that is on everybody's minds; that is, Syria. I want to tell you that approximately 95 percent of the thousands of e-mails and phone calls my office has received are against U.S. military intervention in the bloody and chaotic civil war in Syria.

The truth is the numbers in Vermont may be higher than the national average in terms of opposition to this war. But there is probably no State in this country where U.S. military intervention in this bloody and complicated civil war in Syria is being supported. It is an interesting phenomenon.

We have a very divided Nation politically, but on this issue it appears the vast majority of Democrats, Republicans, Independents, the vast majority of progressives--I am a progressive--conservatives, moderates, have all come together to express deep concern about the United States being involved in the third military intervention in the Middle East in 12 years.

Let me tell you why I believe the American people feel so strongly against military involvement in Syria. Clearly, it has much to do with the fact that the United States has already been at war for 12 years. There are kids in this country who are halfway through primary school who have never known an America that has not been at war.

What the American people also understand is these wars have been enormously costly in many ways. Not only have these wars in Iraq and Afghanistan cost us the lives of some 4,600 brave American men and women who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, but as chairman of the Veterans Affairs' Committee I can tell you that today we have tens of thousands of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who are dealing with traumatic brain injury, who are dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, problems they are going to be carrying with them for the rest of their lives.

The human cost of those wars has been enormous. But it is not only the human cost, it is the financial cost as well. Today, at a time when working families are struggling to keep their heads above water economically, we are throwing thousands and thousands of little kids who desperately need preschool education off of Head Start. We should be expanding Head Start. But because of sequestration we are throwing them off of Head Start. We are denying nutrition programs, the Meals on Wheels Programs, that go to some of the most vulnerable and fragile seniors in this country. We are throwing them off basic nutrition programs.

We are forcing massive cuts through furloughs on tens of thousands of Federal employees, including members of the Vermont National Guard. At the end of the day, by the time we take care of the last servicemember who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, those wars will have cost us at least \$3 trillion.

But it is not only the human cost of those wars that troubles the American people. It is not only the financial cost of these wars that troubles the American people. It is the deep sense that exists across the political spectrum that foreign policy and going to war are a lot more complicated and unpredictable and have unintended consequences, far more so than many of our leaders in past years have believed.

Afghanistan is a small country that in 2001 virtually had no army when the United States invaded it; no army against the most powerful military force in the history of the world.

What is the problem? Twelve years later we are still in Afghanistan. All of us remember President George W. Bush standing on an aircraft carrier telling us that in Iraq the mission was accomplished. Mission accomplished.

Well, it didn't turn out quite that way. Thousands of deaths later for

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American servicemembers, tens of thousands of deaths later for the people of Iraq, peace and democracy in that country has not yet been accomplished. It is a lot more complicated than people thought it would be.

Today people worry what are the long-term implications and what are the unforeseen consequences of the United States being involved in a horrendous, bloody, and complicated war in Syria. All of us know Asad is a ruthless dictator who has exploited his people terribly and used chemical weapons against them. But not every American knows that some 20 to 25 percent of the opposition to Asad turns out to be Islamic fundamentalists, some of them affiliated with Al Qaeda.

What are the long-term implications and unintended consequences of being involved in a war in that area? I know the President has been very clear about saying he is talking about strikes that are very targeted, very minimal. But once you break the egg, once you get involved, we have to bear and will bear a certain amount of responsibility for what happens during the war and even after the war if Asad is overthrown.

This is why the American people are extremely concerned about the United States unilaterally going into Syria without the support of the international community and without the support of the United Nations.

Having said all of that, in my mind there is another reason, a deeper reason, as to why there is so much opposition to the President's proposal and the proposal that came out of the Foreign Relations Committee, which was more open-ended and spoke about regime change. That has everything to do with the fact that the favorability rating of the Congress is today somewhere between 8 and 15 percent.

The vast majority of the American people don't know. They don't care who controls the Senate, whether it is the Democrats. They don't know who controls the House, the Republicans. By and large, the American people have given up believing that the Congress and the White House are listening to their needs, which are very serious at this moment, or are interested or capable of responding to their needs.

What the American people are saying, and they are saying it very loudly, is we have a Congress and a White House which continues to ignore the enormous crises facing the middle class and working families of our country. What they are saying is: Yes, Mr. President, we agree with you, what Asad is doing in Syria is unspeakable; that he is gassing his own kids is beyond belief. We understand that. We want the international community to address that.

But what they are also saying is: Mr. President, Members of Congress, think about our children, the kids in West Virginia, the kids in California, the kids in Detroit, the kids in Vermont. What about our kids? What kind of future are they going to have in an economy in which the middle class continues to disappear and poverty remains at an almost all-time high for the last 60 years?

Today real unemployment in this country is not 7.4 percent, the official unemployment rate. Real unemployment is close to 14 percent.

Youth unemployment is a tragedy. Kids are graduating high school, going out and looking for jobs, and they want to get a sense of independence. There are no jobs for them. Youth unemployment in this country is close to 20 percent.

For minorities, the number is considerably higher. Black youth unemployment in this country is close to 40 percent. Parents are worried that their kids are graduating from high school and there are no jobs available to them.

Before I came to Washington the other day, I talked to a physician in the State of Vermont who said: Bernie, do you know what. In Vermont, beautiful Vermont, rural Vermont, we are facing a heroin epidemic. Kids are shooting up heroin in Vermont, not to mention the rest of the country, because they don't see much of a future facing them.

Parents are worried that their kids are graduating college, often deeply in debt, and that either they can't find a job or the jobs they do obtain often do not require a college degree. The fact is most of the new jobs being created in this country are part-time jobs with minimal benefits, and they are often low-wage jobs.

What the Department of Labor is telling us is that, in fact, most of the new jobs we see coming down the pike for our kids do not require a college degree. They are low-wage jobs.

The people are saying from one end of this country, yes, we are concerned about Syria, but we are also concerned about Los Angeles, Detroit, and St. Johnsbury, VT. Please, Mr. President, create jobs for the working families of this country. What they are begging the Congress to do is to address the needs our people face.

What they understand, and I think this has a lot to do with why there is so much opposition to getting involved in this war in Syria, is that the Congress has virtually done nothing to improve the economy for working families, and they worry very much that if all of our time, energy, and resources are devoted to Syria, we are never going to address the serious problems facing the working families of this country.

Tens of millions of our fellow Americans today are working longer hours for lower wages, and many of them are earning wages that are simply too low to support a family. We have been happy to hear in Michigan, for example, the automobile industry is doing better; more people are being hired. That is the good news.

Do you know what the bad news is. The new jobs in the automobile industry are barely more than 50 percent in pay of what the old jobs were. All over this country the new jobs that are being created are not paying what the jobs in this country used to pay. We have millions of people working for a disgracefully low minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour.

People are saying: Mr. President, Members of Congress, yes, we are worried about Syria, but why don't you work to make sure every person who has a job in this country can earn a wage which enables him or her to take care of their family?

The media doesn't pay a lot of attention to it, Congress doesn't pay a lot of attention, but the American people also understand it is not only high unemployment and low wages, something else is going on in this country. They know that while the middle class is disappearing and 46 million Americans are living in poverty, they understand the people on top today, the people whose lobbyists surround this institution, the people who make huge campaign contributions to the political parties, are doing very well. They are doing extraordinarily well. Corporate profits are at an all-time high. The people on Wall Street, whose greed, recklessness, and illegal behavior caused the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, well, guess what. They are doing phenomenally well. They are making record-breaking profits. The rich are doing well and corporate America is doing well. They are making all kinds of campaign contributions.

The American people are looking around and saying, What are you doing for us? What are you doing to protect the seniors and their Social Security? What are you doing to protect the children of this country,

to make sure they get a decent education? What are you doing to make sure the United States joins the rest of the industrialized world so all of our people have health care as a right?

One of the reasons I think there is so much lack of support for this war is the American people feel it is high time for us to pay attention to their needs.

We have recently heard, and the news is being updated almost momentarily, that Russia, for whatever reasons, has decided finally to play a positive role in this crisis. They are urging Syria to allow the international community to take possession of their chemical weapons. We believe that France right now is prepared to go to the Security Council with a resolution similar to what the Russians are talking about.

I can't tell you how honest the Russians are being in this effort, what their ulterior plans may be. But I think now is the opportunity to work with Russia, to work with China, to work with the Security Council and the United Nations. It would be an extraordinary victory, in my view, for the people of Syria, who are going through horror after horror right now,

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for the entire world, and for the future of the world, if we could take those terrible chemical weapons out of Asad's hands and destroy them. I would hope very much the President and our Secretary of State will be working with the international community to make that happen.

Let me conclude. I think we are in a very interesting and, in fact, momentous moment in the history of the United States of America. The people are coming together to say we have enormous crises in our own country and if we don't get our act together, we are going to see the decline of a once-great Nation. We are going to see, for the first time in the modern history of our country, our children having a lower standard of living than we do.

I would hope the lesson we learned of this entire episode is the American people do not want us unilaterally getting involved in another war in the Middle East. I would hope also the lesson we learned is the American people are saying very loudly and clearly this country faces enormous crises: economically, global warming, health care, education, income and wealth inequality, and they want us to start addressing those needs. I hope that out of this very difficult moment the silver lining is we learn something from what the American people want and we begin to do what they say.

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

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the very serious vote before us--the vote to authorize force against Syria. Let's be clear: This is a vote to authorize an act of war. The American people are watching. They know what this is--a dilemma with no easy answers. They know it could spiral out of control. It has happened before and it could happen again.

The use of chemical weapons is an outrage. What happened in Syria was despicable. The horror is clear. The world cannot look away. This crime is a crime against humanity. It demands an international response--strong and unequivocal. On this we can all agree. However, what should that response be?

The President has presented a plan for military strikes on the Syrian regime--an attack that has been presented to the American people as

limited in scope but with very great consequences. So we are confronted with urgent appeals to strike, but I believe there are strong reasons not to do so.

First, we should pursue all diplomatic and economic options to pressure both Asad and his backers to change course. We have not yet done that to the fullest extent.

We all know the Russian Government is aiding and abetting the criminal regime in Syria, supplying military support, providing diplomatic cover, and preventing an international response to this atrocity. The world is rightly outraged. That outrage should be loud and clear, and the full force of international condemnation must be exerted, not just against Asad.

As of this week there are signs Russia may be getting the message. If their proposal to help secure Syria's chemical weapons is sincere, then we should welcome this opportunity. We should work with the international community to make this a reality. The inability to use chemical weapons in this conflict will restore the international norm we seek to uphold and prevent a recurrence of the horrors we have seen.

If Russia aims to be a responsible world power and not a rogue nation, they will seek solutions, not obstruction. They are a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Let's hold their feet to the fire to do what is right. The President's mandate is stronger with congressional approval, and the mandate of the United States is stronger with international support. I would urge Ambassador Power and Secretary Kerry to keep up the pressure on Russia. Make the forceful case to the Security Council. Continue to share the evidence with the people of the world.

This situation will not be solved with Tomahawk cruise missiles fired into Syria. It will require a concerted international effort to push Asad and the various rebels to pursue a political solution. For us to go it alone, to take unilateral action, will put us on shaky ground legally and strategically.

Second, the proposal to use military force could embroil the United States in a complex Middle Eastern civil war. There is a cancer in Syria, from Asad to Al Qaeda. The civil war is a twilight zone comprised of multiple players internationally, regionally, and within Syria. Many of the rebels do not share our values. Some--we don't know how many--are enemies of the United States and our allies. Many of these rebel groups have also committed terrible atrocities. Tilting the balance too far in their favor is not in our Nation's interest and will not leave Syria safer for innocent civilians.

These strikes have been presented as limited and targeted, but last week there were reports about expanding military targets, of regime change. Even the resolution we are considering today includes veiled language--the language that could make it the policy of the United States to tilt the momentum in the civil war and endorse the policy of arming the Syrian rebels--a policy I and others believe is very dangerous--about whom we know too little.

Third, there is a real risk that even limited U.S. military involvement may make Asad feel more desperate, putting our allies--Israel, Turkey, and Jordan--at risk of attack. This could spark a regional war, creating a situation on the ground where Asad may be more, not less, inclined to use chemical weapons.

As with so many elements here, the question occurs, what then? Here is the reality. There is no simple solution, and the American people know this. I understand there is a natural instinct to want to retaliate, to strike out. No one can forget the horrific images, the terrible suffering of the victims. But we need a clear strategy that will not mire the United States in a bloody and uncertain civil war. I remain unconvinced that we have such a strategy in place.

The Iraq war, which I voted against, began as an international effort to kick Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. There followed years of a no-fly zone and airstrikes to prevent Saddam from threatening his neighbors or reconstituting his arsenal of chemical weapons. As we all know, these limited military actions led to one of the biggest blunders in U.S. history.

Americans are understandably skeptical after the fiasco of Iraq. They want to know if we are going down the same path in Syria, into a civil war that is more complex and potentially damaging to the United States and its interests. Limited attack or broader, there is no easy way out of the quicksand. Have we not learned at least that after 12 years of war?

I have listened to the administration's arguments closely, as well as the opinions of New Mexicans. The American people do not believe a limited strike will deter Assad; they fear this strike will just lead us further toward direct involvement. They rightly ask, for what purpose and to what end? Public officials should not always let polls be their guide before making important decisions for our country, but I agree with the majority of Americans and New Mexicans--we must exhaust our political, diplomatic, and economic options first. This is not a lack of resolve. America has the greatest military on Earth. No one should doubt that we will defend our interests and our allies. But a military strike in Syria is the wrong response in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I come to the floor not to push my colleagues one way or another. Each of us must make up his or her own mind. I come here simply to explain my reasons for voting no on this authorization for the use of military force in Syria.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, make no mistake about it, the resolution before us, in my judgment, is one of the most difficult decisions a Member of the Senate will ever have to make. The authorization of force is an awesome responsibility that each of us has. None of us wants to see American troops in harm's way. None of us wants to see the need for the use of military force. This is a difficult judgment for us to make.

The Constitution envisions that both the President and Congress are involved in the deploying of U.S. military. Certainly the President, as Commander in Chief, and the Congress, under the War Powers Act, have a responsibility to authorize the use of force. Today in this country Americans are tired of war. We have been involved in Iraq and Afghanistan for way too long. We thought these campaigns would be short campaigns. They turned out to be very long. There has been a tremendous loss in human life and fiscal resources as a result of the wars in which the United States has participated. But the public also understands that we have a responsibility to use our military to protect the national interests of the people of this country. They understand that America's military strength keeps the people in this country safe, and they expect that the President and the Congress will use that military force in order to protect the national security of the people of this country.

What is in our national security interest and why would the President come to Congress asking us to consider the use of military force in the current circumstances in Syria? People understand, they recognize that

if we are about to be attacked, there is a need to use force.

The United States plays a unique role in the international community, for we understand that standing up for basic internationally recognized human rights is a responsibility we all have. I supported President Clinton when he asked for the authorization of force for the United States, along with the international community, to be involved in restoring order in the republics of the former Yugoslavia, where there was ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo. But for the leadership of the United States additional communities would have been destroyed and people would have lost their lives. We stood up because it was in the interests of the United States to stand up for the enforcement of basic internationally established human rights.

Let's evaluate what is happening in Syria today and understand that although what is happening there may be far from our shores, the impact very much could be felt here in the United States. I serve on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. We were called back into session last week because of the President's request for the Congress to act on his request for the use of force. We held hearings that were open to the public, and we held classified hearings in order to better understand what had happened in Syria.

I think it is now clear beyond any doubt that the Asad regime in Syria used chemical weapons. The evidence is clear. It was not the first occasion they used chemical weapons. They had used chemical weapons in the past but not to the magnitude they did on August 21 of this year which resulted in more than 1,400 deaths, many of whom were children. The videos of that image are now available publicly. People can see the horrific act that was imposed upon the people of Syria by its President, President Asad.

The action of Syria on August 21 violated international norm. Since chemical weapons were used in World War I, the international community has come together and said: Even in war we will not permit the use of chemical weapons. It is so horrific, so indiscriminate in its killing and in its maiming that as an international community we will stand and say: No, you cannot use chemical weapons.

The evidence is clear that President Asad of Syria used chemical weapons in a mass way and killed over 1,400 people. That action requires the response of the international community, for if it goes unchallenged it is more likely President Asad will continue to use chemical weapons. He just considers it one of the weapons in his toolbox, and he will call it out more and more if it goes unchallenged by the international community.

The people of Syria are not the only ones at risk. These chemical weapons could easily be used against American allies in that region. It could be used against Turkey. It could be used against Jordan. It could be used against Israel.

If the use of weapons of mass destruction in Syria goes unchallenged and if President Asad can get away with the use of chemical weapons, what message does that send to the regime in Iran and its ambition to become a nuclear weapons state and perhaps use nuclear weapons? What message does it send to the Government of North Korea, which is openly testing the use of nuclear weapons?

We have a direct interest in preventing the use of weapons of mass destruction, and we have to work with the international community to say this will not go unchallenged. We not only have a moral imperative--and we do have a moral imperative--but we also have an issue of our national security interest. If these weapons of mass destruction get in the hands of terrorist organizations and groups, it threatens the security of Americans and it threatens the security of our allies. We have a responsibility to protect the national security of the people of this country.

I have engaged many people in Maryland who have talked to me about their concerns about the use of the American military in Syria. They recall what happened when the Congress authorized the use of force in Iraq where there was evidence of chemical weapons, and then we went in and found no chemical weapons. There were statements made about how this would be a limited operation. Our troops were there for a decade. So there is obviously concern about the information being made available to us and what is being asked of the Congress of the United States.

When force was authorized against Iraq and that resolution was pending on the floor, I served in the other body, in the House of Representatives. I had a chance to see firsthand the information about Iraq and its risk factors to the interest of the United States. Some may recall that the popular sentiment was for America to authorize the use of force--for Congress to authorize the use of force. I voted no on that resolution because I was convinced America did not have a national security interest to use military force. So I will explain the difference between the circumstances in Iraq over a decade ago and what we are facing today in Syria.

The original justification for the United States entering its combat troops in Iraq was that Iraq was deeply involved with the then-government of Afghanistan and the attack on our country on September 11. I looked for that information, and I saw no information between the Iraqi Government and the attack on our government. Yet those statements were made and it was used as justification for the use of military force.

Here the justification is the use by Syria of chemical weapons, and that has been established. I believe the international community has now understood the evidence is clear that the Asad regime used chemical weapons in contravention to international norm.

When we were authorizing the Iraq use of force, there were no restrictions on the U.S. military. As everyone knows, we used ground troops. We used hundreds of thousands of ground troops in our campaign in Iraq. American lives were put directly at risk, and it put America directly in harm's way.

The request made by the President of the United States for military action in Syria does not include--and, in fact, the resolution that has come out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee makes it clear that there will be no ground combat troops from the United States of America. We will not be drawn into a ground war.

The Iraqi resolution that was approved over a decade ago had no time limit on that authorization. As we saw with that authorization and with the Afghanistan authorization, those campaigns went for over a decade, with American troops at risk.

The authorization that has come out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee contains a 60-day limitation on the authorization of the use of force. It can be extended once for an additional

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30 days. This is a limited campaign. It is very clear this authorization is restricted to the specific objective to degrade and deter the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and to prevent the transfer of chemical weapons to terrorist organizations.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee recommended resolution is limited. It is limited to that mission. It is limited in the type of military operation--no ground troops. It is limited in time and is not to exceed 60 to 90 days. It is limited to the fact that use of force should be the last option--not the first but the last option.

I have said many times on the floor of the House, and now on the floor of the Senate, that the use of military should be the last

resort. There are other options that need to be explored first. So the resolution that has come out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee requires the President to pursue diplomatic ways to resolve the issue before he can use force. He must certify to Congress that he has done that before he can use force.

Mr. President, you understand this directly because you raised some of these issues. We now have an opportunity that we hope will work. We now have the attention of Russia and Syria since they know America is serious about reacting to Syria's use of chemical weapons. They know we will not stand by.

They have now acknowledged that chemical weapons in great numbers exist in Syria. And, quite frankly, I think they have acknowledged the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Of course, the videos speak for themselves and the physical evidence is overwhelming.

Now the suggestion is they will turn over those chemical weapons to the international community. If that is done, we have achieved our objective in the resolution that is before us. The resolution before us is to degrade and deter the use of chemical weapons by Syria. If they turn their chemical weapons over to the international community, we have achieved our objective. However, any such plan must be verifiable, enforceable, and timely.

Excuse me if I seem a little bit suspicious of the suggestions made by Russia and Syria. I want to make sure they are verifiable, they are enforceable, and that they are timely. We anticipated a diplomatic effort when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee recommended this resolution to the floor of the Senate.

There are many Members of the Senate, including the Presiding Officer, who are looking at ways we can come together to support the President's effort to stand up against the use of chemical weapons. I hope we will be able to come together with language in this resolution that will allow the Syrian Government to turn over its chemical weapons in a timely and enforceable way so military force will not be necessary.

Make no mistake about it, but for the leadership of President Obama and their fear of the use of American military force, we would never be at this opportunity right now where we have a viable diplomatic channel we can pursue. I wanted to acknowledge that we anticipated diplomacy would be used, as it always should be, before the use of our military. We hope our military will not be necessary, but we have to react to the use of chemical weapons.

Let me explain some of what we don't want to see happen. Earlier I referenced the hearings we had in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I congratulate Senator Menendez and Senator Corker, the chairman and ranking Republican on our committee. We had a very open hearing, we had access to classified information, and then we had an open discussion in our committee where all views were heard.

We tried to recommend a resolution we thought was responsible for the Congress to weigh in on. It was not the resolution the President submitted to us. It was one that was much more limited to the authorization we thought was appropriate. I think it has served its purpose from the point of view of putting Syria on notice that the United States is prepared to join the international community to say: Chemical weapons will not be allowed to be used. We also made it clear we will not be drawn into a civil war.

President Assad has done some horrible things in that country. In my view, he has lost the legitimacy of leading the country, but it is up to the Syrians to solve their civil conflict. American troops will not be drawn into the civil problems within Syria itself. They are going to have to resolve that issue.

As the United States has said, and as the international community has

said, there needs to be a political solution to the future of Syria. Yes, there are some good people in the opposition and there are some people we are concerned about in the opposition. At the end of the day, it is up to the Syrians, through a political process, to determine their own government. What we should expect is a government that will respect the human rights of all the people of Syria and will respect the right of Syrians to determine who their leader should be. All ethnic communities should be able to live in peace in Syria, and that is our objective, to get to that political solution. We will not be drawn into a broader conflict.

As I said earlier, the people I have talked to in Maryland don't want war. The people I have talked to in this Nation do not want the United States drawn into another war, and neither do I.

One more point about the response to the use of chemical weapons. Yes, our first priority is to make sure these chemical weapons aren't used again. The best way to do that is to get control of the weapons and make sure they are not used and, hopefully, destroyed.

President Asad needs to be held accountable. He has committed war crimes. He has committed crimes against humanity. He needs to be held accountable for the criminal actions he has perpetrated on the people of Syria. As we know, over 100,000 have lost their lives, many of whom were civilians who were put in harm's way by the Syrian Government against international norms. I encourage my colleagues to join me in the effort of calling on an international tribunal to take President Asad, in this case, and establish the international justice so that he is held accountable for his actions.

One last point about the resolution before us. It is important to work with the international community. I hope we will find more countries standing up for the importance of international participation regarding condemning the use of chemical weapons. One of the hopes we have in this new opportunity for a diplomatic solution is for the United Nations to assume its appropriate role. The United Nations Security Council will have an opportunity as early as today to pass an enforceable resolution condemning what happened in Syria and accepting the offer to take control of all of its chemical weapons and do it in a way that is enforceable and in a way that accomplishes its goal. I hope the United Nations Security Council will act. I hope the international community will join us. United States leadership is needed, and President Obama is providing it. But the key point is we must respond to the use of chemical weapons.

I think this debate is strengthening our country. I understand there are different views. I urge my colleagues to come together to support a resolution that puts America on record supporting President Obama in saying we will not permit the use of chemical weapons to go unchallenged, that our objective is to make sure the world is safer, and we are prepared to work with the international community in order to achieve those objectives.

With that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. Warren). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the time until 7 p.m. be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to enter into a colloquy with my dear friend Senator

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Heitkamp of North Dakota so we can talk about the serious situation we have before us.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia is recognized.

Mr. MANCHIN. I thank the Chair.

(The remarks of Mr. Manchin and Ms. Heitkamp pertaining to the introduction of S.J. Res. 22 are located in today's Record under ``Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.'')

Mr. MANCHIN. I thank the Senator and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Ms. BALDWIN. Madam President, I come to speak to the important debate we are having about the most sobering issue I face as a Senator, as a Wisconsinite, and as an American--the issue of military action by the United States.

Let me start by saying that the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people is morally reprehensible and a serious violation of longstanding international law. The various treaties and conventions addressing these issues have been ratified by most of the world's nations. There is a reason why almost the entire world has gathered under the Chemical Weapons Convention to ban these weapons. It is because chemical weapons are truly barbaric in nature. They are a global threat, and they therefore require a global response.

The President has made the right choice to seek congressional authorization for any potential military action in Syria. The gravity of these issues before us is significant and they deserve a full debate. President Obama should be praised for understanding and appreciating that fact. We must demand that all Presidents--not just this President--come to Congress to get approval before taking military action in another country in instances where we are not facing an imminent threat. I have made that case with both Democratic and Republican Presidents.

I strongly believe our response to this situation must not be a unilateral military action. This is not America's responsibility alone, and it is not in our interest to set the precedent that it is our responsibility alone.

Syria violated international laws and should be held accountable by the international community. America must not act alone. The use of chemical weapons is a global atrocity that demands a global response, and that is why I oppose going to war in Syria and I oppose authorizing military involvement in Syria's civil war--not for 1 day, not for 60 days, not for a decade. I do not believe we should involve ourselves militarily in the middle of a brutal years-long civil war. That would not strengthen America's national security. But the answer is not to do nothing. The answer, rather, is to create a situation where these violations of humanitarian norms and crimes against humanity can be dealt with effectively by the U.N. and other international institutions.

We must continue to focus on building a global coalition to support the encouraging developments in the past few days and to resolve this crisis without the use of unilateral military engagement in Syria. By working through the United Nations and its institutions, we strengthen international frameworks that can help resolve the conflict in Syria

and build a safer and stronger international community moving forward.

I firmly believe that the recent potential for progress in today's U.N. discussions is a testament to American democracy. By President Obama fulfilling his constitutional duties to come to Congress and by our serious debate here on Capitol Hill, I believe America has helped drive a more constructive international debate and engagement on Asad's regime's atrocities. We must now give the opportunity of a path forward without military involvement in Syria a chance to succeed.

Madam President, I yield back my time and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Congressional Record Senate Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/9/9/senate-section/article/s6273-7>

[Pages S6273-S6284]

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AUTHORIZING THE LIMITED AND SPECIFIED USE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES AGAINST SYRIA--MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move to consider S.J. Res. 21.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the joint resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to S.J. Res. 21 to authorize limited and specified use of the United States Armed Forces against Syria.

===== NOTE =====

On page S6273, September 9, 2013, in the second column, under the heading of AUTHORIZING THE LIMITED AND SPECIFIED USE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES AGAINST SYRIA--MOTION TO PROCEED the following appears: . . . move to consider S. J. Res. 26 . . . The legislative clerk read as follows: A joint resolution (S.J. Res. 21) . . .

The Record has been corrected to read: . . . move to consider S. J. Res. 21 . . . The legislative clerk read as follows: Motion to proceed to S. J. Res. 21 to . . .

===== END NOTE =====

Schedule

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this evening the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider a couple of would-be judges, Caproni and Broderick, both from the Southern District of New York, at 5:30 p.m., and then there will be two rollcall votes on the confirmation of those nominations. We may only have one rollcall vote and one voice vote, but we will get both of them done today.

I just moved to proceed to the joint resolution reported last week by the Foreign Relations Committee to authorize the limited use of force against Syria. This matter demands the attention of the Senate and this country. It is this resolution the Senate will turn to. Regardless of where Senators stand on the merits of this issue, we should have this debate. I hope all Senators will support proceeding to this measure. That vote will occur sometime on Wednesday on the motion to proceed.

Under a previous order, at 11 tomorrow morning, the Senate is to have a motion to proceed to the energy efficiency bill. It is obvious we are not going to be able to do that. I will work with the Republican leader to reach a consent agreement to defer consideration of that bill to a later time.

On the Syria resolution, I intend that the Senate should have a full and open debate. I encourage Senators to come to the floor to begin that debate.

Also this week, President Obama will come to the Capitol to address the Democratic caucus. He has also extended his invitation to the Republicans. I have not heard back from the Republicans as to whether they wish to hear from the President.

President Obama will address the Nation tomorrow evening. Senior administration officials will brief all Senators in a classified session on Wednesday. There will be other meetings in the White House today with Democratic and Republican Senators. The Senate will give this matter the serious attention it deserves.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. President, the first large-scale military use of deadly military weapons occurred almost 100 years ago when the Germans deployed chlorine gas during World War I. During that war,

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World War I, there were 1,200,000 casualties from attacks with deadly toxins--chlorine gas, mustard gas, and other deathly and destructive chemical agents. Great Britain, Austria, Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States all suffered losses.

``This is a horrible weapon,'' wrote German Major Karl von Zinger, who reported a firsthand battlefield account of the carnage to his superior officers.

One hundred thousand soldiers died, and most of the other casualties were debilitated for life by the exposure to these deadly toxins. The effects of these killers were horrific. Those who didn't die suffered blindness, burns, blisters, and labored breathing. For those dying, it was as terrible as anyone could imagine. The great World War I era poet Wilfred Owen from Great Britain wrote that gassed soldiers cried out like men on fire as they drowned in air thick with poison. The world was horrified by the gruesomeness of these new evil weapons of war, and

so, as a global community, we agreed these weapons should be banished from the battlefield forever.

Despite the success of global efforts to eliminate their use, today the Syrian Government is the second largest holder of chemical weapons in the world--only shortly behind North Korea. The well-documented use of these toxic and unsavory stockpiles by President Bashar al-Asad's regime is a certain violation of the overwhelming international consensus forged against these weapons nearly 10 decades ago. It is a clear violation of human decency. This is not the first time Asad has used chemical weapons against his own citizens. We all heard in our classified briefings that these weapons have been used a number of times, but this is the most gruesome and extensive.

This morning I watched some film in my office. The film takes about 13 minutes. It was pictures that were taken following the dropping of those horrible weapons. I will never get that out of my mind. There were little baby boys and girls dressed in colorful play clothes. Some of the boys and girls looked like teenagers. They were retching and had spasms with their arms. Of course there were older people as well. These poisons kill the kids first. Their little bodies cannot take this as well as older folks. It kills the older people also but more slowly.

The well-documented use of these unsavory stockpiles by Asad is a certain violation, I repeat, of the overwhelming international consensus forged against these weapons 10 decades past. I have talked about human decency. It is a clear violation of human decency.

The August 21 attacks killed more than 1,000 civilians--including hundreds of these children. This week we will further examine the evidence that is growing which proves the viciousness of these attacks and discuss their brutal results.

The innocent civilians who were killed by the Syrian Government during those attacks died terrible deaths. Their death was just as painful and shocking as those suffered on the battlefields of World War I. These deaths were just as terrible as those that convinced the global community to outlaw the use of such brutal tactics against soldiers, and, of course, against innocent civilians such as those Asad murdered last month.

The evidence of the Asad regime, and their using outlawed nerve agents against its own citizens, is clear and very convincing. The Syrian Government has worked to hide the gruesome evidence. They have done it a number of different ways. After the bodies had been cleared away, they sent a barrage of weaponry in there--artillery and tanks--and blasted the ground and destroyed the evidence. They couldn't destroy it; it is still there, but they did try. They worked very hard to hide these gruesome attacks by repeatedly bombing the site of these grisly and unforgettable occurrences. Without question, this brutality demands a response. The satellite imagery and amateur video shot by eyewitnesses--and I talked about that--paint a clear picture of the brutality of this awful regime.

President Obama sought approval 2 weeks ago for targeted military action--action that will hold President Asad accountable for these heinous acts. Congress has done its due diligence. Since President Obama announced he would seek congressional approval for the limited military action against Syria, the Senate has held many committee hearings and briefings as well as five classified all-Members briefings. There are more briefings and much debate to come this week--including open debate here in the Senate.

On a bipartisan basis the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed a resolution that restricts the use of military force to 60 days, with a single 30-day extension. The resolution reflects President Obama's proposal for limited military action--including strikes of limited duration and limited scope.

The resolution plainly states there may be no U.S. military boots on

the ground. America's intention, as specified in the resolution, is not to engage in an open-ended conflict or invasion. Nor is it the Commander in Chief's intention to commit ground troops to this conflict or to effect regime change. Rather, the Senate will be voting to uphold the century-long international consensus that chemical weapons have no place on the battlefield and certainly no place in attacking innocent civilians. This standard demands any government--a dictator or any other government--that has used chemical weapons to be held accountable.

Some may disagree with my conclusions. I don't expect everyone to agree with the statement I am giving here today, as is anyone's right, but this is my firm conviction.

Today, many Americans say that these atrocities are none of our business, that they are not our concern. I disagree. Anytime the powerful turn such weapons of terror and destruction against the powerless it is our business.

The weapons in question are categorically different. Chemical weapons, we know, can kill not just dozens or hundreds of people but tens of thousands of innocents in a single attack--tens of thousands. These weapons don't just pose a threat to the Syrian people or to our allies in the region; they pose a threat to every one of us, every American, and, in particular, every member of the U.S. Armed Forces.

If we allow Asad's use of chemical weapons to go unchecked and unanswered, hostile forces around the world will also assume that these terrible tactics of demons such as Asad are permissible, that they are OK. That America cannot allow. That is why the massacres in Syria are our business and our concern, both as humans and as Americans. America's willingness to stand for what is right should not end at its borders.

Our intervention on behalf of those in danger hasn't always been popular. Look back at history. There has always been part of our society that prefers isolation. Look prior to World War I. Look prior to World War II. Some prefer isolation. That is the easy thing to do. But sitting on the sidelines isn't what made the United States of America the greatest Nation in the world in years past and, yes, today, and sitting on the sidelines won't make us a better Nation tomorrow.

As America faces yet another crisis of conscience, another opportunity to intervene on behalf of humanity, my mind returns to that turning point in the world's history when the United States of America faced down an evil regime that murdered millions of innocent citizens. Millions of civilians and prisoners of war were murdered by gas in Nazi death camps--Belsen, Treblinka, Auschwitz. Never again, swore the world. Never again would we permit the use of these poisonous weapons of war.

Fourteen blocks from here, down Constitution Avenue, is the Holocaust Museum. We walk in there and see a quote on the wall from Dante's famous ``Inferno.'' Here is what it says: ``The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality.'' I repeat: ``The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality.'' I have thought about those words very often--and very often lately--as I have considered whether America should take action to avert further atrocities in Syria.

In Europe, in World War II, far too many were neutral. Far too many around the world were neutral. Far too many in America were neutral, and in Europe, in World War II. Six million

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Jews and tens of thousands of gypsies, disabled people, gay people, and political dissidents were murdered. Never again.

Now we are faced with that choice again. Some say it is not our fight. Some say Syria is too far away. Some say it is not in our security interest. Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States--we should all remember our history. There were 1.2 million casualties in World War I from these poisons.

We should remember our history. Rabbi Hillel, a respected and famous scholar, said more than 2,000 years ago: ``If I care only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?''

I, Harry Reid, say: If not now, when?

I believe America must set the example for the rest of the world. If America must once again lead--as we have before and we will again--to set an example for the world, so be it. This is America. It is who we are as a country. That is what we do as a country. That is where we stand as a country. That is the American tradition of which I am proud and a tradition which I have faith will continue.

We are the United States of America.

Order of Procedure

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there is an order outstanding. I ask unanimous consent that the order until 5 o'clock today be modified on the motion to proceed, with the other aspects of the order remaining in place.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Reservation of Leader Time

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of debate on the motion to proceed to S.J. Res. 21 until 5 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak to the issues the majority leader just addressed. I don't anticipate speaking for more than 12 to 15 minutes. I know the minority leader is delayed in being able to be here. I would be happy to defer to him when he arrives or I would be happy to defer to someone coming back to speak on the business of the day.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, President Obama will finally make his case to the American people tomorrow, explaining why he wants to take military action against Syria. His explanation is long overdue.

I think I have a pretty good idea of what I expect he will say. First, he will explain that we have compelling evidence that it was Asad himself who used long-banned chemical weapons to murder his own people. This is not seriously contested. Neither I nor perhaps I think any of my colleagues here dispute these sad facts. It has been well documented by our intelligence sources. As a member of that committee, I have had access to those sources, and I don't doubt the conclusion of the President and others that Asad is responsible for this attack.

The President will also most likely explain that such a horrendous violation of international norms deserves a worldwide response of condemnation. Who could possibly look at those standards and those rooms full of dead children and not agree that the perpetrators have to face consequences for their crimes?

The President will also surely discuss the issue of credibility. He is likely to maintain, as he did recently in Stockholm, that it is not his own credibility at stake, nor even American credibility, but the credibility of the international community that will be harmed by inaction.

I agree with those who say the President's credibility and our Nation's credibility are linked. They are. However, with his now notorious and, I believe, ill-considered "red line" comment, President Obama has forced us to debate a military attack in yet another Middle Eastern country. Unfortunately, it appears that the purpose of this military attack first and foremost is perhaps to defend his own credibility. I am certain that if the President had not drawn his red line, we would not be having this discussion. In that case, Asad's use of such weapons would be roundly condemned as yet another example of his horrendous brutality, but we would be no more eager to engage militarily in his civil war than we have been as the other 100,000 Syrian people were being slaughtered by more conventional means.

Make no mistake--it is the credibility issue that has brought us to this pass, and the credibility issue is of President Obama's own making--his and his alone.

So tomorrow evening the President will need to explain to the American public exactly what will be achieved by this limited, focused attack, as described by the administration, beyond simply a token punishment for a horrendous crime in defense of his credibility. The President has said the proposed limited attack is to be a "shot across the bow." His Secretary of State, Secretary Kerry, has said it is going to be unbelievably small. We need to know what the plan is, and will be, should President Asad be undeterred by this unbelievably small, shot-across-the-bow attack. What if he isn't? What then? What do we do next? The President needs to explain that.

We need to know how this escalation is likely to influence extremist radical fighters now active in Syria--extremist radical fighters. There is not a line between good guys and bad guys here. There is the infiltration of Al Qaeda, al-Nusra, and other terrorist organizations and individuals with those seeking to overturn Asad. So it is not clear just how Syria will turn out should Asad be deposed. I don't think these extremist fighters will be overly concerned with an "unbelievably small, shot across the bow" response by the United States.

What will Hezbollah and Hamas and Al Qaeda affiliate fighters do when this "show of force" is over? What is the President's plan of action if the chemical weapons fall into the hands of these anti-American jihadists? And how about the always-threatened spillover of the Syria conflict into Lebanon or Turkey or Jordan? Will an attack intended to slap Asad's wrist while defending President Obama's credibility make expansion of the conflict more likely or less likely? Most importantly, the President needs to explain to the American people more thoroughly exactly how America's national security and best interests will be served by this response.

The President, in my opinion, must also address additional concerns that are widely--almost universally--shared by the American people. We all know that taking America to war without support from the people is the surest path to disaster. I suggest this must be avoided, and the President is going to have to make his case as to how to avoid that.

Over this last week I visited with Hoosiers from across Indiana to gather their input. Through these visits, as well as calls and e-mails by the thousands, the vast majority--shockingly, the majority of Hoosiers I have heard from are opposed to U.S. military engagement in Syria. As all conscientious lawmakers, I know I have to balance the views of my constituents with my own judgment on how best to represent

their interests and the interests of our country.

In this case, I must first ask myself, what do the people back home in my State know that many of the rest of us here in Washington perhaps do not, or at least have expressed?

First, the people back home know that America has been at war in far-off lands for more than a decade--12 years on. They have seen long repeated deployments of their loved ones, and they have seen the body bags come home. They are aware of sacrifices that have been made in the name of protecting our interests, but they are less aware of positive results of those sacrifices.

They see Iraq descending again into conflict as its own citizens continue to slaughter one another because of different interpretations of the Koran or different political motivations or just pure outright quests for power. They see a corrupt government there that authorizes overflights of Russian aircraft bringing modern weapons to Syria to fuel a similar conflict.

Hoosiers see an Afghanistan so deeply corrupt and ungrateful to the United States that the current regime tries to extort huge ransom payments simply

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to permit us to remove equipment and personnel from that sorry country. They do not see meaningful progress toward a democratic, stable, and humane government that was to be the objective of American sacrifice of blood and treasure. They do not see how our 12 years of effort have contributed to our own national security interests.

Hoosiers look at the spiraling disaster in Egypt, where the choices have been an extremist, deeply anti-American Islamic radicalism or a brutal and undemocratic military dictatorship. Both benefiting from billions of American taxpayer dollars spent on weapons or lining uniform pockets. In the meantime, fellow Christians are being killed in their churches.

Simply put, the people of Indiana do not see that American policy and action have attained meaningful results in the Middle East. Instead, they see a region of continuing and increasing violence, chaos, and disintegration. They are war weary and they are discouraged after more than a decade of wars that have not produced the desired outcomes.

What they do not see is an articulate response. They do not know what our regional strategy is in the Middle East because no one is explaining it, much less pursuing it. They cannot measure progress because they do not know the destination. And they cannot evaluate this latest proposal for a fourth military engagement in the Middle East because they cannot see how it contributes to our own security here at home.

More importantly, they worry that a focused, limited attack on Syria will end up being something else entirely because so little thought has been devoted to potential unintended consequences. Yes, they are war weary, but the American people are also war wise.

In addition to the above unanswered questions, for me, one of the most important questions is how this proposed limited strike will affect Iran's perception of our resolve and our ability to prevent that country from acquiring nuclear weapons capability. It is not so much what we do or how we do it but how Iran perceives the action we take. This may be the most significant question of all because, unlike Syria, Iran poses threats to our core national security interests.

Part of the administration's argument is that to do nothing would embolden the Iranian regime as they pursue their own weapons-of-mass-destruction programs. But I think we have to raise the question, is that really so, or is it, perhaps, the reverse? Will a limited punitive

attack discourage the mullahs in Iran because of some degree of destruction--remember, unbelievably small--or will it actually encourage the Iranians because there is no followup option or broader strategic context informing our policy? If an attack is ineffective in altering Asad's behavior or fortune, will it not actually encourage Iran in pursuing its own weapons program? I have not heard the administration address this question.

Also, will a fourth military engagement in the Middle East make it harder to assemble popular and political support for action should Iran's behavior make that necessary? My constant fear here during the past several years, as I have been engaged on the Iranian issue of the pursuit of nuclear weapons, has been that our country will be too militarily, politically, and economically exhausted to confront the real strategic enemy when our core interests require it. I fear a Syria attack will make this problem even more difficult. To my knowledge, no one has yet to address this question within the administration, which President Obama, like the previous three Presidents, has declared a nuclear-weapons-capable Iran to be ``unacceptable.''

I think this is a critical question we must have to ask ourselves. For all of those who are saying: We will change the perception of Iran to the point where they will change their behavior in the pursuit of nuclear weapons by a, quote, unbelievably small shot across the bow or a military response that could lead us into further conflict in the Middle East--I think this undermines our credibility. I think the question has to be asked: Is the reverse going to happen as a consequence of all of this?

This is a deeply historic and profound moment for our Nation. It carries an importance that goes well beyond Syria or even the Middle East. This debate carries important consequences for the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of our government.

To refuse the Commander in Chief war-making authorities when he has asked for them is not a decision any of us can take lightly.

We must all balance the views of the people we represent--even when they have been nearly unanimous--with other elements, such as the abstract, unknowable geostrategic factors that could carry profound consequences not just for this year or next year, for this generation, but for many generations; and such as the compelling moral arguments that resonate with special strength in our unique Nation guided from birth by moral principles; and now even the constitutional challenges that could affect the delicate balance we have maintained for two centuries.

I will weigh all I have said before I announce how I intend to vote on the resolution before us. I will defer to the President's request to address the Nation. In my opinion, consequential actions proposed by the President need to be clarified and numerous questions need to be answered before we grant the authority to the President to engage America in yet another Middle East conflict.

With that, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I wish to address the subject of Syria.

First of all, I wish to commend to anyone who is listening to my voice to view the videos the intelligence community has released. They came from social media. There are 13 videos that came from a body of in excess of 100 videos, but they show the horror of what happens to the human body with an attack by a weapon of mass destruction--in this case, chemical weapons, a gas called sarin.

It is my hope the President, when he speaks to the Nation on Tuesday, will show clips of those videos because I think very few Americans have seen the extent of those videos, even though they have been shown on some cable shows in some limited amounts. They could see the range of why, almost a century ago, in 1925, the nations of the world came together in a treaty after the use of chemical weapons in World War I. This treaty banned the use of chemical weapons anywhere, any time, including in war, because of the horrific nature their use causes. In the 1990s this was subsequently reaffirmed in a convention or some kind of conclave which the nations of the world--I believe in excess of 180 nations--signed banning the use of chemical weapons.

If you watch the videos, you will see why. You will see what happens to innocent human beings as they struggle for life before the throes of death overtake them. You will see this on the videos. Of course, parents may wish to use discretion because it is going to make a lasting impression. You will see how the body starts to shut down by the nerves being attacked.

Interestingly, for the first time in a CBS interview today, President Asad of Syria has said, has admitted, today, that Syria has chemical weapons. Up to this point that was denied. No wonder he would want to deny, because when you see what happens in the use of them and what it does to the human nervous system--and I don't wish to be graphic, because I want anybody listening to what I am saying to watch them. I hope the President will show them Tuesday night, to see how the human body convulses when it attacks the nervous system--the convulsions, the twitching, what happens to the face, the respiratory system, and all of the evidence that comes from that.

The American people need to know what we are dealing with, not only in Syria but in other nations that possess chemical weapons. This is not only sarin, which was the gas used here, but also mustard gas and a toxin called VX that directly attacks the nervous system. It does not have to be inhaled,

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like mustard gas or sarin, to do its evil deed. Instead, VX can be absorbed through the skin.

If the American people understand the consequences of the use of this, they will understand why it is classified as a weapon of mass destruction, along with biological weapons of mass destruction introducing some plague among a community of innocents and, of course, the weapon of mass destruction that most everybody recognizes, the nuclear weapon.

There are three weapons of mass destruction: chemical, biological, and nuclear. This is why, in the family of civilized nations, we have said their use is so abhorrent that civilized humans say they should be banned. But they weren't. They were used extensively on August 21.

Before I give the unclassified evidence, I wish to point out that maybe there is a little opening on the occasion of the Russian Foreign Minister today, since our Secretary of State, almost in an offhanded comment a few days ago, said it would certainly be a game changer if he, Asad, would allow the international community to come in and take control of his Syrian chemical weapons. The Russian Foreign Minister today picked that up. Supposedly there is a comment by an official out of Syria who says that is worth looking into. I can't speak to the authenticity of that comment. I have heard it was said.

Whatever it is, of course, Asad is the decisionmaker and it is ultimately going to come down on him. But in the meantime, what the United States ought to do--and the Congress of the United States ought to authorize what the President of the United States has requested, that the Congress back him in giving him the authority to use a

limited, short duration retaliation in degrading Asad's capability of utilizing these weapons in the future.

If Congress will give the President that authority, it may well be the additional incentive for the ultimate decisionmaker, President Asad, to do what the Russian Foreign Minister has suggested. That would be a good thing.

In the meantime, they are going to be debating this and we are going to be put to the question: Do we support the President in this time of peril?

Let us look at the facts. I think when you see the videos, clearly, most every reasonable human being is going to conclude chemical weapons were used on innocents in the Damascus suburbs on the night of August 21.

The question then, of course, is, is there a chain of custody to show in fact they came from the Syrian army? There is an unclassified body of evidence that clearly shows, to put it in the speak of the intelligence community, we have high confidence. That means it happened.

How did that happen? The assessment is the Syrian chemical weapons personnel, who are associated with the chemical weapons part of the Syrian command, were preparing chemical munitions prior to the attack. This is all unclassified. There were streams of data of human signals and geospatial intelligence that revealed regime activities that were associated with the preparations for that chemical weapons attack. Syria chemical weapons personnel, we know, were operating in the Damascus suburb from August 18 all the way through August 21. That was the suburb that was attacked. Multiple streams of intelligence indicate the Syrian army executed the rocket and artillery attack against those suburbs in the early morning hours of August 21. We have satellite detections that corroborate those attacks from a regime-controlled neighborhood to where the attacks landed. At the same time, social media reports started exploding about a chemical attack in the Damascus suburbs. Those social media reports started coming at 2:30 in the morning. Three hospitals in Damascus received approximately 3,600 patients displaying the symptoms of a nerve agent exposure, and they received them in less than 3 hours on the morning of August 21.

As I said earlier, there have been over 100 videos attributed to the attack. This has been distilled down into 13 videos, many of them showing large numbers of bodies exhibiting the physical signs of nerve agent exposure. Any Member of the Senate will have access to the classified information that shows the Syrian opposition does not have the capability to fabricate those videos or the physical symptoms verified by the medical personnel.

So when we put all of this together, with past Syrian practice and some of the small-scale attacks they have done previously, the conclusion is obvious: The Syrian regime of Bashar Asad was willing and directed the attack on August 21.

To this Senator, who has had the privilege of seeing and hearing classified information--and I have visited with President Asad three times, the last time being 6 years ago where the two of us had a sharp exchange over what was happening in Lebanon and the fact he was harboring Hamas and Hezbollah, which of course he denied--the conclusion is obvious: There is a substantial body of information that corroborates that the Syrian Government was responsible for the chemical weapons attack on August 21.

There is additional information for the Senators to see, but the question is, Are we going to agree to the President's request that we authorize him to attack? If we don't, where does that leave the President on any kind of negotiations in the future? If the President decides to go ahead and attack, we automatically give to the opponents

in these countries--especially President Asad and North Korea and Iran--the obvious scenario that the American people are so divided that they won't support the President. So if he were to decide to attack--knowing it is his responsibility to provide for the national security, and he has sworn to provide for that national security--we will look so divided at that point, whatever the scenario is for the future.

What about the mindset of other people who want to do harm to the United States? Does it give additional license to North Korea if we were to do nothing? North Korea is sitting on a huge stockpile of chemical weapons, not to mention their nuclear weapons. What about Iran? We are very concerned as they continue to energize weapons material and march down the road perhaps to building a nuclear weapon. What kind of message does it send to Iran? Just game that out. If Iran had a nuclear weapon or felt free to use chemical weapons, what would that do to the interests of the United States in that region of the world, not to mention our allies in the region, of which there are many.

So it is clear to this Senator. I will admit I don't know why the President did not keep his own counsel and make the decision without saying he wanted to come to Congress, but he made that decision, and now it is up to us.

Hopefully, there may be some validity to this report coming from the Russian Foreign Minister, but we won't know that for a long while, until, as we say, the proof is in the pudding with Asad turning over control of all the chemical weapons to an international body. In the meantime, are we going to support the President? Clearly, in the interest of the national security of this country and our allies, I think that is a position we must take. I will vote yes on the resolution.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, what is the pending business before the Senate?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senate is on the motion to proceed to S.J. Res. 21.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Which is?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Syria resolution.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, it is to that ominous resolution that I would like to speak.

Within a few days the Senate will be called upon to vote on whether to give the President of the United States limited authority to use military action in response to Syrian President Asad's use of chemical weapons against his own people. It is an enormous and grave decision. It is the most serious vote I can take.

When a U.S. Senator is called upon to authorize America's use of military action or military might, it calls for the

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most sober reflection, the most due diligence analysis of the facts and the compelling need because once you vote to authorize the use of military might, you cannot take it back. It is one of the few votes you can't take back. We can vote on our budget this year, but there will be another vote next year. You can vote to confirm a member of the Cabinet, but they serve at the pleasure of the President. But once you vote to use military might or military action, it is irrevocable, so I

take it very seriously.

I say to the men and women of our military that we owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude. I think that should not only be with yellow ribbons, but we also owe it to them to do the due diligence to choose the wisest, most prudent course.

This is what I have done as I have contemplated my vote on the Syria resolution. I went to numerous briefings before Asad used chemical weapons, and I have gone to all of the briefings since then. I participated as a member of the Intelligence Committee in a variety of meetings. I went to a classified House and Senate briefing. I have listened carefully to the President, to the Secretary of State, to the Secretary of Defense, and even had the opportunity to sit with the Vice President of the United States in the Situation Room at the White House to go over this situation and what options are available to the United States of America.

In addition to listening here in Washington, I have also listened to my Marylanders, whether at events or meetings going around the State, whether it has been grocery shopping or just being out in the Maryland community. I have also gotten thousands of e-mails and calls from Maryland constituents, and I want to thank them for their civic engagement. They overwhelmingly oppose military action in Syria. My constituents have spoken loudly and clearly. They don't want a war. They don't want boots on the ground. They don't want an all-in effort. They don't want to use or expend America's talent and treasure on another military expedition. They don't want war, and neither do I.

Yet the use of chemical weapons--a weapon of mass destruction--grim and ghoulish, mandates a response. The use of chemical weapons flies against all international law and international norms. It is an act that should have consequences or I believe it surely will happen again--in Syria, possibly in Korea, possibly used by Iran.

Since the attack, I have been waiting and hoping for a worldwide reaction because if it is serious enough for the world to be aghast, then it is serious enough for them to respond.

I have been waiting to hear from the 189 countries that are signatories to the Chemical Weapons Convention. I believe if you sign a treaty or a convention, you sign up for the responsibility that comes with that, which means stop proliferation of the weapons you signed against; stop the proliferation of chemical weapons; also, if necessary, to take action if mandated.

I am waiting to hear from the Arab League. I wanted to hear from the Arab League, beyond: Yes, we want Asad to be accountable. I don't know what that means--hold him accountable. What does that mean? Does it mean if we use missiles they will send in Arab men to defend Arab women and children? I have not quite heard that.

I have waited to hear from our allies, and there are a hearty, reliable few who have supported us. Are they going to help support the chemical weapons treaty? Are they going to help support the moderates in the opposition? Have they called for a donor conference on refugees? Hello out there.

Then there is the U.N. Security Council. By the way, I applaud the work of the U.N. weapons inspectors and the U.N.'s work on refugees, but where is the Security Council? People will say: Oh, we can't act unless the Security Council acts. Three times Asad enablers at the U.N., Russia and China, have vetoed every effort to move to a political solution--vetoed three times efforts to move to a political solution. The U.N. seems paralyzed in this effort.

In deciding my vote, I had to be sure that chemical weapons were used by the Asad regime. I was 1 of 19 Senators who voted against going to war in Iraq. I did vote after 9/11 to use lethal action against the Taliban, but when it came to the Iraq war, as a member of the Intelligence Committee I had reviewed these briefs and I did not

believe Saddam Hussein had nuclear weapons so I voted no. I was right.

This time is different because, after extensive briefings and the evidence that has been outlined to members of the Intelligence Committee, I am satisfied that, indeed, chemical weapons were used in Syria and I am satisfied the Asad regime gave the order to do so.

There are those who say to me: Senator Barb, aren't you concerned about the risks and the retaliations if we take action? You bet I am. I worry about that. I worry about my own country. I worry about our own military. I worry about treasured allies such as Jordan, Israel, Turkey. But I also worry about the risk of doing nothing because, as I weigh this, I believe the risk and retaliatory possibilities are the same even if we do not act because if they do not use them in retaliation against us there is a very good chance that if we leave it unresponded to, they will use them anyway. There is no guarantee that by doing nothing the bad guys, who have chemical weapons, will do nothing. In fact, I fear that Asad, Iran, and North Korea will be further emboldened.

Last, I had to review the President's resolution that is pending before us, that came out of the Foreign Relations Committee, modified, and the President's plan. The President's plan is very straightforward, his proposal is very straightforward, a targeted limited attack. His purpose is to deter and to degrade; to deter Asad from using those weapons again and to degrade Asad's capability and capacity to use them.

I also listened to the President's promise--and I take him at his word--that any action would not be boots on the ground; that it is not an extended air campaign; that it is not another Iraq or Afghanistan; that we are not in it to try to do regime change. That must come from the Syrian opposition themselves, and I hope others help do that. It is meant to deter the use of chemical weapons and to degrade Asad's capability.

I believe the President's plan is the best response to protect U.S. security interests in the region and to show commitment to our common security interests with allies such as Turkey, Jordan, and Israel. Therefore, after great reflection and as much due diligence as I could do, I want to announce today to my colleagues, and most of all to the people of Maryland who supported me, that I will support the President's request for a targeted, limited military action against the Syrian President Bashar Asad's regime in response to the horrific, grim, and ghoulish use of chemical weapons.

Let me be clear: I have no grand hopes or illusions about what this strike will do. I do not believe this strike will stop Syria's brutal civil war. I do not believe this strike will stop Asad from being a ruthless, brutal dictator. I do not believe a strike will eliminate all of his chemical weapons. But I do believe it will deter and degrade his capability to strike again, and I do believe when you sign up for a convention to ban the use of chemical weapons, the United States of America acts in accordance with its responsibility.

Syria is one of the toughest foreign policy issues on which we have focused; there are not many good options. Yet I believe the President's plan is the best way and, as of this moment, the only way forward. He has my support.

In today's late-breaking news, I understand Russia has now said: Oh, let's put these weapons under international control. Where were the Russians during the U.N. Security Council meetings on those three other occasions? Is this another tactic for delay? Is this just another tactic to enable Asad to have more time to focus?

I remain skeptical, but I will leave that to the President to analyze the Russians' intent about what their followthrough is on that. Today is not to mandate the strike. My vote does not mandate a strike. But my vote is to say: Mr. President, you are the Commander in Chief. We can

only have one at a time. You analyze the situation and if you think it is necessary to protect the security of the United States of America and to fulfill our responsibilities under the conventions we

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have signed on chemical weapons, you have my support to act in what you think is the best way and in our best interests.

I look forward to additional debate with my colleagues and also further in this debate, in coming to closure, hopefully this week.

I yield the floor.

I note the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the situation in Syria and the historic choice facing this Congress and America. I have been deeply concerned about the situation in Syria since March of 2011, when thousands of Syrians from all backgrounds peacefully protested for a change in the politics and the economy of their country. I think many of us believed these peaceful protests would lead to the end of an autocratic Asad regime, just as other despots have fallen in other parts of the Arab world.

Yet President Bashar al-Asad, like his father before him, Hafez al-Asad, instead responded with horrific violence to suppress the aspirations of his own people. With the disturbing help of Russia, Hezbollah, and Iran, Asad has managed to hang on to power and turn his country into a humanitarian nightmare.

I met with the Russian Ambassador to the United States here in my office in Washington on this issue. I visited the refugee camps along the Turkish border. I talked with the moderate Syrian opposition in Istanbul. I discussed this situation with the Turkish President, Mr. Gul, and their Foreign Minister, Davutoglu, and met with many Chicago-area Syrian Americans.

I hoped diplomatic and economic pressure would bring an end to the mayhem and human suffering in Syria. I know the American people feel a responsibility for those overseas in need and those who are struggling to find freedom. But I also know something else about the people of my State of Illinois, and I believe of this country: They are weary of war.

Then came the August 21 chemical attack in the suburbs of Damascus in the middle of the night. At that moment an important challenge was thrown down to the international community. That is not in any way to diminish the violence that has taken place in Syria over the last several years. Over 100,000 died in that violence.

But when it comes to the use of chemical weapons, the world made a decision almost 100 years ago about their use--even in war. How did we reach this international consensus on this horrible weapon? We saw firsthand what it could do. The large-scale use of chemical weapons in World War I killed many and left many wounded and disabled.

Those who have some memory of this war--either from a history class or having spoken to someone who served there--understand what it meant. These photos can't do justice to the devastation of chemical weapons and poison gas, but this is a German gas attack on the Eastern Front in World War I. We can see that as the gas billowed, the victims were anyone who happened to be in its wake.

This is also a photograph of British troops from World War I who were subjected to the poison gas, the chemical weapon of the day, and

blinded during the battle of Estaire in 1918. These photos show just a snapshot of the use of poison gases which don't reach the level of virulence of those used today. Yet maybe even more poignant are the audio recordings of the actual former World War I British soldiers maintained by the BBC for generations so the experience would not be forgotten.

This is one excerpt of British troops struggling to cope with the effects of chemical warfare:

Propped up against a wall was a dozen men--all gassed--their colours were black, green and blue, tongues hanging out and eyes staring--one or two were dead and others beyond human aid, some were coughing up green froth from their lungs--as we advanced we passed many more men lying in the ditches and gutterways--shells were bursting all around.

This BBC report went on to say:

My Respirator fell to pieces with the continual removal and readjustment--the gas closed my eyes and filled them with matter and I could not see. I was left lying in the trench with one other gassed man and various wounded beings and corpses and forced to lie and spit, cough and gasp the whole of the day in that trench.

Another soldier recorded by the BBC said:

. . . the faces of our lads who lay in the open changed colour and presented a gruesome spectacle. Their faces and hands gradually assumed a blue and green color and their buttons and metal fittings on their uniform were all discoloured. Many lay there with their legs drawn up and clutching their throats.

As a result of the horrors of World War I, in 1925 the Geneva Protocol prohibited the use of chemical and biological weapons in war. It was drawn up and signed at a conference held in Geneva under the auspices of the League of Nations, the precursor of the United Nations. This happened in June of 1925, and it became a force of law in February of 1928. Syria was a signatory to this agreement.

Let me read the opening of this protocol. It is even relevant today.

Whereas the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of all analogous liquids, materials or devices, has been justly condemned by the general opinion of the civilized world; and

Whereas the prohibition of such use has been declared in Treaties to which the majority of Powers of the world are Parties; and

To the end that this prohibition shall be universally accepted as a part of International Law, binding alike the conscience and the practice of nations.

What the world was saying in 1925 was clear: These chemical weapons would never, ever be accepted in the civilized world. This message was reaffirmed by the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling, and Use of Chemical Weapons, which went into effect in 1997 and to which almost every country in the world has signed--almost every country. Those who have not signed: Angola, Egypt, North Korea, South Sudan, and Syria.

While not completely taken off the world's battlefields--notably in the case of Iraq, which used poison gas against Iran and its own Kurdish people in the 1980s--the global prohibition against using chemical weapons has been largely upheld for almost a century, that is, until last month in Damascus, Syria. Syria has one of the largest stockpiles of chemical weapons in the world.

At our hearing last week, I asked General Dempsey whether the reports which we have from the French were accurate. They reported the Syrians now have almost 1,000 tons of chemical agents and hundreds of tons of the deadly gas sarin, which has been detected in the pathological investigation of those who were victims on August 21 in Damascus, Syria.

Despite all international warnings not to do so--the Syrian Government is literally a superpower when it comes to chemical weapons and has an arsenal on such a large scale--on August 21, in the desperation of war, Bashar Asad unleashed these chemical weapons in his own city on his own people.

These are horrible pictures of what happened as a result of that attack. I have seen worse. One room of children stacked like cordwood--victims of these chemical weapons. We don't believe it was the first time he has used them, and his father used them before him. But it is the largest scale we have ever seen of the use of chemical weapons by Asad in Syria.

Syria has crossed the line the civilized world said must never be crossed. Not only has the community of nations agreed that such weapons are never to be used but other regimes with weapons of mass destruction or plans for such weapons--including North Korea and Iran--are undoubtedly watching to see what the world will do now.

Now that Bashar Asad has used chemical weapons in Syria, now that the world has reported it, now that the photos are there for the world to see, and now that the pathological investigations are completed, what will the world do? Ideally there is a place to resolve it--the U.N. Security Council. But, sadly, both Russia and China have said they will veto not only any effort

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to hold Asad to account, they have literally vetoed efforts to even pass resolutions condemning the use of chemical weapons without specificity in Syria.

Russia's behavior is incredible and particularly perverse given the thousands of Russian soldiers who were victims of chemical weapon attacks in World War I. In May 1915 alone, Russian soldiers on the Eastern Front suffered 9,000 casualties--1,000 of them fatalities--as a result of German chemical weapons.

Today I was in the airport in Chicago, and the news was flashing about an overture made by President Putin to try to put an end to this controversy. I, of course, salute and applaud any effort to resolve this the right way and verifiable way, and to do it with dispatch.

What I understand this proposal to be is that the Syrians will somehow destroy their cache of chemical weapons and, of course, forswear never to use them. That would be a good opportunity, but it will be a difficult outcome because investigating with a third party, such as the United Nations, verifying where these weapons are, removing them from Syria in the midst of a civil war, is particularly challenging. If there is a way to do this diplomatically, safely, and to do it in a fashion where we can be certain this type of atrocity will not occur again, we absolutely have a responsibility to pursue it.

I don't understand how Russia and China can be signatories to the 1925 Geneva Protocols and the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and then turn around and protect Syria in the Security Council

of the United Nations. If there is one international agency that should be involved in any major diplomatic effort to resolve this peacefully, it should be the United Nations.

We should call on Mr. Putin to step forward with the leaders in China and say they will work with the Security Council to execute any diplomatic policy that can avoid further military confrontation. Until then, make no mistake, President Putin's proposal today, and the activities we are seeing and hearing from Syria, are a direct result of President Obama's leadership. He has stepped up--even though it is an unpopular position with some in this country--and said we cannot ignore this redline created by the world when it came to chemical weapons. It is time for others to stand and join us in stopping the advancement and use of chemical weapons once and for all.

I have been listening to this Syria debate, and I cannot say how many times I have harkened back to that time 12 years ago when we debated entering the war in Iraq. It was another one of those votes that come along in the course of a congressional career that keeps you awake at night.

I was serving on the Intelligence Committee in the Senate. I sat through hour after hour of hearings about the suspected weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but it never came together in a credible way as far as I was concerned. There was such a rush to war 12 years ago. Twenty-three of us voted no--22 Democrats and 1 Republican. I can recall the scene. It was late at night, after midnight, right here in the well of the Senate when three of us were left. It was Kent Conrad of North Dakota and, of course, from Minnesota our friend, the late Senator who served with so much distinction and spoke out so many times on issues of morals and ethics. We cast the vote no and waited in this empty Chamber.

I thought about that vote so many times. I think it was the right vote to vote no, but there comes a moment in history when we have to stand as civilized nations and say to those who are willing to ignore the rules and to break the rules that a line cannot be crossed. I hope we can get that done, and not just for the memory of Senator Wellstone and Senator Conrad, but in memory of so many who served here and faced these challenges in the past in our history. I hope we can find a diplomatic solution that will avoid any military use, but I know the reason we have reached this point in diplomacy with this Putin overture has more to do with the President being determined to stand for a matter of principle than almost anything else. We have to continue to make it clear that we find it unacceptable to use these chemical weapons. We paid a bitter price for the war in Iraq as a nation when we were misled as to weapons of mass destruction.

I have seen the evidence in briefings of this deadly attack in Damascus. I think the evidence is overwhelming and convincing. I think at this point many Americans are reluctant to even consider the use of military force. So we sat down and drew up a resolution in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last week. There are strict limitations within this resolution about the President's authority and power. He has 60 days to execute a military strategy--if nothing else intervenes, 60 days. He can extend it 30 days, but even Congress can object to that if it wishes. He can use military weapons but only for the purposes specified. No troops on the ground. No troops in combat operations. As Senator McCain said yesterday, that will be part of the law. The President has already said that is his standard as well. So for those who are worried about mission creep and where this might lead us, if, God forbid, we are faced with that possibility, this resolution strictly limits what the President can do.

It was about 8 days ago that I got a phone call I will never forget at my home in Springfield late on a Sunday night from the President

himself. We talked for about half an hour. We talked about a lot of things because we go back a long way. He talked to me about his thought process and what he is taking under consideration in trying to lead the world in this response to chemical weapons.

I was one of the early supporters of this President. I believe in him. I believe in his values. I believe he has been honest with me and with the American people about the situation we face. I know the options are not good. They never are under these circumstances. But I also know that if we turn our backs on this situation, there will be some dictator in Iran or North Korea who will be emboldened to do even more--to perhaps use not just chemical weapons but even nuclear weapons. There comes a point when we have to take a stand.

I understand when the people I represent across Illinois have said to me so many times in the last week: Why is it always the United States? Why is it that we have to be involved in this so many times? Why do we have to be the policemen to the world?

Well, there is a basic answer to that. I would like to believe we have values the rest of the world looks up to. Oh, we have stumbled in our own history, and we will continue to do so, but we continue to fight for those basic values all around the world.

Secondly, if someone is in trouble in their country somewhere in the world and they have one 9-1-1 call to make, they pray to God the United States will answer because we have the best military in the world. We have responded to challenges around the world throughout history, and seldom do we leave a residual power base behind. We go in, we do the job, we come home. That is something we can't say for a lot of nations. It is an awesome responsibility.

I think the President is doing the right thing. I think his appeal to the leaders around the world and his appeal to the American people is consistent with our values as a nation.

The President doesn't come quickly to war. He is a person who understands, as I do, the heavy price that has to be paid, and he understands there are moments when a leader--a commander in chief, a person with the responsibility of protecting his nation in a dangerous world--has to step forth and lead. If the United States did not take this onerous leadership role, I doubt anyone else would have.

I take very seriously the President's promise that he won't be putting boots on the ground in Syria. I have been to too many funerals and visited too many disabled veterans to ever want to see us do that again, except when it is absolutely necessary for America's survival.

I think what we are doing this week in the Senate is a step in the right direction, and I believe it is a step that can move us toward a safer world. If we can find, because of the President's leadership, a diplomatic response that avoids further military conflict but keeps us safe from these deadly chemical weapons, we should pursue it.

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Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Whitehouse). The clerk will call the roll. The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

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

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

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, we come to this Chamber as we have many times before--to make one of the most difficult decisions we are tasked to make: the authorization of the use of American military power--this time in Syria, to respond to the horrific attack, including the use of chemical weapons, of August 21 that took the lives of 1,429 Syrians, including at least 426 children.

The world is watching, America is waiting to see what we do in this Chamber in response to the threat the world faces from those who cross the line of human decency and use chemical weapons against anyone, anywhere in the world.

The images of August 21 were sickening and, in my view, the world cannot ignore the inhumanity and horror of what Bashar al-Asad did.

As I have had to say too many times before as a Member of Congress: I do not take the responsibility to authorize military force lightly or make such decisions easily. I voted against the war in Iraq when it was popular, according to the polls, to vote for the war and strongly supported the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. But today I urge my colleagues to support this tightly crafted, clearly focused resolution to give the President authorization to use military force in the face of this horrific crime against humanity.

Yes, there are clearly risks to any action we authorize, but the consequences of inaction--the consequences of standing down from fully upholding the norms of international behavior--are greater and graver still: further humanitarian disaster in Syria, regional instability, the loss of American credibility around the world, an emboldened Iran and North Korea, and the disintegration of international law.

This vote will be among the most difficult any of us will be asked to make. But the American people expect us to make the hard decisions and take the hard votes. They expect us to put aside political differences and personal ideologies, forget partisanship and preconceptions, forget the polls and personal consequences.

This is a moment for a profile in courage--a moment for each of us to do what we know is right--based on what we know is in the best interest of the United States, regardless of the polls or pontifications of political pundits.

To be clear, the authorization Senator Corker and I seek is for focused action, with a clear understanding that American troops will not be on the ground in combat.

We have worked closely to put politics aside, weigh the facts, search our consciences, and pass a resolution in committee that we believe is in the national security interest of the American people.

I have said before and will say again: This is not a declaration of war but a declaration of our values to the world.

I want to thank Senator Corker for being a close partner in helping to tailor and focus the language of this resolution so it reflects the will of the committee, the interests of the American people, and gives the President the authority he needs to respond to Syria's use of chemical weapons against its own people.

What we know. What we know is clear, notwithstanding Asad's interview and his denials.

According to the declassified intelligence assessment, we know--with high confidence--that the Syrian Government carried out a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus suburbs on August 21.

We know that the buck stops with Asad--his interview--denials aside. We know that he controls the regime's stockpiles of chemical agents, including mustard, sarin, and VX gas, and has thousands of munitions

capable of delivering them, again, under his control.

It is inconceivable--and defies all logic--that he would not know about the preparations and deployment of these horrific weapons.

We know that personnel involved in the program are carefully vetted to ensure loyalty to the regime and the security of the program.

We know that chemical weapons personnel from the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center, subordinate to the regime's Ministry of Defense, were operating in the Damascus suburb of `Adra from Sunday, August 18 until early in the morning on Wednesday August 21 near an area the regime uses to mix chemical weapons including sarin.

Human intelligence, as well as signal and geospatial intelligence have shown regime activity in the preparation of chemicals prior to the attack, including the distribution and use of gas masks.

Some may still be skeptical about Asad's direct involvement, but clearly the buck stops with Asad when it comes to the use of these weapons.

Some may also be skeptical that we have not done enough to allow diplomacy to work, but the fact is we have tried diplomacy. We have gone to the UN on many occasions, and it has only bought Asad more time.

Notwithstanding Russia's belated offer today to take action, which, by the way, only be on the table today specifically because of the threat of the use of force, let us not forget it has been their intransigence that brought us to this point in the first place.

The fact is, on August 28, a week after the attack, Russia blocked a UN Security Council resolution that called ``for all necessary measures'' to be taken, and simply called for any state that used chemical weapons to be held accountable.

On the day of the attack, August 21, Russia blocked a Security Council press statement simply expressing ``concern'' that chemical weapons might have been used.

On August 6, Russia blocked another press statement welcoming the news that a UN investigations team would investigate three sites, and calling for their full and fettered access to those sites.

Russia has also vetoed a Security Council resolution enshrining the June 30 Geneva Communique brokered by Kofi Annan, vetoed a resolution calling for an end to violence in Syria, vetoed a draft resolution endorsing the Arab League's plan of action that would have condemned human rights violations.

They blocked a press statement calling for humanitarian access to the besieged city of Homs, and one calling for Syrian authorities to provide the UN with humanitarian access.

Over the course of the conflict in Syria, the United States Government, specifically the State Department, has met consistently with its close allies and partners, as well as with Syria's neighbors, to help prepare the region to detect, prevent, and respond to potential use or proliferation of chemical weapons.

As Ambassador Power acknowledged in her remarks at the Center for American Progress on September 6, the United States has regularly engaged with the Russians and Iranians to attempt to get them to use their influence to stop the Asad regime from using chemical weapons.

The same day, September 6, the United States and 10 other countries issued a joint statement condemning the Asad regime's use of chemical weapons. They were: Australia, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, and Great Britain. Since then 14 other nations have also signed onto that statement: Albania, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Honduras, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Morocco, Qatar, Romania, and the United Arab Emirates.

It is only the threat by the President, and this resolution, that would drive both Russia and Syria to the negotiating table.

The facts are clear. We have tried diplomacy.

Let us understand that this action is not a choice of force or diplomacy. It is about both.

It is about enforcing international norms that will, at the end of the day, leverage necessary UN action and help bring about a political solution.

For those who want to see UN Security Council action, those who want to

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push Syria to sign a chemical weapons agreement and give up their weapons, this resolution is the best path to getting there.

Let me say to my colleagues who believe that the authorization of the use of military force will be nothing more than a pin-pick. This resolution will have clear and verifiable consequences.

It will help keep these weapons in check, degrade Asad's ability to deploy them, and prevent the proliferation of chemical weapons and their use by anyone, anywhere in the world.

The resolution will have clear consequences, but it is also not open-ended.

It appropriately narrows the scope, duration, and breadth of the authority granted to meet Congressional concerns, and the concerns of the American people.

It is tightly tailored to give the President "necessary and appropriate" authority to use military force to respond to the use of weapons of mass destruction by the Syrian government; protect the national security interests of the United States and our allies and partners; and degrade Syria's capacity to use such weapons in the future.

It has a requirement for determination that the use of military force is necessary, that appropriate diplomatic and other peaceful means to prevent the deployment and use of chemical weapons by Syria have been used, and that the United States has both a specific military plan to achieve the goal of responding to the use of weapons of mass destruction by the Syrian government and that the use of military force is consistent with the broader goals of U.S. strategy toward Syria, including achieving a negotiated settlement to the conflict, and a limitation that specifies that the resolution "does not authorize the use of United States Armed Forces on the ground in Syria for the purposes of combat operations" assuring there will be no "boots on the ground."

The authorization would end after 60 days, with the President having the ability to request and certify for another 30 days, and with Congress having an opportunity to pass a resolution of disapproval. It provides for an integrated United States Government strategy for Syria, including a comprehensive review of current and planned U.S. diplomatic, political, economic and military policy towards Syria, and requires a Report to Congress on the status of the military operations. I know my colleagues on both sides will want to offer a range of amendments.

Let me say in conclusion, history has taught us harsh lessons when it comes to the use of chemical weapons.

The images we saw of children lined on the floor on August 21 were not the first images the world has ever seen of the horrors of chemical attacks.

We saw them almost 100 years ago in World War I.

If we do not learn from and live by the lessons of the past, if we fail the test of history then we are destined and doomed to repeat it.

If we allow the use and proliferation of chemical weapons despite the world's horror at the gruesome and horrific use of mustard gas,

phosgene, and chlorine at the beginning of last century, then we risk the same horrors again in this century.

Let us not fail the test of history.

Let us say to the world that we cannot allow anyone to use chemical weapons again, and that we can never allow such weapons to fall into the hands of stateless-actors and terrorists who would unleash them against America or American interests around the world.

I repeat what I said earlier: Let us understand that this action is not about force or diplomacy. It is about both. It is about enforcing international norms that will, at the end of the day, leverage necessary UN action and help bring about a political solution.

For those who want to see UN Security Council action, those who want to push Syria to sign a chemical weapons agreement and give up their weapons, this is the best path to getting there.

Make no mistake, the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime ultimately represents a national security threat to the United States, a global security threat we cannot ignore.

Let me read what our former colleague and respected Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Lugar, recently said in the press: ``We are talking about weapons of mass destruction. We are talking about chemical weapons in particular which may be the greatest threat to our country of any security risk we have--much more than any other government, or another nation--because they can be used by terrorists, by very small groups.

The use of those weapons has got to concern us to the point that we take action whenever any country crosses that line and use these weapons as we have seen in Syria.''

Senator Lugar is right. We must be concerned--deeply concerned--and that is why we must act. The danger of proliferation is too great--too much of a risk--for us to stand silent and stand down.

I urge my colleagues to put aside politics, polls, and preconceptions and do what we know, at the end of the day, is in the national security of the American people.

Again, I want to thank Senator Corker and members of the committee for working quickly together to respond to this crisis with a well-crafted resolution that is a declaration of our values and will send a clear message that we--and the world--cannot and will not tolerate the use of chemical weapons anywhere--by anyone.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I would like to thank the chairman for his comments for a historical analysis of what has occurred and his comments regarding our ability to work together. I do wish to reiterate a point that the chairman made partially through his comments. I do not think any of us know at this time whether the offers that today have been made from Russia and responses that have been given from Syria, I do not think we have any idea whether there is credibility at present.

What I do know is there would be absolutely zero conversation about that had our committee not passed an authorization out on a 10-to-7 vote and if we were not taking this up this week. So I wish to commend the chairman for his leadership on this issue. I have enjoyed working with him. I have enjoyed working with him on all the issues relative to Syria and all the other things we have done in a bipartisan way.

I think it has been the tradition--I know it has been the tradition of this body, when it comes to issues beyond our shorelines, to set aside partisanship, as was mentioned a moment ago, and do things that are in the best interests of our Nation. There is nothing more important that each Member of this body will take up than the authorization for the use of military force. I sensed it the other day in our committee. I have sensed it with those whom I have talked to since. Each Member is looking at this with a sense of humility and soberness. I truly believe it is up to each Member to make this

decision.

I will say the issues of Syria are something I am familiar with. I have traveled to the region, as I know the chairman and many others have. I have traveled three times this year. I wrote an op-ed in the New York Times in April regarding what our response to Syria should be. Our committee thankfully passed, on a 15-to-3 vote on May 21, with the chairman's leadership, the Syria Transition Support Act.

This was to support the vetted moderate opposition and require the administration to develop a comprehensive strategy. I know Members of this body know I support this authorization. I helped write it with the chairman. I am very comfortable with my position in supporting this and believe what we have done with this authorization we have done in the right and correct way.

I will say I have been very dismayed at the administration's lack of response after stating publicly that they were going to support the vetted moderate opposition in certain ways. I have been very frustrated at the response and the lack of support in that way. As I mentioned, I was just in the area 3 weeks ago. I visited the same refugee camp in Turkey on the Syrian border and in Jordan on the Syrian border. I saw some of the same refugees whom I saw there less than 1 year ago.

Candidly, I am dismayed we have not supported the vetted opposition in a better way. I know we have urged out of our committee that we have a much

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more comprehensive strategy. I wish that bill had come to the floor. I wish the Senate had taken action. But, candidly, I also am dismayed this administration has not taken action to do something in a more comprehensive way.

No question the introduction of chemical weapons has changed the dynamic tremendously. I think the chairman was very articulate in explaining why this is important. I wish to say to everybody in this body, to me an equally important issue for our Nation is the credibility of the United States of America. I believe our President, whether you support him, whether you like him, I believe the President spoke for our Nation when he established a red line some months ago regarding the use of chemical weapons.

I believe it is very important for our Nation's credibility in the region and in the world that we have an appropriate response when we have a dictator such as Asad take the actions he has taken against international norms the way he has but especially when the Commander in Chief of our Nation has spoken the way he has about this issue. To me this is twofold. Certainly, it is about the international norms that have been spoken to eloquently by many, but to me it is also an issue of this Nation's credibility of the response as people are looking on to what we are going to do.

That is why I support this authorization. I do wish to go back over a couple points the chairman referred to relative to the substance of the authorization. I think most people know the White House sent over an authorization that to me was very broad. It did not define what we were going to do in a specific way.

I know the chairman just talked about the fact that this authorization is tailored. It is specific. Let me go over again specifically what this authorization does. It is specific purposes only: to respond to the use of weapons of mass destruction to dissuade future use, degrade ability, and to prevent transfer, no boots on the ground for combat operations.

I know there have been some discussions about that in our committee. Very emphatically, this authorization eliminates and keeps any boots on the ground for combat operations from occurring.

This has a time limit of 60 days with a 30-day extension which Congress can disapprove. It is geographically limited to Syria only, which the original authorization was not. It is against legitimate military targets only, which again the original authorization was not.

There are a series of determinations the President has to make prior to taking action with this authorization, including that it is in the core national interests of the United States and that he has a military plan to achieve the objectives.

In addition, this authorization requires a comprehensive strategy for a negotiated end to this conflict.

I wish to refer to something else the chairman mentioned; that is, the type of activity. I know there have been a number of editorial comments in papers and publications around the country referring to this as a pinprick. There have been other concerns by Members of this body as to the duration of this effort, as to how long it will be.

I have had the privilege, because of the position I serve in on the Foreign Relations Committee, to be involved in multiple phone calls and personal meetings. There was one last night that lasted at great length with the President and Vice President.

I wish to say to every person in this body, I have no belief whatsoever that if military action is taken, it is going to be a pinprick--none. The American military has incredible ability to deal with issues in a forceful way but also do so in a very short timeframe.

I do believe, based on the many meetings we have had, both with military and civilian leadership, that to characterize what is proposed as a pinprick or to characterize what is proposed as inserting ourselves into a long-term civil war, I think both of those characterizations are wrong.

Obviously, one of the dilemmas people here deal with is that we write policy and then it is up to the administration to carry that out--and no question, none of us will be involved in the direct carrying out. But it is my firm belief that there is not a thread of thinking by the administration that what they are considering is a pinprick.

On the other hand, I have not a thread of thought that they are also considering doing something that is going to involve us in a long-term civil war. Obviously, conflicts such as this are complex.

In closing, let me say this. Each Senator has to make their own decision. This is one of those things where lobbying is not something that is going to make up the minds of Senators. I think each Senator has to make up their own hearts and minds.

What I can say is we are going to have an open process. I know we have talked about the process going forward. I hope Senators will keep their amendments germane. I hope we have a sober debate about an issue that is the most important type of decision any Senator will make.

I am thrilled the President decided to come to Congress for an authorization. I know a lot of people have made many comments regarding this. Candidly, I am pleased the President has come to us for a debate. It is my hope the Senate, after hearing the facts and after having a thoughtful debate, will approve the authorization for the use of military force.

I couldn't agree more with the chairman that if people wish to see a diplomatic solution--which is the only way we are going to end this conflict--I do not think this conflict ends militarily. I believe we have learned a lot from the last two episodes we have been through.

I believe it is important for us to have this authorization because I believe it is the only thing at this point, the fact that we passed it out of committee, the fact that it is on the floor, that might possibly lead to a diplomatic settlement.

I also believe it is time for the President to lead. I know there have been a lot of statements over the last week, and the President had multiple audiences in which to speak. I understand this, and I

understand reports out of these meetings can come in many ways not to be accurate.

The President is coming to the Hill tomorrow. He will be making a major speech to the United States, the citizens of our country, tomorrow night. I know many of them have lives, where all of them, most of them, get up in the mornings, go to work, they raise their families, and they haven't had the opportunity to spend as much time on these issues. That is why we are elected to do this.

I will say this. It is very important for the President of the United States to come to Congress and for the President of the United States to make his case to the American people.

He is asking for this authorization. I believe it is important for us to give him this authorization.

Again, I wish to thank the chairman for working with us to make sure we have narrowed this authorization in such a way that I think it meets the test of what the American people and what all of us wish to see happen. But I do believe now it is up to the President, over the next several days and this week, to make his case to the American people as to why the Senate should give him this authorization for the use of military force, which I hope we will do.

I thank you for the time, and I yield the floor.

Congressional Record Senate Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/9/10/senate-section/article/s6307-3>

[Pages S6307-S6312]

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LEGISLATIVE SESSION

AUTHORIZING THE LIMITED AND SPECIFIED USE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES AGAINST SYRIA--MOTION TO PROCEED--Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S.J. Res. 21.

Under the previous order, the time until 12 noon will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the time during the quorum calls, which I will suggest in just a few seconds, be equally divided between the majority and the minority.

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

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, this week we have a very difficult set of questions to answer relating to Syria and the ongoing crisis there. But in particular we have a question to answer as it relates to what the United States should do. I rise this morning to express strong support for this authorization to degrade Bashar al-Asad's chemical weapons capability and deter the future use of these horrific weapons. I made this determination based upon the evidence and the national security interests of the United States, both our national security interests today as well as in the future.

The resolution that is before the Senate right now does not allow for the deployment of U.S. combat troops on the ground in Syria. I will not support--nor do I think there will be much support in this Chamber--any measure that would involve U.S. boots on the ground in Syria and this resolution specifically speaks to this concern. I am quoting, in part, the resolution:

The authority granted in section 2(a) does not authorize the use of the United States Armed Forces on the ground in Syria for the purpose of combat operations.

It is important we make that point.

As we have all seen, especially in the last few days, the situation in Syria is in flux, especially in the last 24 hours. The Russian Government put forth a proposal yesterday which would have international monitors take control of Syria's chemical weapons in order to avert a U.S. military strike. I am open to this diplomatic discussion--however not without caution and not without skepticism. Diplomatic solutions are always a preferred path and military strikes should always be the last resort.

I think prior to this proposal we were at this point of a last resort. But the only reason this proposal is on the table is because of the credible threat of force that is being debated in Washington--but even more significantly being debated across the country. The authorization itself should still go forward because it will keep the pressure on the Syrian regime for a diplomatic solution.

Let's take a couple of minutes on our own national security interests. In March of 2011, as reported by the U.S. State Department, multiple news sources, including CNN, reported--and I will submit for the Record a report from CNN--that the Syrian Government authorities had arrested 15 schoolchildren in the city of Daraa for spray-painting antigovernment slogans. These young people were reportedly tortured while in custody and authorities resorted to force when their parents and others in the community called for their release. Within 1 week the police had killed 55 demonstrators in connection with the early efforts to provide opposition to the Asad regime. The regime committed countless atrocities during the next 2 years of this conflict, culminating in the unspeakable use--the indiscriminate use of chemical weapons on August 21.

I submit for the Record a report from CNN, dated March 1, 2012, and ask it be printed in the Record.

This report is March of 2012, but it looks back in a retrospective fashion on what happened in those early days of the opposition coming together in 2011. I will read a pertinent part, part of what CNN said about what happened when these schoolchildren were demonstrating against the regime. They talked in this report about the young people, as I mentioned, not just protesting but spray-painting their beliefs against the regime. At the time, not a lot of people around the world were focused on what was happening in Syria. Let me quote in pertinent part what at one point one of the citizens on the street was saying, that the people in Daraa:

. . . didn't want to go against the regime. People thought that this [leader, Mr. Asad] was better than his dad. Nobody wanted to go face-to-face with him.

But then of course it was young people, in this case even schoolchildren, who led the way to take him on. I submit this for the record because this opposition started on the streets of Syria, in this case in Daraa, starting with young people, but it of course continued from there. We know that the regime itself has the largest chemical stockpile in the region, one of the largest in the world. We know Mr. Asad used these weapons against his own people, not only on August 21 but on multiple occasions prior to that in a much more limited way. We also know he has the capacity, the will, and unfortunately the track record to use these weapons against innocent civilians.

We also should remember we have troops and other military and diplomatic personnel in the region, in the Middle East. Even Syria's acquisition--even Syria's very acquisition of chemical weapons threatens our national security. In 2003, the Congress of the United States--some people have forgotten about this--the Congress of the

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United States in 2003 passed the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of that year. This act explicitly states that Congress found--the U.S. Congress made a finding that ``Syria's acquisition''--and I am underlining that word ``acquisition''--``of weapons of mass destruction threatens the security of the Middle East and the national security interests of the United States.''

This Congress 10 years ago made a determination that the acquisition of chemical weapons was a threat to our national security. We are in a different world now. Syria not only acquired them but has now used them multiple times on its own people, the most recent being the horrific scenes that we all saw in some of the videos that are now part of the public record. So there is clear and convincing evidence of the direct involvement of the Asad regime, the forces of the Asad regime and senior officials, in the planning, execution, aftermath, and attempts to cover up the August 21 attack. This is graphically evident in the 13 authenticated videos released by the Senate Intelligence Committee compiled by the Open Source Center showing the results of chemical weapons use in the Damascus suburbs on August 21. These videos were shown to the Intelligence Committee on Thursday and played on CNN on Saturday. So many Americans have seen them. If anyone would like more information about those, go to my Web site and I am certain many others as well.

It is clear that the regime violated international law as it relates to chemical weapons. We know the regime committed a barrage of terror across the country with the sole aim of remaining in power. We have to ask ourselves, when a dictator or terrorist organization uses chemical weapons in violation of international law, should that regime or terrorist organization pay a price? I argue that they must pay a price.

We simply can't condemn this crime against humanity; it is in the national security interest of the United States for the administration to have the authorization to act. The regime in Iran, the terrorist organization Hezbollah, and the regime in North Korea are watching very closely, so it is imperative that we take steps to address this threat.

Let me talk about the regime in Iran and Hezbollah. What happens in Syria is of great consequence to our security interest as it relates to that regime in Hezbollah. When I say ``that regime,' ' I am speaking about the Iran regime. Their support for Hezbollah, through Syria, has resulted in constant plotting against the United States and its allies.

The Asad regime in Syria is the conduit of this relationship between Hezbollah and the Iranian regime itself.

I support this authorization of targeted and strategic military action in order to hold the Syrian regime accountable and because it will diminish the ability of Iran and Hezbollah to conduct acts of terror. It will also protect American lives if we hold them accountable, as well as, of course, the Syrian people. Indeed, other than Al Qaeda, Hezbollah has killed more Americans than any other terrorist organization in the world, including 241 marines in 1983. Hezbollah has consistently partnered with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to bolster Asad's campaign of repression and violence in Syria, which has further destabilized the region. The regime in Iran has provided funds, weapons, logistical support, tactical advice, and fighters to the Syrian Government forces. Just this year Iran's support to Asad has increased, with reported daily resupply flights to Syria.

The Syrian regime possesses a stockpile of chemical weapons that we cannot allow to fall into the hands of terrorists. Iran and Hezbollah-- I think some people in Washington missed this--are not on the sidelines; they are already on the battlefield. I would argue that Iran and Hezbollah are on two battlefields. Certainly, they are on the battlefield in Syria but also the daily battlefield of terrorist acts plotting against the United States and other countries as well.

Failure to bring action and failure to hold Syria accountable after such a horrific crime will only serve to embolden the Iranian regime, to embolden the terrorist organization Hezbollah and others, to expand terror across the world. Iran's status as the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism is well established, and its proxies have perpetuated attacks against the United States, Israel, and our allies.

Emboldened by Iran's support, Hezbollah has conducted terrorist attacks since its inception in the early 1980s--including Western targets. Hezbollah has become more aggressive in the last few years and has executed attacks not only in the Middle East but on two other continents--South Asia and Europe. Just 2 years ago a plot was uncovered to blow up a restaurant in Georgetown--right here in Washington, DC--to kill the Saudi Ambassador to the United States, along with U.S. officials and average citizens who are American. When the Iranian-backed attacker was questioned, he referred to the potential killing of Americans as ``no big deal.''

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record the report by the Department of Justice entitled ``Two Men Charged in Alleged Plot to Assassinate Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States.''

The list goes on. We know that in June of 1996 there was the bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia where 19 U.S. Air Force personnel were killed. That is another example of an Iran-backed terrorist activity. It goes back, as I mentioned, to 1983 when 241 marines were killed by a truck bombing in Beirut. There are also new reports on evidence that strongly suggests that an Iran-backed plot was underway to kill a U.S. Ambassador in 2011. Hezbollah has consistently partnered with Iran to do just that.

The national security interest of the United States is even more significant than that. It is not simply the green light it would send to Iran and Hezbollah as it relates to terrorism. If we don't take the right action here, it would send a message and green light to Iran as it relates to their nuclear program. We know the Iranian regime is intent on developing nuclear weapons capability. I support a variety of measures to prevent Iran from acquiring that capability. Condemnation only of Syria would embolden Iran and undermine our efforts to prevent the Iranian regime from developing and possessing a nuclear weapon.

Every Member of Congress will have to weigh the consequence of giving the green light to the use of chemical weapons and contemplate what it

will mean for enemies, such as the Iranian regime and Hezbollah, who plot against the United States every day. I am like a lot of Members of Congress in that after receiving several intelligence briefings, I have more confidence than ever before that we have a significant national security imperative to authorize the President to act as it relates to Syria. I have no doubt that Mr. Asad used the chemical weapons against his people and it is evident that he crossed more than one redline. So I support this limited and proportional scope of authorization for the use of force.

By the way, this authorization would probably be the most limited authorization in recent American history.

I believe Congress must stand united on this issue, and we have to make sure we not only hold the regime accountable but make sure we are doing everything possible to send the right message.

I have two more points before I conclude. One of the best rationales for the reason we are taking the steps I hope we will take was set forth in an op-ed printed in the New York Times last weekend by Nicholas Kristof, and it is dated September 7, 2013. The op-ed is entitled ``Pulling the Curtain Back on Syria,'' and I ask unanimous consent to have this op-ed printed in the Record.

I think one of the most important lines in here--and, of course, I will not read the entire op-ed--is what Mr. Kristof wrote:

In other words, while there are many injustices around the world, from Darfur to eastern Congo, take it from one who has covered most of them: Syria is today the world capital of human suffering.

There are few journalists--there are few Americans--who have more credibility on the issue of what is happening to children and vulnerable populations around the world than Nicholas Kristof. For him to say the world capital of human suffering is in Syria is a powerful and compelling statement.

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That brings me back to where I started. I started walking through the early days of this opposition to a repressive regime against Mr. Asad, and the people who led the way and made a case against his regime in large measure were the children or young people. One of the harrowing and very disturbing elements of this entire crisis--this war that has raged on for more than 2 years now--is the impact it has had on children.

I received a report today that came from Save the Children. They have enormous credibility not only on children's issues worldwide, but there are Save the Children personnel on the ground in Syria.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the document entitled ``Briefing note: The children crisis in Syria'' be printed in the Record as well.

That documents in great detail the human suffering of children and the impact this has had on millions of Syrian children. But, of course, maybe the most graphic and disturbing example of that was the footage that virtually every American has had an opportunity to view which shows the hundreds and hundreds of children who were killed instantly in this horrific chemical weapons attack. By one estimate, more than 400--maybe as many as 426--children were killed.

When we confront this issue, we cannot simply say: Oh, this is just another horrific situation around the world. When we consider what this regime did to schoolchildren--arrested them and by many accounts tortured them from the beginning of this opposition all the way through to the attack on August 21--and what will continue to happen to

children in Syria and in places around the world, we are summoned by our conscience to act in some fashion and hold this regime accountable.

I want to be open to this possibility that maybe there is a breakthrough, that we can remove this terrible threat from Syria and wipe out the chemical weapons threat by giving total and complete control of chemical weapons to an international force, but the burden of proof is on Syria and the Russian Federation. They have to deliver very specifically in a very short timeframe if they expect us to agree to this. We should be hopeful and consider this opportunity, but at the same time we cannot divorce ourselves from the reality of what happened, the consequence of not acting, and also the long-term and short-term national security interests of the United States, which I think are overwhelming and compelling in this instance.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess.

Congressional Record Senate Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/6/18/senate-section/article/s4546-3>

Syria

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, there is so much good flowing through the veins of this country. We are, by and large, a compassionate, just people. It hurts us deeply to see pain and suffering in places that don't enjoy the relative safety and security of America.

We are, more so than ever before, a powerful people. We are the one remaining superpower with a military that dwarfs all others and a record of throwing our weight around in all corners of the globe.

Mixed correctly, this combination of goodness and power can be a transformation. It can lighten the load of oppressed peoples. It can lift the disenfranchised. It can cure diseases.

There is one fatal trap that comes with these defining characteristics of 21st century America, a tripwire that has ensnared our Nation too many times in recent history. This is the belief that there are no limits to what this combination of goodness and power can achieve. In a word, that trap is hubris. I rise because I fear we are on the verge of falling into this trap once again.

In April, the Presiding Officer and I, as well as several other Members of the Senate and the House, visited the Kilis refugee camps of Turkey and Syria. These were reportedly the best of the refugee camps set up to shelter Syrian families fleeing the blood and carnage of that country's civil war. It is not a place I would have wanted to stay for another hour.

We met a girl who had half her face scarred by a Syrian rocket attack. I met a little orphan boy whose parents had been felled by the ruthless tactics of Bashar al-Asad. We were there for an afternoon, but we didn't need to spend more than 10 minutes in that place to be deeply moved by the case of the refugees.

Of course, Syria presents not only a humanitarian imperative, Syria is of immense strategic importance to the United States. The Asad regime has been a thorn in our side for years, and now his refusal to step down has created a bloody conflict that is in real time destabilizing a region that is critical to our national security interests. Even worse, the fight has drawn in Islamist groups affiliated with al-Qaida. A failure to root out their influence and reduce their presence threatens to hand them a new base of operation with which to plot attacks against Americans.

It is easy to see why American intervention is so tempting. It is

easy to see why President Obama has chosen to act: a humanitarian crisis, a strategic interest, a uniquely American blend of goodness and power tells us we can, that we must try to make things better.

Here is the rub. It is not enough for there to be a will. There also has to be a way.

Today in Syria I do not believe there is that way. I do not believe this Congress should give the President the ability to escalate America's role in the Syrian conflict without a clear set of goals and a clear sense that we can achieve these goals.

Let's start with the odds attached to our first objective, overthrowing Bashar al-Asad. The unfortunate reality is that the momentum is with the Asad regime. With the help of Hezbollah and Qasem Soleimani, a senior Iranian Quds Force commander, Asad has driven the rebels from the key town of Qusayr, and his forces are

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now battering the rebels' positions in Aleppo.

American-supplied automatic weapons are not going to be enough to change this reality. While antitank and anti-aircraft weapons, along with armored vehicles, could give the advantage to the Syrian opposition, this would, frankly, invite another more sinister problem. The Syrian opposition is not a monolithic force. It is an interlocking, sometimes interdependently operating, sometimes independently operating, force.

Our favored faction is the Free Syrian Army, but they are currently far from the most effective fighting force of the opposition.

Today the most effective fighting unit of the rebels is Jabat al-Nusra, an Islamist extremist group with demonstrable ties to al-Qaida. If we give heavy weaponry to the FSA, there is virtually no guarantee these weapons will not find their way to Jabat al-Nusra, a group that represents the very movement we are fighting across the globe.

In fact, we have been down this road before. In the eighties, we gave powerful weapons to the mujahedin in Afghanistan, freedom fighters that we supported in their war against the Soviets. Of course, as we all know, after kicking out the Soviets, those fighters later formed the foundation of the Taliban, providing a staging ground in Afghanistan for al-Qaida's plans against the United States.

Let's take our second objective. Even if we are successful in toppling Asad, it matters to us greatly who takes the reins of Syria next. I can't imagine we are getting into this fight just to turn the country over to the al-Nusra front or another Iranian- or Russian-backed regime. But if we do care about which regime comes next, and we should, then we need to admit we aren't intervening in Syria for the short run. We are in this for the long haul. Why? Because as we all learned in history class, these upheavals run a pretty predictable course. There is first the revolution and then there is the civil war.

Iran nor Russia will allow a U.S.-backed Free Syrian Army to simply stand up a new government. Certainly, Jabat al-Nusra and other extremist groups are not going to do the lion's share of the early fighting and then just walk away with no role in the new government.

Then we have to admit we are in the medium and in the long term deciding to arm one side of what promises to be a very complicated multifront heavily proxied civil war.

One may say there is still an interest to negotiate the politics and the military logistics of this second conflict. To that I would ask, what is the evidence we have ever gotten this tightrope right in the past? Recent history tells us America is pretty miserable at pulling the strings of Middle Eastern politics. In Afghanistan, after 10 years of heavy military presence, many experts think that when we leave, the place is going to look pretty much like it did before we got there. If

we can't effect change with tens of thousands of troops, how are we going to do it in Syria with just guns and cash?

There is a risk that our assistance could actually make things worse. Would it not embolden the Iranians, the Russians or the extremists to fight harder against the new regime if they know they are backed by American money and arms?

As we saw in our disastrous occupation of Iraq, American presence often attracts extremists, not repels them. Our money and arms become bulletin board material for extremist groups around the globe. Why would we want to help al-Qaida's recruitment by putting a big red, white, and blue target on Damascus for years to come?

The bottom line is this: Not everywhere where there is an American interest is there also a reason for American military action. In Syria, with a badly splintered opposition, a potential nightmare follow-on civil war, I believe the odds are slim that U.S. military assistance will make the difference that the President believes it will make. And I worry that our presence could harm, not advance, our national security interests.

There is, thankfully, another way. Given the atrocities occurring within Syria and the potential for further destabilization in the region, the United States cannot and should not simply walk away from Syria. We should dramatically increase our humanitarian aid--both inside and outside Syria. We should help improve conditions at the refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan, and help other nations bearing the burden of displaced persons, such as Lebanon and Iraq, deal with the influx of people. Put simply, we should concentrate our efforts on humanitarian help inside Syria and on making sure the conflict doesn't spill outside of Syria's borders.

At the very least, our Nation's role in Syria deserves a full debate in Congress before America commits itself to a course of action with such potentially huge consequences for our national interests. According to published press reports, the administration has indicated it does not intend to seek congressional approval before shipping arms to the Free Syrian Army--at a time, I would note with some irony, when the United States still officially recognizes the Asad government.

The Foreign Relations Committee has done its work here, and I commend Chairman Menendez. We have had hearings, we have held a debate and a vote on a resolution, but now that the President has announced these new steps, it is incumbent upon the full Senate to ask questions of the administration's short-term and long-term goals, and to debate the consequences of American intervention fully. This is serious business, and the American public deserves a full debate.

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

Congressional Record Extensions of Remarks Articles. (2022, mei 10).
<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2012/6/21/extensions-of-remarks-section/article/e1106-3>

[Extensions of Remarks]

[Pages E1106-E1107]

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INTRODUCING THE ``SYRIA NON-INTERVENTION ACT OF 2012''

HON. RON PAUL

of texas

in the house of representatives

Thursday, June 21, 2012

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, the Administration is marching toward another war in the Middle East, this time against Syria. As with the president's war against Libya, Congress has been frozen out of the process. The Constitution, which grants Congress and only Congress the authority to declare war, is once again being completely ignored.

The push for a U.S. attack on Syria makes no sense, is not in our interest, and will likely make matters worse. Yet the Administration, after transferring equipment to the Syrian rebels and facilitating the shipment of weapons from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, has indicated that its plans for an actual invasion are complete.

This week there are even press reports that the Central Intelligence Agency is distributing assault rifles, anti-tank rocket launchers, and other ammunition to the Syrian opposition. These are acts of war by the United States government. But where is the authority for the president to commit acts of war against Syria? There is no authority. The president is acting on his own.

Today we are introducing legislation to prevent the administration from accelerating its plan to overthrow the Syrian government by assisting rebel forces that even the administration admits include violent Islamic extremists.

The bill is simple. It states that absent a Congressional declaration of war on Syria:

``No funds available to the Department of Defense or an element of the intelligence community may be obligated or expended for the purpose or which would have the effect of supporting, directly or indirectly, military or paramilitary operations in Syria by any nation, group, organization, movement, or individual.''

This legislation is modeled after the famous Boland Amendments of the early 1980s that were designed to limit the president's assistance to the Contras in their attempt to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. Congress has an obligation to exercise oversight of the president's foreign policy actions and to protect its constitutional prerogatives. This legislation will achieve both important functions.

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Mr. Speaker, the last thing this country needs is yet another war particularly in the Middle East. Even worse is the president once again ignoring the Legislative Branch and going to war on his own. I hope my colleagues will join me in standing up for our Constitutional authority and resisting what will be another disastrous war in the Middle East.

Congressional Record House Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2012/6/27/house-section/article/h4071-1>

[Page H4071]

From the Congressional Record Online through the Government Publishing Office [www.gpo.gov]

AMERICA'S FOREIGN POLICY OF MISCHIEF AND INTERVENTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Paul) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, last week I introduced legislation, H.R. 5993, that would prohibit the President from providing military or paramilitary aid of any sort to any faction in the internal fighting in Syria. Unfortunately, it appears that the administration is already very much involved in supporting the overthrow of the Assad government.

There's nary a whimper of criticism in Congress over our growing involvement in the civil war in Syria. The only noise we hear from Congress, and repeated in the media, is the complaint that we're not doing enough and that immediate, direct U.S. military action must be taken.

Tragically, our political leaders show both bad judgment and short memories when it comes to the downside of our foreign policy of mischief and intervention. Our compulsion to engage ourselves in every conflict around the world is dangerous to our national security.

In dealing with Syria, the administration pretends to pursue diplomacy and provide humanitarian assistance to the people. In reality, the U.S. Government facilitates weapons transfers to the rebels who are demanding immediate regime change.

My goal is to stop our dangerous participation in the violence in Syria; yet evidence mounts that we're already deeply involved, with no expectation that the administration will back away from military engagement.

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Recent reports indicate that the U.S. is providing logistics and communication assistance to the rebel forces. Assistance in getting arms to the rebels through surrogates is hardly a secret. Cooperating with the rebels' propaganda efforts has been reported and is used to prepare the American people for our coming involvement.

There is every reason to expect that the well-laid plans to, once again, coordinate a favorable regime change will end badly. Even the

strongest supporters of our direct and immediate military involvement in Syria admit that the rebel forces are made up of many groups, including al Qaeda, and no one is sure to whom the assistance should be given. All they claim is the need for the immediate removal of Assad.

This policy is nothing new, and too often in our recent history our assistance with dollars and weapons used to overthrow a government ends up with the weapons being used, instead, against us. The blow-back from our policy of intervention has caused a great deal of harm to us since World War II:

Propping up the Shah in Iran for 26 years was a powerful factor in motivating radical Islamists to eventually overthrow the Shah in 1979. The hostages taken at the U.S. Embassy at that time was as a consequence of our putting the Shah into power in 1953;

In working with the mujahadeen in the 1980s, our CIA supported radical Islam in an effort to combat communist occupation in Afghanistan. Later, this led to the radical Islamists' hatred being turned against us over our occupation and interference in Muslim countries;

The \$40 billion given to Egypt for over 30 years to prop up the Mubarak dictatorship and to buy an unstable peace with Israel has ended with what appears to be the takeover of Egypt by the Muslim Brotherhood. They may well turn Egypt into a theocratic Islamic state unless our CIA is able to, once again, gain control. Al Qaeda now has a presence in parts of Egypt and has been involved in the bombing of the pipelines carrying gas to Israel. This is hardly a policy that is enhancing Israel's security.

What are the possible unintended consequences of this policy if we foolishly escalate the civil war in Syria?

The worst scenario would be an all-out war in the region involving Russia, the United States, Israel, Iran, Turkey, and others. The escalating conflict could rapidly make containment virtually impossible.

Chaos in this region could encourage the Kurds in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran to decide it's an opportunity to move on their long-sought-after goal of establishing a Kurdish state. Significant hostilities in the region would jeopardize the free flow of oil from the Middle East, causing sharp increases in the price of oil. The already weak economy of the West would suffer immensely. Some will argue erroneously that a major war would be beneficial to the economy and distract the people from their economic woes.

War, however, is never an economic benefit, although many have been taught that for many decades. If liberty and prosperity are to be our goals, peace is a necessary ingredient of that process.

Congressional Record Senate Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2012/3/5/senate-section/article/s1377-2>

[Pages S1377-S1380]

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Mr. McCain. Mr. President, after a year of bloodshed, the crisis in Syria has reached a decisive moment. It is estimated that more than 7,500 lives have been lost. The United Nations has declared that Syrian security forces are guilty of crimes against humanity, including the indiscriminate shelling of civilians, the execution of defectors, and the widespread torture of prisoners.

Bashar al-Asad is now doing to Homs what his father did to Hama. Aerial photographs procured by Human Rights Watch show a city that has been laid to waste by Asad's tanks and artillery. A British photographer who was wounded and evacuated from the city described it as "a medieval siege and slaughter." The kinds of mass atrocities that NATO intervened in Libya to prevent in Benghazi are now a reality in Homs. Indeed, Syria today is the scene of some of the worst state-sponsored violence since Milosevic's war crimes in the Balkans or Russia's annihilation of the Chechen city of Grozny.

What is all the more astonishing is that Asad's killing spree has continued despite severe and escalating international pressure against him. His regime is almost completely isolated. It has been expelled from the Arab League, rebuked by the United Nations General Assembly, excoriated by the U.N. Human Rights Council, and abandoned by nearly every country that once maintained diplomatic relations with it. At the same time, Asad's regime is facing a punishing array of economic sanctions by the United States, the European Union, the Arab League, and others--measures that have targeted the assets of Asad and his henchman, cut off the Central Bank and other financial institutions, grounded Syria's cargo flights, and restricted the regime's ability to sell oil.

This has been an impressive international effort, and the administration deserves a lot of credit for helping to orchestrate it.

The problem is the bloodletting continues. Despite a year's worth of diplomacy backed by sanctions, Asad and his top lieutenants show no signs of giving up and taking the path into foreign exile. To the contrary, they appear to be accelerating their fight to the finish and they are doing so with the shameless support of foreign governments, especially in Russia, China, and Iran. A steady supply of weapons, ammunition, and other assistance is flowing to Asad from Moscow and Tehran. As the Washington Post reported yesterday, Iranian military and intelligence operatives are likely active in Syria, helping to direct and sharpen the regime's brutality. The Security Council is totally shut down as an avenue for increased pressure, and the recently convened Friends of Syria contact group, while a good step in principle, produced mostly rhetoric but precious little action when it met last month in Tunisia. Unfortunately, with each passing day, the international response to Asad's atrocities is being overtaken by events on the ground in Syria.

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Some countries are finally beginning to acknowledge this reality as well as its implications. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are calling for arming opposition forces in Syria. The newly elected Kuwaiti Parliament has called on their government to do the same. Last week, the Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, ADM James Stavridis, testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that providing arms to opposition forces in Syria could help them shift the balance of power against Asad. Most importantly, Syrians themselves are increasingly calling for international military involvement. The Opposition Syrian National Council recently announced that it is establishing a military bureau to channel weapons and other assistance to the Free Syrian Army and armed groups inside the country. Other members of the Council are demanding a

more robust intervention.

To be sure, there are legitimate questions about the efficacy of military operations in Syria and equally legitimate concerns about their risks and uncertainties. It is understandable that the administration is reluctant to move beyond diplomacy and sanctions. Unfortunately, this policy is increasingly disconnected from the dire conditions on the ground in Syria, which has become a full-blown state of armed conflict. In the face of this new reality, the administration's approach to Syria is starting to look more like a hope than a strategy. So, too, does their continued insistence that Asad's fall is "inevitable." Tell that to the people of Homs. Tell that to the people of Idlib or Hama or the other cities that Asad's forces are now moving against. Nothing in this world is predetermined, and claims about the inevitability of events can often be a convenient way to abdicate responsibility.

But even if we do assume that Asad will ultimately fall, that may still take a long time. In recent testimony in the Armed Services Committee, the Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said if the status quo persists, Asad could hang on for months, probably longer. And that was before Homs fell. So to be clear, even under the best-case scenario for the current policy, the cost of success will likely be months of continued bloodshed and thousands of additional lives lost. Is this morally acceptable to us? I believe it should not be.

In addition to the moral and humanitarian interests at stake in Syria, what is just as compelling, if not more so, are the strategic and geopolitical interests. Put simply, the United States has a clear national security interest in stopping the violence in Syria and forcing Asad to leave power. In this way, Syria is very different than Libya. The stakes are far higher, both for America and some of our closest allies.

This regime in Syria serves as a main forward operating base of the Iranian regime in the heart of the Arab world. It has supported Palestinian terrorist groups and funneled arms of all kinds, including tens of thousands of rockets, to Hezbollah in Lebanon. It remains a committed enemy of Israel. It has large stockpiles of chemical weapons and materials and has sought to develop a nuclear weapons capability. It was the primary gateway for the countless foreign fighters who infiltrated Iraq and killed American troops. Asad and his lieutenants have the blood of hundreds of Americans on their hands. Many in Washington fear that what comes after Asad might be worse. How could it be any worse than this?

The end of the Asad regime would sever Hezbollah's lifeline to Iran, eliminate a longstanding threat to Israel, bolster Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, and inflict a strategic defeat on the Iranian regime. It would be a geopolitical success of the first order. More than all of the compelling moral and humanitarian reasons, this is why Asad cannot be allowed to succeed and remain in power. We have a clear national security interest in his defeat, and that alone should incline us to tolerate a large degree of risk in order to see that this goal is achieved.

Increasingly, the question for U.S. policy is not whether foreign forces will intervene militarily in Syria. We can be confident that Syria's neighbors will do so eventually if they have not already. Some kind of intervention will happen with or without us. So the real question for U.S. policy is whether we will participate in this next phase of the conflict in Syria and thereby increase our ability to shape an outcome that is beneficial to the Syrian people and to us. I believe we must.

The President has characterized the prevention of mass atrocities as "a core national security interest." He has made it the objective of

the United States that the killing in Syria must stop, that Asad must go. He has committed the prestige and credibility of our Nation to that goal, and it is the right goal. However, it is not clear that the present policy can succeed. If Asad manages to cling to power--or even if he manages to sustain the slaughter for months to come--with all the human and geopolitical costs that entails, it would be a strategic and moral defeat for the United States. We cannot--we must not--allow this to happen.

For this reason, the time has come for a new policy. As we continue to isolate Asad diplomatically and economically, we should work with our closest friends and allies to support opposition groups inside Syria, both political and military, to help them organize themselves into a more cohesive and effective force that can put an end to the bloodshed and force Asad and his loyalists to leave power. Rather than closing off the prospects for some kind of negotiated transition that is acceptable to the Syrian opposition, foreign military intervention is now the necessary factor to reinforce this option. Asad needs to know that he will not win.

What opposition groups in Syria need most urgently is relief from Asad's tank and artillery sieges in the many cities that are still contested. Homs is lost for now, but Idlib and Hama and Qusayr and Deraa and other cities in Syria could still be saved. But time is running out. Asad's forces are on the march. Providing military assistance to the Free Syrian Army and other opposition groups is necessary, but at this late hour that alone will not be sufficient to stop the slaughter and save innocent lives. The only realistic way to do so is with foreign air power.

Therefore, at the request of the Syrian National Council, the Free Syrian Army, and local coordinating committees inside the country, the United States should lead an international effort to protect key population centers in Syria, especially in the north, through air strikes on Asad's forces. To be clear, this will require the United States to suppress enemy air defenses in at least part of the country. The ultimate goal of air strikes should be to establish and defend safe havens in Syria, especially in the north, in which opposition forces can organize and plan their political and military activities against Asad. These safe havens could serve as platforms for the delivery of humanitarian and military assistance, including weapons and ammunition, body armor, and other personal protective equipment, tactical intelligence, secure communications equipment, food and water, and medical supplies. These safe havens could also help the Free Syrian Army and other armed groups in Syria train and organize themselves into more cohesive and effective military forces, likely with the assistance of foreign partners.

The benefit for the United States in helping to lead this effort directly is that it would allow us to better empower those Syrian groups that share our interests--those groups that reject al-Qaida and the Iranian regime and commit to the goal of an inclusive democratic transition as called for by the Syrian National Council. If we stand on the sidelines, others will pick winners, and this will not always be to our liking or in our interest. This does not mean the United States should go it alone. I repeat: This does not mean that the United States should go it alone. We should not. We should seek the active involvement of key Arab partners such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Qatar, and willing allies in the EU and NATO, the most important of which in this case is Turkey.

There will be no U.N. Security Council mandate for such an operation. Russia and China took that option off the table long ago. But let's not forget: NATO took military action to save Kosovo in 1999 without formal U.N. authorization. There is no reason why the

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Arab League or NATO or a leading coalition within the Friends of Syria contact group, or all of them speaking in unison, could not provide a similar international mandate for military measures to save Syria today.

Could such a mandate be gotten? I believe it could. Foreign capitals across the world are looking to the United States to lead, especially now that the situation in Syria has become an armed conflict. But what they see is an administration still hedging its bets--on the one hand insisting that Asad's fall is inevitable but, on the other, unwilling even to threaten more assertive actions that could make it so.

The rhetoric out of NATO has been much more self-defeating. Far from making it clear to Asad that all options are on the table, key alliance leaders are going out of their way to publicly take options off the table. Last week, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen said that the alliance has not even discussed the possibility of NATO action in Syria, saying: "I don't envision such a role for the alliance." The following day, the Supreme Allied Commander, ADM James Stavridis, testified in the Senate Armed Services Committee that NATO has done no contingency planning--none--for potential military operations in Syria.

That is not how NATO approached Bosnia or Kosovo or Libya. Is it now the policy of NATO--or the United States, for that matter--to tell the perpetrators of mass atrocities in Syria or elsewhere that they can go on killing innocent civilians by the hundreds of thousands and the greatest alliance in history will not even bother to conduct any planning about how we might stop them? Is that NATO's policy now? Is that our policy? Because that is the practical effect of this kind of rhetoric. It gives Asad and his foreign allies a green light for greater brutality.

Not surprisingly, many countries, especially Syria's neighbors, are also hedging their bets on the outcome in Syria. They think Asad will go, but they are not yet prepared to put all their chips on that bet--even less so now that Asad's forces have broken Homs and seem to be gaining momentum.

There is only one nation--there is only one nation--that can alter this dynamic, and that is the United States of America. The President must state unequivocally that under no circumstances will Asad be allowed to finish what he has started; that there is no future in which Asad and his lieutenants will remain in control of Syria; and that the United States is prepared to use the full weight of our air power to make it so. It is only when we have clearly and completely committed ourselves that we can expect other nations to do the same. Only then would we see what is really possible in winning international support to stop the killing in Syria.

Are there dangers and risks and uncertainties in this approach? Absolutely. There are no ideal options in Syria. All of them contain significant risk. Many people will be quick to raise concerns about the course of action I am proposing. Many of these concerns have merit but none so much that they should keep us from acting.

For example, we continue to hear it said that we should not assist the opposition in Syria militarily because we do not know who these people are. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton repeated this argument just last week, adding that we could end up helping al-Qaida or Hamas. It is possible that the administration does not know much about the armed opposition in Syria, but how much effort have they really made to find out, to meet and engage these people directly? Not much, it appears. Instead, much of the best information we have about the armed resistance in Syria is thanks to courageous journalists, some of whom

have given their lives to tell the story of the Syrian people.

One of those journalists is a reporter working for Al-Jazeera named Nir Rosen, who spent months in the country, including much time with the armed opposition. Here is how he described them recently:

The regime and its supporters describe the opposition, especially the armed opposition, as Salafis, Jihadists, Muslim Brotherhood supporters, al-Qaeda and terrorists. This is not true, but it's worth noting that all the fighters I met . . . were Sunni Muslims, and most were pious. They fight for a multitude of reasons: for their friends, for their neighborhoods, for their villages, for their province, for revenge, for self-defense, for dignity, for their brethren in other parts of the country who are also fighting. They do not read religious literature or listen to sermons. Their views on Islam are consistent with the general attitudes of Syrian Sunni society, which is conservative and religious.

Because there are many small groups in the armed opposition, it is difficult to describe their ideology in general terms. The Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood ideologies are not important in Syria and do not play a significant role in the revolution. But most Syrian Sunnis taking part in the uprising are themselves devout.

He could just as well have been describing average citizens in Egypt or Libya or Tunisia or other nations in the region. So we should be a little more careful before we embrace the Assad regime's propaganda about the opposition in Syria. We certainly should not let these misconceptions cause us to keep the armed resistance in Syria at arm's length because that is just self-defeating. And I can assure you that al-Qaida is not pursuing the same policy. They are eager to try to hijack the Syrian revolution, just as they have tried to hijack the Arab spring movements in Egypt and Tunisia and Libya and elsewhere. They are trying, but so far they are failing. The people of these countries are broadly rejecting everything al-Qaida stands for. They are not eager to trade secular tyranny for theocratic tyranny.

The other reason al-Qaida is failing in Tunisia and Egypt and Libya is because the community of nations--especially the United States--has supported them. We are giving them a better alternative. The surest way for al-Qaida to gain a foothold in Syria is for us to turn our backs on these brave Syrians who are fighting to defend themselves. After all, Sunni Iraqis were willing to ally with al-Qaida when they felt desperate enough, but when America gave them a better alternative, they turned their guns on al-Qaida. Why should it be different in Syria?

Another objection to providing military assistance to the Syrian opposition is that the conflict has become a sectarian civil war and our intervention would enable the Sunni majority to take a bloody and indiscriminate revenge against the Alawite minority. This is a serious and legitimate concern, and it is only growing worse the longer the conflict goes on. As we saw in Iraq or Lebanon before it, time favors the hard-liners in a conflict such as this. The suffering of Sunnis at the hands of Assad only stokes the temptation for revenge, which in turn only deepens fears among the Alawites and strengthens their incentive to keep fighting. For this reason alone, it is all the more compelling to find a way to end the bloodshed as soon as possible.

Furthermore, the risks of sectarian conflict will exist in Syria whether or not we get more involved. And we will at least have some ability to try to mitigate these risks if we work to assist the armed opposition now. That will at least help us to know them better and to establish some trust and exercise some influence with them, because we took their side when they needed it most. We should not overstate the

potential influence we could gain with opposition groups inside Syria, but it will only diminish the longer we wait to offer them meaningful support. And what we can say for certain is we will have no influence whatsoever with these people if they feel we abandoned them. This is a real moral dilemma, but we cannot allow the opposition in Syria to be crushed at present while we worry about the future.

We also hear it said, including by the administration, that we should not contribute to the militarization of the conflict. If only Russia and Iran shared that sentiment. Instead, they are shamelessly fueling Asad's killing machine. We need to deal with reality as it is, not as we wish it to be. And the reality in Syria today is largely a one-sided fight where the aggressors are not lacking for military means and zeal. Indeed, Asad appears to be fully committed to crushing the opposition at all costs. Iran and Russia appear to be fully committed to helping him do it.

The many Syrians who have taken up arms to defend themselves and their communities appear to be fully committed to acquiring the necessary weapons to resist Asad, and leading

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Arab States appear increasingly committed to providing those weapons. The only ones who seem overly concerned about a militarization of the conflict is the United States and some of its allies. The time has come to ask a different question: Whom do we want to win in Syria--our friends or our enemies?

There are always plenty of reasons not to do something, and we can list them clearly in the case of Syria. We know the opposition is divided. We know the armed resistance inside the country lacks cohesion or command and control. We know some elements of the opposition may sympathize with violent extremist ideologies or harbor dark thoughts of sectarian revenge. We know many of Syria's immediate neighbors remain cautious about taking overly provocative actions that could undermine Asad. And we know the American people are weary of conflict--justifiably so--and we would rather focus on domestic problems.

These are realities. But while we are compelled to acknowledge them, we are not condemned to accept them forever. With resolve, principled leadership, and wise policy, we can shape better realities. That is what the Syrian people have done.

By no rational calculation should this uprising against Asad still be going on. The Syrian people are outmatched. They are outgunned. They are lacking for food and water and other basic needs. They are confronting a regime with limitless disregard for human dignity and capacity for sheer savagery. For an entire year, the Syrian people have faced death and those unspeakable things worse than death, and they still have not given up. Still they take to the streets to protest peacefully for justice, still they carry on their fight, and they do so on behalf of many of the same universal values we share and many of the same interests as well. These people are our allies. They want many of the same things we do. They have expanded the boundaries of what everyone thought was possible in Syria. They have earned our respect, and now they need our support to finish what they started. The Syrian people deserve to succeed, and shame on us if we fail to help them.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Coons). The Senator from Illinois.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.
Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask to speak in morning business.
The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Congressional Record Senate Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2012/4/19/senate-section/article/s2551-2>

[Pages S2551-S2553]

From the Congressional Record Online through the Government Publishing Office [www.gpo.gov]

SENATE RESOLUTION 428--CONDEMNING THE GOVERNMENT OF SYRIA FOR CRIMES
AGAINST HUMANITY, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Mr. BLUMENTHAL (for himself, Mr. Graham, Ms. Klobuchar, Mr. Kirk, Ms. Collins, Mr. Coats, Mr. McCain, and Mr. Cardin) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. Res. 428

Whereas, on December 22, 2010, the Senate passed S. Con. Res. 71 (111th Congress), a bipartisan resolution recognizing that it is in the national interest of the United States to prevent and mitigate acts of genocide and other mass atrocities against civilians;

Whereas, since the uprisings in Syria began in January 2011, the Government of Syria has manifestly failed in its responsibility to protect its people;

Whereas, on August 4, 2011, President Barack Obama issued Presidential Study Directive/PSD 10, stating, "Preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States.";

Whereas, on November 23, 2011, the United Nations-appointed Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic expressed grave concern that "crimes against humanity of murder, torture, rape or other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity, imprisonment or other severe deprivation of liberty, enforced disappearances of persons and other inhumane acts of a similar character have occurred in different locations in Syria since March 2011" and that "the Syrian Arab Republic bears responsibility for these crimes and violations";

Whereas, on February 3, 2012, Syria security forces began using indiscriminate sniper fire and shelling of the densely populated neighborhoods of Homs with heavy weaponry;

Whereas, on February 4, 2012, President Obama stated that President Assad "has no right to lead Syria and has lost all legitimacy with his people and the international community";

Whereas, on February 4, 2012, the United States co-sponsored a draft United Nations Security Council resolution condemning "the continued widespread and gross violations of

human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities such as the use of force against civilians, arbitrary executions, killing and persecution of protestors and members of the media, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, interference with access to medical treatment, torture, sexual violence, and ill-treatment, including against children'';

Whereas, on February 17, 2012, the Senate passed S. Res. 379 (112th Congress), stating

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that the ``gross human rights violations perpetuated by the Government of Syria against the people of Syria represent a grave risk to regional peace and stability'';

Whereas, on February 22, 2012, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic found in a subsequent report that ``[a] reliable body of evidence exists that, consistent with other verified circumstances, provides reasonable grounds to believe that particular individuals, including commanding officers and officials at the highest levels of Government, bear responsibility for crimes against humanity and other gross human rights violations'' and that ``children continue to be arbitrarily arrested and tortured while in detention'';

Whereas, on February 28, 2012, the United Nations Security Council was informed that over 7500 people in Syria have been killed, an estimated 100 more are killed each day in attacks directed against the civilian population, and there are between 100,000 and 200,000 internally displaced persons in Syria;

Whereas, on February 28, 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton testified before the Subcommittee on the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate concerning President Assad, stating that ``based on the definitions of war criminal and crimes against humanity, there would be an argument to be made that he would fit into that category'';

Whereas, on March 1, 2012, Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Jeffrey Feltman testified before the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate that ``large numbers of Syrians are living every day under siege, deprived of basic necessities including food, clean water and medical supplies, and women and children are wounded and dying for lack of treatment'';

Whereas, on March 8, 2012 Ambassador Susan Rice, the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations, stated that the United States ``remain[s] determined to hasten the day when the brave people of Syria can shake off the yoke of bondage and tyranny'';

Whereas, on March 27, 2012, United States Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford, in testimony before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, cited massive human rights violations that, ``may amount to crimes against humanity''; and

Whereas, with the intent and knowledge of the highest level of the Government of Syria, including commanding officers of the Syria security forces and the President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Bashar Assad, members of the Syria security forces have reportedly committed a widespread and systematic pattern of gross human rights violations, including use of force against civilians, torture, extra judicial killings,

arbitrary executions, sexual violence, the execution of defectors, and interference with medical treatment and other humanitarian assistance: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate--

(1) condemns the Government of Syria, Syria security forces, and the President of the Syrian Arab Republic for widespread and systematic attacks against the civilian population of Syria;

(2) commends the President for the vote of the United States at the United Nations Security Council to condemn the continued widespread and gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the authorities in Syria;

(3) urges the President to use his authority to collect information on incidents in Syria that may constitute crimes against humanity under section 2113 of the ADVANCE Democracy Act of 2007 (title XXI of Public Law 110 53; 22 U.S.C. 8213) and take action to ensure that the Government of Syria, its leaders, and senior officials who are responsible for crimes against humanity are brought to account for such crimes in an appropriately constituted tribunal;

(4) urges the President to formally establish the Atrocities Prevention Board established by Presidential Study Directive 10 in August 2011, and for the Board to provide recommendations to the President concerning the prevention of mass atrocities in Syria;

(5) urges the international community, working with the people of Syria to review legal processes available to hold officials of the Government of Syria, Syria security forces, and the President of the Syrian Arab Republic accountable for crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights; and

(6) expresses solidarity and support for the people of Syria as they seek to exercise universal rights and pursue peaceful democratic change.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I rise to submit a resolution condemning the Government of Syria for crimes against humanity. I am pleased to be joined by Senators Graham, Klobuchar, Kirk, Cardin, Coats, Collins, and McCain in submitting this resolution.

I am very proud we have strong bipartisan support and I thank, in particular, Senator Graham for his leadership, along with Senator McCain, who repeatedly and consistently in this area of human rights and liberties have stood for basic American principles of democracy and freedom. I had the great opportunity to visit a number of the Middle Eastern countries with them, and my strong support for this kind of resolution rises from the firsthand views we were able to have of the results of freedom fighters in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt and the impact on the future of their country and being on the right side of history, as the United States was there. Those people showed their gratitude and welcomed us to their countries.

I am grateful to Senators McCain and Graham for giving me that opportunity, along with Senators Sessions and Hoeven, who accompanied us, for their leadership.

Syrian crimes against humanity include acts such as murder, torture and unlawful punishment and imprisonment when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack on civilian populations.

Since peaceful protests began last year, the Syrian regime has brutalized and savaged its own people, leaving thousands dead as it commits horrific crimes against humanity, including the abduction and torture of children.

This resolution tells the Syrian people they are not alone, that the

American people are with them as they fight for freedom and basic democratic rights; the people of the world are watching.

On November 23, 2011, the U.N.-appointed Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic expressed grave concern that ``crimes against humanity of murder, torture, rape or other forms of sexual violence . . . imprisonment or other severe deprivation of liberty, enforced disappearances of persons and other inhumane acts . . . have occurred in different locations in Syria since March 2011.''

The Commission also found that ``the Syrian Arab Republic bears responsibility for these crimes and violations.''

Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Jeffrey Feltman testified before the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate that ``large numbers of Syrians are living every day under siege, deprived of basic necessities including food, clean water and medical supplies, and women and children are wounded and dying for lack of treatment.''

General Mattis, commander of the U.S. Central Command, for whom I have the strongest and deepest respect, explained before the Senate Armed Services Committee ``the Syrian military continues to ruthlessly use lethal force with impunity against the Syrian people.''

In this body, we have not remained silent in the face of this humanitarian disaster, approving on February 17, 2012, S. Res. 379, condemning violence by the Government of Syria against the Syrian people. We have also approved S. Res. 391, which I cosponsored, condemning violence by the Government of Syria against journalists and expressing the sense of the Senate on freedom of the press in Syria.

The world should be inspired by the continuing courage and determination of Syrian protesters standing and speaking, despite the Syrian military gunning down and bombing their homes, businesses, and neighborhoods.

I know our Nation is at war and rightly wary of intervention abroad. But military intervention is not our only option, not the only means to summon support or step forward in solidarity with the freedom fighters in Syria, nor is military intervention alone sufficient to call forth the world's conscience. Even without military action, we need not abdicate the democratic rights and principles that underlie and underpin our own Nation's constitutional ethos.

One powerful and profound step this body can take is to bear witness to the atrocities occurring in Syria. More than 9,000 people have died in Syria since these protests began. As Elie Wiesel has said, ``For the dead and the living, we must bear witness.''

The Syrian thugs who detain and torture children must know the United States bears witness to their crimes. We should say to President Assad that the world is watching and witnessing as he uses snipers to target civilians, indiscriminately shelling homes and businesses, and torturing protesters who dare to speak of change.

This resolution calls on President Obama to bear witness by using his existing authority. America can and

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must bear witness by taking and preserving evidence of actions and incidents in Syria that constitute crimes against humanity. America must bear witness by asking the President's newly created Atrocities Prevention Board to consider crimes against humanity occurring in Syria.

These atrocities epitomize the crimes this prevention board must address. I commend President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton for their work at the U.N. and with our allies to assist the Syrian people. We should make our own findings about what has occurred in Syria concerning the crimes against humanity. We cannot avoid this obligation

simply because the result may present difficult choices.

As Martin Luther King would often remind us, ``The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.''

If we bear witness today, justice will come closer for the Syrian people. President Assad and the Government of Syria, its leaders and senior officials who are responsible for crimes against humanity, will be brought to account and justice for their crimes.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this resolution.

Congressional Record Senate Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2012/12/4/senate-section/article/s7381-2>

Mr. McCAIN. Madam President, I call up amendment No. 3262, as modified.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Arizona [Mr. McCain] roposes an amendment numbered 3262, as modified.

The amendment is as follows:

amendment no. 3262, as modified

At the end of subtitle C of title XII, add the following:

SEC. 1233. REPORT ON MILITARY ACTIVITIES TO DENY OR SIGNIFICANTLY DEGRADE THE USE OF AIR POWER AGAINST CIVILIAN AND OPPOSITION GROUPS IN SYRIA.

(a) Report Required.--Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense shall, in consultation with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, submit to the congressional defense committees a report identifying the limited military activities that could deny or significantly degrade the ability of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, and forces loyal to him, to use air power against civilians and opposition groups in Syria.

(b) Nature of Military Activities.--

(1) Principal purpose.--The principal purpose of the military activities identified for purposes of the report required by subsection (a) shall be to advance the goals of President Obama of stopping the killing of civilians in Syria and creating conditions for a transition to a democratic, pluralistic political system in Syria.

(2) Additional goals.--The military activities identified for purposes of the report shall also meet the goals as follows:

(A) That the United States Armed Forces conduct such activities with foreign allies or partners.

(B) That United States ground troops not be deployed onto Syrian territory.

(C) That the risk to civilians on the ground in Syria be limited.

(D) That the risks to United States military personnel be

limited.

(E) That the financial costs to the United States be limited.

(c) Elements on Potential Military Activities.--The report required by subsection (a) shall include a comprehensive description, evaluation, and assessment of the potential effectiveness of the following military activities, as required by subsection (a):

(1) The deployment of air defense systems, such as Patriot missile batteries, to neighboring countries for the purpose of denying or significantly degrading the operational capability of Syria aircraft.

(2) The establishment of one or more no-fly zones over key population centers in Syria.

(3) Limited air strikes to destroy or significantly degrade Syria aircraft.

(4) Such other military activities as the Secretary considers appropriate to achieve the goals stated in subsection (b).

(d) Elements in Description of Potential Military Activities.--For each military activity that the Secretary identifies in subsection (c), the comprehensive description of such activities under that subsection shall include, but not be limited to, the type and the number of United States military personnel and assets to be involved in such activities, the anticipated duration of such activities, and the anticipated cost of such activities. The report shall also identify what elements would be required to maximize the effectiveness of such military activities.

(e) No Authorization for Use of Military Force.--Nothing in this section shall be construed as a declaration of war or an authorization for the use of force.

(f) The report required in subsection (a) shall be delivered in classified form.

Mr. McCAIN. Madam President, I believe the Senator from Kentucky is here to speak on the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Madam President, the amendment before us requires that the President submit a plan for a no-fly zone for Syria. I want to compliment the authors for including in this amendment a clause that says nothing in this amendment shall be construed as a declaration of war or an authorization for the use of force. I think it is very important in our Nation today that we are not saying we are starting, beginning, or getting involved in a new war.

However, I do think this amendment is ill-advised for two reasons. No. 1, I don't think I know with certainty whether the Syrian rebels will be freedom-loving, tolerant, constitution-toting believers in a republican form of government or whether they will institute an Islamic republic that will have no tolerance for Christians and no tolerance for people of any other faith.

It still remains to be seen whether a secular government will be established in Libya, Tunisia, or Egypt. There is the question of whether al-Qaida is more or less of a threat in Libya today since the rebels have won the civil war. I don't think we know for certain what a rebel government in Syria will do with the 1 million Christians who live in Syria.

Since the Iraq war, hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled Iraq and gone to Syria. Even after the war, apparently Syria was seen as more of a tolerant nation than Iraq. Will a rebel Islamic government in Syria tolerate or persecute Christians? Will a rebel Islamic

government institute the death penalty for blasphemy, for conversion, or for apostasy? Will they have a true democracy, a secular government, or will they have a Syrian rebel government that is less tolerant than what they currently have? In many ways the Arab spring has become the Arab winter.

In Egypt we have a leader from the Muslim Brotherhood who recited amen when a radical cleric stood up and said: Death to Israel. As a radical cleric said: Death to Israel and anyone who supports them, this Muslim Brotherhood leader of Egypt that came out of the Arab spring is nodding his head in assent and seemed to be chanting amen.

Will they seek peace with Israel or war? Will the Syrian rebels seek a secular government or one ruled by Shari'a? I think there are many unknowns we need to be asking ourselves before we involve ourselves in a civil war.

Secondly, I think it is a bad idea to discuss contingency plans for war. While I am in favor of the Senate retaining our prerogative to declare war, I believe that the details of the execution of war are in the purview of the Executive. In other words, we do have the power to begin or to not begin a war. That is the power the Constitution gave us, but I don't think the Constitution intended to have 535 generals. I don't think it intended to have us explicitly talking about every contingency plan for every possible war in every corner of the globe.

Our Defense Department, no doubt, has contingency plans for a ballistic missile attack on the United States, a conventional land invasion, naval or air encounters throughout the world, but we don't necessarily openly discuss them or encourage them. I don't think it is best to openly discuss these plans for defending against an attack and especially not for involving ourselves in a civil war.

Our Nation and our soldiers are weary of war. Our Nation yearns for leaders who will strive to keep us out of war. Our Nation yearns for leaders who are reluctant to begin a new war or get involved in a new war. I hope my colleagues today will not encourage a rush to war by publicly clamoring for a plan to become involved in Syria's civil war.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

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Mr. COONS. Madam President, I rise today to speak in favor of amendment No. 3262, which I am honored to cosponsor with Senators McCain and Levin. I thank the Senators for their disciplined, diligent, and very strong leadership of this year's NDAA process. This is an authorization bill that has been taken up and considered by the Senate for 52 years, and despite a lot of challenges and a lot of difficulties we had getting to bills, getting past objections, getting to reasonable processes and amendments, these two fine Senators have led admirably in a very difficult environment.

This amendment does what I think we need to do next, to put before the Senate in an appropriate classified setting useful information about the possibilities before us and before our allies in a very difficult and very complex region that is, as Senator Paul has noted, currently undergoing dramatic conflict.

Let me speak to a few points that persuaded me to join Senator McCain and Senator Levin in cosponsoring this amendment.

First, despite the comments from my colleague from Kentucky, these plans will be delivered to the Senate in classified form. They will not be accessible to the general public, and they will not be broadcast to our opponents or those who might seek to learn about America's plans. They will only be delivered in classified form.

Second, and I think most important, it is explicit in this amendment that nothing in this section shall be construed as a declaration of war

or an authorization for the use of force. Senator Paul's repeated concerns that we are rushing headlong into an overengagement in a civil war that is best left to the people of Syria is reflected clearly and in plain language in that provision within this amendment.

Earlier today we took up and voted on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I spoke to this issue as well. Despite the plain language of that convention that would prevent it from having any of the noxious impacts it would have on families in the United States, despite the plain language of that convention and the various restrictions and reservations that were added to it, it would have no impact on homeschooling and no impact on reproductive rights in the United States. It would have no impact on any of the variety of things that were cast about on the floor of the Senate today. So, too, here we should not allow--despite this plain language--Senators to mislead our colleagues into thinking that somehow secretly embedded within this is an authorization for the use of force.

So what is this? This is asking that the United States, in consultation between the Department of Defense and this Senate, make reasonable assessments of what our path forward in dealing with the tragic situation in Syria might be. This amendment is clear that it will not consider ground troops being deployed onto Syrian territory. It will only look at a means that might be used by the United States or our allies to stop Assad's reckless, relentless criminal use of airpower to murder his own civilians and his own citizens.

I have been heartbroken as I have read account after account of jets and helicopters being used to stray from red lines, being used to bomb hospitals and schools, and of the thousands of innocents who have died.

The Syrian civil war is a very complex conflict. Senator Paul asked what I really think is the central question. He said: How can we be confident that the opposition will be tolerant, inclusive, peaceful, and that it will not prosecute or persecute Christians; that they will be an ally to Israel and not impose the sorts of threats and difficulties he cited from Libya, Egypt, and other countries? That is exactly the core question at issue for us going forward: **Should the United States stand on the sidelines as Bashar al-Assad massacres tens of thousands more of his civilians or should we consider what ways we can be involved through providing humanitarian assistance?**

Should we support our regional allies, Turkey and Jordan, through multilateral engagement, supporting Turkey's request to NATO for defensive material? Should we better learn and understand what the opposition on the ground is inclined to do and set clear standards for how, if they demonstrate they are reliable partners in pursuing peace and if they commit themselves to the elements of the national coalition and the Free Syrian Army and to being exactly what Senator Paul would hope--tolerant, inclusive, pro-democracy--**why would we stand on the sidelines of history and allow Islamic extremists to instead write the future of the Syrian people?**

For these and many reasons I am grateful for the opportunity to join with Senators McCain and Levin in cosponsoring this amendment.

Mr. McCAIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from Connecticut be allowed 4 minutes, the Senator from Michigan be allowed 3 minutes, and I be allowed 2 minutes before the vote.

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

The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Madam President, I am honored to rise to support this amendment and just to make a few points. The first is to assure all of our colleagues that this is just an amendment that asks the Pentagon to conduct a study. It is nothing more than that. I want to particularly say that to reassure anyone who is concerned that somehow this is an authorization for the use of military force. Look at the wording. That is just not the case.

All we are debating and voting on is whether the Pentagon should be asked to do a study of the possibility of how we might stop Bashar al-Assad's air force from committing acts of murder against his own people. In my way of thinking, to tell the truth, it is two things: One, this amendment is simply a way of saying that we in the Senate are concerned and care about the slaughter that is going on in Syria and agitated that the United States and the rest of the world is not doing more to come to the assistance of those who are fighting for their freedom and lives in Syria.

I want to point out that there are a lot of options for the Pentagon to study. One is a traditional no-fly zone. We know a lot of people in the Pentagon are concerned that to carry out a traditional no-fly zone with our aircraft, we need to spend a lot of time and energy and assume risks to knock out the Syrian air defenses. Well enough.

But there are other ways to achieve the goal of keeping Assad's aircraft from destroying Syria's people. One is to use Patriot antimissile batteries to keep Syrian planes--placed in Turkey and Jordan--out of the air. The second, of course, that I can think of is to fire precision guided missiles from offshore to hit the Syrian Air Force on the ground so it cannot take off.

All of those should be considered as part of this study, as the most obvious, which is to make sure that the freedom fighters on the ground have their own antiaircraft weapons to fire from the ground at Assad's aircraft so they can protect their own lives.

The truth is, in supporting this amendment, I come to say that I continue to be troubled, deeply, by why the United States and so much of the rest of the civilized world is standing by and letting this happen. To me--and I speak only personally, and I do so with respect--getting involved in this on behalf of the opposition in Syria has been now for 18 months as close to a no-brainer as America ever has the opportunity to get involved in in foreign policy.

I say that because from the beginning we knew which side was fighting for freedom and which side was against it. And America is supposed to be on the side of the freedom fighters. Secondly, this has developed into a humanitarian disaster: 40,000 people killed. And, third, we have not just humanitarian interests here and values interests, we have strategic interests because Assad's government is the No. 1 friend of our No. 1 enemy in the world, which is the Islamic Republic of Iran. If he goes down, Iran and its radical regime suffers a body blow. If we continue to stand back, we run the risk of terrible sectarian conflict in Syria, which runs the risk of spreading beyond, between Sunni and Shia, also between secular and religious modernizers and people who do not want to modernize.

We have every good reason to come to the aid of these people in need, and I do not see an argument for not at

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least studying how we might better do that.

I thank my colleagues. I am proud to support the amendment.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, I wonder if I might be able to proceed for 1 minute before we begin the votes.

Mr. McCAIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that 1 minute be added and that the Senator from Mississippi be recognized for that 1 minute.

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

The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, I thank my colleagues for allowing me to

breeze in here at the last moment.

I would like to speak today about a Department of Defense policy that has an impact on American jobs and is in urgent need of greater transparency. Until recently, this policy picked industry winners and losers. We must ensure that the Federal Government's adopted standards for green buildings are consensus-based, fair, and established by sound science.

Before last year's Defense authorization bill was signed into law, the Department of Defense exclusively recognized or showed preference for a single green building rating system.

The U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design--or LEED--became DOD's adopted benchmark for green building.

This raised concerns, primarily because LEED standards are not developed in a transparent manner and do not allow meaningful input from all affected stakeholders.

For example, for some reason LEED standards are unreasonably biased against American timber.

Obtaining the highest LEED certifications often requires green buildings to exclude domestic wood. Instead, the use of bamboo, often shipped from overseas, is favored over more cost-efficient local timber.

The next version of LEED threatens to eliminate the use of other approved materials and proven products that are currently used to achieve true energy savings.

It makes sense to anticipate that a blanket adoption of LEED by the Department of Defense would have a significant impact on American industry.

To put the scope of DOD's green building policies into perspective: DOD has more than 500,000 facilities, covering more than 2 billion square feet. If we combined all of the nearly 5,000 Wal-Mart buildings in America, it would make up about a third of DOD's real estate.

That is why I fought for language--included in the 2012 Defense authorization conference report--requiring DOD to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of various green building rating systems.

Last year's Defense authorization conference report prohibited the use of funds to implement LEED standards.

This year, the Armed Services Committee accepted language I offered to extend the prohibition of funds for LEED until 6 months after the cost-benefit study is reported to Congress.

I look forward to the findings of this study but remain concerned about DOD's adoption of any green building standards that are not transparent and consensus-based.

I have yet another amendment that would direct DOD to utilize green building standards that are driven by consensus as determined by the American National Standards Institute, and include sufficient input from all affected stakeholders.

My amendment also would support green building standards that consider the full environmental benefits provided by a building material throughout its lifetime. Life Cycle Assessment is a science-based approach used to measure these benefits.

Together, I believe these provisions would create a level playing field for materials to compete for green building and energy savings in DOD construction.

The Federal Government should be in the business of choosing winners and losers, Adoption of LEED only--or/any other green building standard not developed by consensus--would discriminate against American-made products, reduce transparency, impact jobs, and ultimately undermine energy savings and sustainability sought using taxpayer dollars.

Although I am going to withhold my amendment, I will continue to closely monitor this issue to ensure that fair competition is part of

DOD's construction of green buildings.

I want to thank the chairman, ranking member, and all the members of the committee.

In conclusion, as we have learned, there is more than one way to have green building standards. The Defense Department has tilted toward the LEED standards in the past. I think we have authorized now a scientific analysis of other methods that is proceeding apace. I had planned to offer yet another amendment which would be withdrawn directing that the Department of Defense utilize green building standards that are driven by consensus as determined by the American National Standards Institute. As I say, I am withholding that amendment.

I do appreciate the language that is in the bill now, and I think we will end up with green building standards that save energy and serve the purposes of national defense and do not tilt toward one industry over the other.

I thank the Presiding Officer for her indulgence, I thank my colleagues on the committee, and I yield the floor.

Amendment No. 3262, as Modified

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, I very much support the amendment offered by Senator McCain and thank him for it.

The suffering of the Syrian people and, increasingly, the people of the region continues to grow daily. This amendment tells the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs that we want a classified assessment of the effectiveness of various military solutions to the problems that are there in Syria and in the region.

This information is going to help inform Congress on the challenges and the obstacles to various solutions, including the very challenges and questions which were identified by Senator Paul. Those are the kinds of questions--not the total list, but the kinds of questions--which this assessment will help us to address. It will also help inform us about the budget and the policy decisions that the congressional defense committees make in the upcoming fiscal year.

The principal purpose of this amendment, as is stated in the amendment, is ``to advance the goals of President Obama of stopping the killing of civilians in Syria and creating conditions for a transition to a democratic, pluralistic political system in Syria.'' That is what is on the mind, I believe, of all of us.

This report--an assessment, to use the word in the amendment--is critically important to Congress, and I very much support the effort of Senator McCain and thank him for it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. McCAIN. Madam President, I would point out again that section (d) (e) of this amendment says:

No Authorization For Use Of Military Force.--Nothing in this section shall be construed as a declaration of war or an authorization for the use of force.

And it will be in ``classified form.''

Yesterday, this was the front-page headline of the Washington Post: Obama Sternly Warns Syria. There is no doubt that as this conflict has dragged on and on, the risk of a wider conflict and terrible consequences can ensue. It is well known that Bashar Assad has a very large inventory of chemical weapons, including sarin gas, which is a deadly nerve agent.

I am not predicting that the United States has to be involved, but there is very little doubt in anyone's mind that as this conflict

escalates, the risk of spreading, the risk of greater jihadist involvement, the greater risk of problems on the borders of Lebanon, of Iraq, of Jordan increase.

And if military action has to be taken in order, for example, to prevent sarin gas to be used, the Congress of the United States has to be involved. We have a thing called the War Powers Act. The War Powers Act expressly calls that Congress make decisions. The Congress needs to be informed. I believe all this amendment does is informs, in a classified manner, the Defense committees so that we will have the information necessary to understand the various eventualities that could result in this terribly, terribly

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escalating and deteriorating situation in Syria.

As my friend from Connecticut said, 40,000 people have already been slaughtered. I think the U.S. Congress needs to be made aware not of what we should do but what we can do in case of that eventuality. I urge my colleagues to vote for the amendment.

I thank my colleagues. I thank the Senator from Connecticut, the Senator from Delaware, and, of course, the chairman of the committee.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, all postcloture time is expired and the question occurs on agreeing to McCain amendment No. 3262, as modified.

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. Rockefeller) is necessarily absent.

Mr. KYL. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Illinois (Mr. Kirk).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced--yeas 92, nays 6, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 220 Leg.]

YEAS--92

Akaka
Ayotte
Barrasso
Baucus
Begich
Bennet
Bingaman
Blumenthal
Blunt
Boozman
Boxer
Brown (MA)
Brown (OH)
Burr
Cantwell
Cardin
Carper
Casey
Chambliss

Coats
Coburn
Cochran
Collins
Conrad
Coons
Corker
Cornyn
Crapo
Enzi
Feinstein
Franken
Gillibrand
Graham
Grassley
Hagan
Harkin
Hatch
Heller
Hoeven
Inhofe
Inouye
Isakson
Johanns
Johnson (SD)
Johnson (WI)
Kerry
Klobuchar
Kohl
Kyl
Landrieu
Lautenberg
Leahy
Levin
Lieberman
Lugar
Manchin
McCain
McCaskill
McConnell
Menendez
Merkley
Mikulski
Moran
Murkowski
Murray
Nelson (NE)
Nelson (FL)
Portman
Pryor
Reed
Reid
Risch
Roberts
Rubio
Sanders
Schumer
Sessions
Shaheen
Shelby
Snowe

Stabenow
Tester
Thune
Toomey
Udall (CO)
Udall (NM)
Vitter
Warner
Webb
Whitehouse
Wicker
Wyden

NAYS--6

Alexander
DeMint
Durbin
Hutchison
Lee
Paul

NOT VOTING--2

Kirk

Rockefeller

The amendment (No. 3262), as modified, was agreed to.

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, I move to reconsider, and I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

Congressional Record House Articles. (2022, mei 10).

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/9/9/house-section/article/h5432-1>

[Page H5432]

From the Congressional Record Online through the Government Publishing Office [www.gpo.gov]

AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM IN THE FACE OF WAR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. Bentivolio) for 30 minutes.

Mr. BENTIVOLIO. Mr. Speaker, I stand here today as a former soldier. Like many of my colleagues in this room who served, I took an oath to honor and defend the Constitution of the United States against enemies both domestic and abroad. American soldiers do not swear to defend the President; they don't swear to defend Congress or political parties. They swear to defend the Constitution because this document is the bulwark that protects our freedom.

American soldiers swear to protect this document because our Founding Fathers understood that elected officials, from the President to us here in the House of Representatives, are fallible human beings. They swear to protect this document because they know that the principles it

defends are true and its wisdom will last long after we're dead, just as it lasted long before we were born.

The Constitution of the United States of America is the key difference between us and other countries. It is what makes our Nation exceptional. Forged on the anvil of liberty, it has protected our Nation as we have grown from a fledgling Republic into a world superpower. The soldier that we ask to fight on our behalf knows that. We must honor our military by looking to the wisdom of the Constitution whenever we discuss sending our troops to war.

The Constitution itself makes clear that we should go to war ``for the common defense.'' This statement, ``for the common defense,'' was so important that it was used twice by our Founding Fathers: once in the preamble, then again in laying out the duties of Congress.

We live in a fallen world. Bad things happen to innocent people every day across the globe. Drug cartels beheading people in central America, Christians being burned alive in Nigeria, human trafficking in Asia-- all of these things are heart-wrenching but none of them involve our common defense.

When I see what is happening in Syria and read the intelligence given to us, I do not see how this terrible civil war involves our common defense. I understand the horrors of the Assad regime and it sickens me. It hurts to see the pictures of dead children brutally gassed by a hateful dictator. Yet the actions our President wishes us to take would do little to prevent such a man from continuing to murder his people, nor would help those our soldiers were sworn to protect--our constituents.

In his farewell address, George Washington said:

We may choose peace or war, as our interest guided by justice shall counsel.

There is nothing just, or in our interest, in lobbing a few bombs into a country and walking away.

The Secretary of State and the President have both stated that we need to go to war because Assad broke a treaty that the entire world supports. The U.N., they say, cannot act. Mr. Speaker, I am asking the same question my constituents are asking: Why do we spend billions of dollars supporting an international organization for peace that cannot enforce a treaty supported by the entire world? If the U.N. is so hamstrung that it cannot rally the world to stop Assad and we have to unilaterally attack Syria, what exactly is the point of having a U.N.?

The Secretary of State also had the gall to tell both the Senate and the House Foreign Relations Committees that bombing Syria is ``not a war in the classic sense.'' Let me tell you something, Mr. Speaker. If another nation attacked us the way our President wants to attack Syria, everyone in this room would call it war. Let me tell you something else, Mr. Speaker: war has consequences.

The Secretary of State told the House Foreign Relations Committee that the goal of bombing Syria was to ``degrade'' Assad's chemical weapons and cause a stalemate in the fighting. In other words, Assad will still have the capability of using chemical weapons and could very well use them again to break the stalemate we create. Does anyone really think that we will just stop with the first round of bombings? That's not how war works. Wars are a ``yes'' or ``no'' question. You cannot, as Secretary Kerry and the White House suggest, only kind of fight a war. If we break it, we're going to be forced to fix it.

Like I said, I'm an old soldier, and old soldiers need mission plans. When I look at this mission plan, I don't see anything that suggests we will simply be able to walk away after this bombing campaign.

America's role in the world is not to play parent to the rest of the nations, chastising bad actors and picking winners and losers in

battles that don't directly threaten us. The point of our Nation is to show the world the wisdom of a free and representative government.

My fellow Members of Congress, we can show that wisdom here today with this vote. We can show the world that our Nation will not plunge itself into war because our President drew an artificial red line and feels embarrassed that a dictator crossed it.

Our military does not belong to the White House. It belongs to the people. I ask you, show the power and wisdom of our Founding Fathers when they granted the representatives of the people with the decision to go to war.

I strongly urge everyone in this room to vote "no" on attacking Syria and involving ourselves in their civil war.

God bless America.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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POTENTIAL U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN SYRIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. Fortenberry) for 30 minutes.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, this is an extraordinarily busy week in Washington as we have all returned from a district work period. There are many issues to discuss, including how we're going to fund the Federal budget, get the fiscal house in order, potentially have the right type of tax reform, and deal with a whole host of other issues, but I felt like it would be very inadequate if the evening went by but did not delve into a little bit deeper of a discussion as to the nature of the Syrian conflict and the potential for United States military involvement.

Mr. Speaker, I wrote my constituents last week as they expressed tremendous concern about the potential for U.S. entanglement in the situation in Syria. In fact, it's overwhelming the number of people who have shared deep, heartfelt concerns. It is overwhelming. I'm hearing that from my colleagues, as well.

This is not some sort of populous reaction to the elites of this institution in government. It is an intuition of the American people who are suggesting to us in leadership that we have poured ourselves out as a country, sacrificed tremendously, extraordinarily, to give other people a chance for stability, for human rights, for the right forms of development, for political outcomes that uphold just governing structures.

Where have we gotten for our investment? Basically since World War II, the United States has been cast into the role of the superpower being the proprietor of international stability and we've accepted that

arrangement, but there are tremendous pressures upon us as we continue to move forward in the 21st century as we've empowered other people and other economies through appropriate development to take responsibilities for themselves.

The United States has not always done this perfectly, but we've fought multiple wars and we've engaged in many areas of the world in order to try to give other people a chance and to stop aggressive ideologies that are inconsistent with basic and fundamental human rights. I've responded to the people of Nebraska. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to share that with you this evening:

Life in Syria today is, as the philosopher Thomas Hobbes once wrote, ``nasty, brutish, and short.'' An ongoing civil war ravishes the country. The oppressive regime of President Bashar al-Assad wages battle against a nebulous, undefined mix of rebels, who have regularly employed the same brutal violence that the government has. The result is that there are more than 100,000 persons dead, including many innocent civilians--mothers, fathers, and children.

In response to the suspected use of chemical weapons by Assad, President Obama is now advocating U.S. military intervention, although, of course, the situation is now fluid. In the past, he has stated that the use of chemical weapons is a ``red line'' that Assad could not cross without a serious rethinking of American involvement in the conflict, which to this point has included a significant amount of humanitarian aid--and properly so--targeted to those caught in the middle of this violence. The President, to his credit, has rightly asked for a vote of Congress prior to taking military action, and some in Congress are signaling their support.

In recent days, however, I have clearly stated my opposition to this idea. I oppose this action of unilateral military strikes. The United States should not bomb Syria in the name of stopping violence in Syria. While quick, unilateral military strikes might satisfy the President's ``red line'' rhetoric, the collateral damage and further risk of destabilization is very high.

{time} 1830

Now, as Congress has returned to Washington this week, there are hard questions that are in the process of being asked: What will be the consequences of this bombing? Who's on the other side of this? And how much do we really know of this rebel movement that we will be implicitly aiding if we attack Assad's government? What happens following the military strike? Why not expend the energy of this debate over military involvement on solidifying international outrage and holding particularly Russia, a longtime ally of Syria who's entangled in this situation, holding them accountable?

The international community must work together creatively to stop the savagery of Assad, but it cannot hide behind the United States military might. No longer can it be assumed that the United States is responsible for fixing all aspects of global conflicts, and no longer should the United States accept that framework. For the sake of global stability, a new construct must instead take its place, one in which the responsible Nations of the world are serious about their own defense and stabilization of conflicts within their regions.

In light of the increasing brutality in Syria, the United States should continue to advance its support for the innocent victims of this civil war. Meanwhile, we should also aggressively use this opportunity to facilitate new international partnerships that seek lasting solutions to complicated situations of mass violence.

Until such a united front is achieved, unilateral military action may only introduce further chaos to an already disastrous problem and, as I have said, implicitly put us on the side of a rebel movement who has

also shown willingness to murder innocent civilians. And it is not clear whether or not the more

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moderate elements of that very movement have any capacity to implement governing structures that are just and lasting. So then what happens? Syria, this area degrades into a vast, ungovernable space, ripe for jihadists with no protections for innocent persons or the ancient peoples who call that place home.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other aspects of this that I have written about that I would like to share momentarily, but I would like to turn to my good friend, Congressman Charlie Dent from Pennsylvania, as he wishes to share a few concepts and perspectives on this conflict.

Mr. DENT. I thank the gentleman from Nebraska for organizing this Special Order this evening to discuss the crisis in Syria. In my view, it is really indisputable that Bashar al-Assad is a villain who has committed heinous, mortal crimes with the use of chemical weapons against his own people.

What is debatable, however, is America's policy on Syria and the broader Middle East. I have raised the issue of Syria with this administration at numerous hearings as a member of the Appropriations Committee. I have also worked with Syrians in my own community, and I have the largest population of Syrian Americans of any Member of Congress in the United States. I have met with them. They have brought to my attention issues of abducted Christian archbishops who have been abducted in Syrian and whose whereabouts, unfortunately, are unknown. There is a lot of work going on to try to secure their release, but that said, you can understand their concern for that part of the world.

I have spent time, too, in meetings with America's wonderful friend, King Abdullah of Jordan, who has also shared his perspective on the plight of the Syrian people. But what I have observed most of all is a very sad observation, and that is the friends of the Syrian regime--Iran, Russia and Hezbollah--are far more committed to President Assad than the friends of the Syrian people--and that would be the West and the Arab League--are to these moderate opposition forces.

I had asked Secretary Hillary Clinton--former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton--back in February, 2012, if the administration was prepared to provide some type of material support to moderate secular opposition groups given that it looked like Assad's government was very weak, there was a popular uprising, and it seemed there might be a better outcome. She was pretty clear with me at the time that she thought providing light arms would be of little help to the opposition in the face of Assad's substantial military, with all his air assets, artillery and armor. To put it bluntly and short, she really didn't want to get too involved at that time. We really didn't have much of a discussion about the benefits to America, its friends and allies and their interests, if Iran's influence in the region were substantially weakened through the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad.

I thought at the time that the President was maybe more concerned about maintaining his reputation as a Nobel Peace Prize winner antiwar candidate than actually developing what I thought would be a more practical response for Syria. It just seemed that inaction and indecision were, and frankly today, remain the order of the day.

In the meantime, let's fast forward from a year and a half, 2 years ago to today: al-Nusra and other radical Islamist terrorist organizations have rushed into this vacuum and filled the void, so to speak. So really today there aren't any good public policy outcomes for the United States. The time for the United States to more constructively intervene and to reach a more efficacious resolution, the time for that has long passed.

So here we are, over these last 2\1/2\ years, this Syrian civil war has descended into both a sectarian and proxy conflict, and these events have moved well beyond the United States ability to control with Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia fully committed to the Assad government.

I think we all know, as Mr. Fortenberry knows, we know we have a very war-weary population which is not going to support a half-hearted, poorly thought out military strike which will only expose the United States and its friends to greater risks, including the possibility of a broader regional conflagration. This could include more chemical weapons attacks against the Syrian people and possibly Israel, potential cyber attacks on American critical infrastructure in both the financial services and energy sectors, an unleashed Hezbollah, and other unforeseen, asymmetrical responses.

I am deeply concerned about this, as we all should be. But we can't just look at Syria in isolation; we have to look at it in the much broader context of the Middle East. Unfortunately, and I'm going to have to be a bit critical of the President at this time, witness how President Obama turned his back on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 after 2 weeks of uprisings. Whatever his faults, whatever his shortcomings, Hosni Mubarak was a loyal, 30-year friend of the United States--a lesson learned by our friends and our allies throughout the region and throughout the world.

Of course, prior to that incident there was the Green Revolution in Iran where we saw a lot of very brave people in Iran stand up to the Ahmadinejad regime in Iran. We witnessed that, and it seemed this administration could barely utter words of support to these very brave people who stood up to a tyrant, Ahmadinejad, who made all sorts of reckless and inflammatory and hateful statements against the West and particularly Israel, and so I was just astounded that the administration could barely utter words of support.

Then, of course, we learned about leading from behind in Libya. Actually, leading from behind the French and the British in Libya, to be precise. I was one of only a handful of Republicans in the House to support the authorization for force in Libya--after the fact, but I supported it. So I'm not an isolationist. I believe that we have an important role internationally with the United States, and we have to be constructively engaged.

But let's move forward to 2013. Bashar al-Assad's government launches chemical attacks against his own people. I believe the intelligence is clear that he did it, or his government did it, so I'm not debating those facts, what appear to be facts. But we witnessed these chemicals attacks in both the late spring and again just a few weeks ago in August, these chemical attacks. We witnessed the trampling of the red line set down by the President not once but twice, maybe more than that for all I know. And now over 100,000 Syrians have been killed. What is the President's strategy for Syria? I couldn't explain it to anybody if they asked. He talked about pinpricks or his administration has talked about pinpricks, shots across the bow, a military action of days not weeks, and no intention to topple Assad or to degrade his military capacity to make war on his own people, for that matter. I'm learning a lot about what we will not do, but I'm not really sure what we're trying to do or trying to accomplish. So a very limited air strike to punish Mr. Assad is not going to alter the outcome of the Syrian civil war. What is the point or purpose? What is the clarity of mission?

In my view, America's national interest is really twofold in Syria. One, we want to limit Iranian influence in the region, and, two, the other issue deals with securing those chemical weapons, frankly, from both the Assad government and the radical elements of that opposition who would probably be just as inclined to use them. So much so that King Abdullah of Jordan came to Members of Congress to express his real

concern about al-Nusra forces getting too close, dangerously close to a chemical site in southern Syria, and that was just a few months ago.

So now we also witnessed, too, there really is not a coalition of the willing to tackle Mr. Assad's crimes. It seems more a coalition of the unwilling. The United Nations really doesn't seem anywhere to be found, although in recent days, in the last 24 hours we're hearing there might be some discussion with the Russians about some kind of a resolution on securing those sites, but the U.N. is really nowhere to be found. NATO does not seem to be fully engaged at all, although maybe some members are supportive. And, of course, we've witnessed what the British Parliament did to Prime Minister Cameron in rebuking him. And so the British, our beloved friends and allies, are not going to be engaged in this one,

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and so we're pretty much on our own. Again, I've called this a coalition of the unwilling. And so I think it would behoove the United States not to move in what appears to be almost a unilateral manner.

I have read, too, recently, that some of the Arab governments, Saudi Arabia and others, would be willing to help pay for some of this mission should we strike. You know, on the one hand, I appreciate that. On the other, the United States military is really not a mercenary force for anyone. A lot of folks may be encouraging us or cheering us on, but it doesn't seem they are willing to put people in harm's way. So I think we have to keep that in mind as we talk about this.

I'm going to conclude in a moment, but I was one of the folks who said it is always important for the President to consult with Congress prior to taking any kind of military action. It's important in our system, although I don't believe the President necessarily needs a congressional authorization for what he has called a very limited airstrike. But now that he has asked me to engage in this debate, I owe the President fair consideration of his policy in Syria, whatever it may be.

Again, I said call me skeptical; now you can call me outright opposed. I have said from day one that the President didn't seem to have his heart in this impending military action. He was looking for a way out after the U.N., the U.K., and NATO, a lot of our friends were just not willing to go along, and then the President turned to Congress as a last resort for an authorization where he has, of course, run into very, very heavy skepticism. I just did see any Churchillian resolve in our Commander in Chief. Our men and women in uniform deserve a Commander in Chief who is full-throated in support of what is likely to become a very dangerous military operation and could possibly spiral out of control. But more importantly, we have to be cognizant of the potential consequences and ramifications for that action.

I think the President of the United States owes that to the American people, to make it clear what his policy is, what his mission is, not what he's not going to do, but what he intends to do. After the President really threw this issue to Congress, we witnessed President Assad's jubilant supporters celebrating in the Syrian streets, and I'm sure the corridors of power in Tehran and Moscow, and it seems now that America's friends and allies watched this mystifying failure of Presidential leadership unfold with dismay.

So have our constituents. We have all received these calls. In my view, and I am really sad to say this, Barack Obama may have diminished his own Presidency in the process, but more problematically, diminished America's standing in the world among both friend and foe alike, and that's a real tragedy.

{time} 1845

You know, in this upcoming vote in Congress, if it's to come at all at this point, it is really not so much a vote on authorizing a military strike or military intervention in Syria. The stakes have grown beyond that. It's much more a vote of confidence on the President's Syrian and broader Middle East policy. On that score, I have no confidence.

And I just wanted to say one last thing. I mentioned I have a very large Syrian population in my community, Syrian Americans. They're great Americans. They've been part of my community for a long time, largely Christian, Antioch Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Presbyterian and other denominations.

They are scared. I think they know what Bashar Assad is, and many are very uncomfortable with what he is. And on the other hand, they have seen al-Nusra and al Qaeda, and are absolutely terrified of that operation.

And so they're caught in this sectarian crossfire. They don't want to be there. They're worried about atrocities, grievous atrocities being committed against the Christian people of Syria.

We just witnessed the other day, there was a story of a small village, I believe not too far from Damascus, where the language of Aramaic is spoken; I guess one of the few places in the world where it is still spoken.

Why is that significant?

Well, if you're a Christian, you know that Aramaic was the language that Jesus Christ spoke. And to know that this ancient community--and of course much of Syria's an ancient civilization--to know that these people could be under attack when you find out that al-Nusra forces had entered and intervened, and I hope they've been cleared out.

But that said, you think about this, and we worry about the history of mankind and the history of the Christian tradition is at risk here, and potentially a great risk of extermination.

And we've witnessed this in Egypt too. I mean, there are lessons to be learned from Egypt. When Mubarak fell, the Christian population, the Coptic Christian population of Egypt, became very vulnerable. We know that--extremely vulnerable. Atrocities committed against Christians, desecration of the churches, burning, other terrible things have happened, and I fear that we might see similar, if not worse, things happen in Syria.

So whatever this country chooses, whatever course of action this country chooses to pursue, I don't believe that a military intervention right now by the United States would advance America's policy objectives; and frankly, I don't think it would change the trajectory of the Syrian civil war.

People have said, well, doing nothing at all is the worst of all possibilities, the worst of all options. Well, I would argue that if we're not certain what this limited, so-called limited military intervention will bring, if we're very unclear about that, then I would argue that no action is better than a limited action which may not do much of anything to alter the course of this civil war. So I think we have to be very cautious and very restrained.

I do appreciate the gentleman from Nebraska allowing me this opportunity to speak on this issue, and for his leadership, and for allowing me this time.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Let me thank you, as well, the gentleman from Pennsylvania, my good friend. I've heard you speak behind the scenes in this body, particularly today, with great passion, particularly for the people who are directly impacted by this, people who you represent and are directly connected to the conflict, the ancient Christian community, as you said.

I appreciate your clarity and your resolve on this issue because I

know you, as I do, have great respect for the institution of the Presidency. He is our Commander in Chief.

But we also have a responsibility to render to him our judgment in this case; and so my judgment is no, that a unilateral military strike is not going to accomplish an objective of potentially stabilizing, punishing, preventing Assad from doing further harm and stabilizing that situation, versus pulling the United States, as a coalition of one, into a conflict where we are very unclear as to what the collateral damage and destabilization outcome could actually be.

In addition to that, the American people are intuiting that there is a serious, serious problem here with us being drawn into another conflict where the options are all bad, where our hearts are with the innocent victims, and we will continue to provide humanitarian aid.

But we must not allow the international community to simply hide behind our military might; and I think that that is what the people are sensing, that we are being drawn into something that has much broader implications for the entire international community to respond in a constructive, creative way.

And if we would have expended this energy, as I said earlier, on trying to get underneath the problem and perhaps point the finger and lay it at the footsteps of the Russians, who are completely entangled in this situation, maybe we would have had better movement on this question prior to now.

Now, we'll see what the President says tonight. We'll listen with an open mind. I don't know whether he is going to pull back from his intention to potentially strike Syria or not. But I think it is prudent to allow some diplomatic actions to potentially take their course, even though that might be a bit farfetched at the moment.

But, hopefully, that new diplomatic momentum has some good creative elements and stops the situation, pressures Assad, brings about a collective

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international response that stabilizes the situation and protects innocent people. I think that's the best outcome that we could potentially hope for here.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FORTENBERRY. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. It seems that the policy of the United States and Syria, since the beginning of the uprising in Syria, has largely been one of inaction and detachment. And, in many respects, we outsourced the arming of the opposition forces to many of our good friends: the Turks, the Qataris, the Saudis, and others. And whether we like it or not--and we don't like it in many respects--many of the folks who were armed were people who don't share our interests and values, the al-Nusra forces in particular.

But there are moderate forces, and if the United States had demonstrated some leadership early in this, during that conflict, to help identify moderate secular opposition forces, there probably could have been multi-ethnic again and secular, it could have been Kurdish and Christian and moderate Sunni, that might have helped bring about a more legitimate or a better opposition force that the international community would be rallying around.

But that, unfortunately, has not happened, and now you read about large swaths of territory in Syria dominated by some opposition forces that have been rather radicalized; and that's unfortunate because there are many elements of the Free Syrian Army, of course, who really do want to try to bring about more representative government and, I think, would embrace the values that you and I hold dear.

But, you know, time has passed. Time has passed, and I just don't see

a good outcome, as I stated earlier, at this point. And I just wish--I think the American people understand this intuitively.

And it also speaks to NATO. What's happening with NATO?

It's a great organization. I believe in NATO. It's a collective defense organization. I believe in its military value and its political value. But it seems, since the end of the Cold War, maybe it's gone a little bit adrift.

And Turkey has been a loyal friend and NATO ally for decades. They are directly affected by this conflict in Syria. They may make demands of us and NATO at some point, and we're going to have to think that through, as policymakers, what we would do if our good friends, the Turks, make a request of us, and certainly our good friends in Jordan.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Reclaiming my time, it's a good question you raised, and one that I pointed to earlier, new international constructs that might be using templates of old international constructs, but that are revitalized so that we can have collective operations, if necessary, to engage in this type of stopping mass violence.

The NATO allocations for many countries, they don't meet them year after year. In other words, the money they're supposed to contribute, they just don't do it.

So who has to pick up the pieces?

We do. There's a "free rider problem" as we call it here. And you deal in a lot of international diplomatic circles and you constantly hear it. Oh, the United States is the only one who has the ability. You're the only superpower. You must act, and it is your--you must be compelled morally, based upon who you are, to do something here.

All of those are fine points. But in the 21st century, you have a shift of the global framework for international stability occurring. We have expended ourselves, as a country, for nearly 70 years, providing that framework for global stability, economically and politically protecting human rights, as I said earlier, not always perfectly.

But the United States cannot single-handedly lift this burden for the entire world, particularly for countries that benefited from our past sacrifice, who have the economic wherewithal, and should have the moral compass to be thinking constructively about regional organizations that stop this type of conflict before it starts and demanding just outcomes of sovereign territories.

That is the long-term strategy. I recognize we're in a difficult moment because we're being pressured to decide unilateral military action or not, but this is the type of long-term thinking that I think will help bring about new models of international, multilateral cooperation to prevent this from happening, or when it does happen, to have the right response in place.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FORTENBERRY. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I just want to say one more thing. You know, the President has said that this red line that was crossed was not his red line, but the international community's red line. Ninety-eight percent of the world has opposed chemical weapons use and has agreed to the various conventions on chemical weapons.

Unfortunately, 98 percent of the world isn't prepared to help us in this intervention. We're on our own, and I just wanted to point that out.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Well, our time has expired, and I do thank you for the good constructive conversation. I appreciate your insights and clarity on the situation. It's complex, it's difficult; but, again, unilateral military action allows the international community to hide behind our might, and it's simply not the right response at this time.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

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U.S. ARMS SYRIAN REBELS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Poe) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, there is a war going on in Syria. Some call it a civil war. It may have started out as a civil war, but it has escalated. The Government of Syria, is ruled by the dictator Assad. He's a bad guy; no question about it. Several rebel groups, and we're still not sure who all these people are, are trying to remove him from power. World powers seem to be taking sides in this battle.

You have the Syrian Government supported by Iran and Russia. There's also this little terrorist group called Hezbollah supporting the regime. But on the other side, you've got the rebels, numerous groups, including al Qaeda, a terrorist group. You've got Saudi Arabia; Qatar; you've got the Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt supporting the rebels. Turkey is concerned, and even Great Britain has weighed in on this, a former colonial power in the region. And so more and more groups and nations are lining up in this war in Syria that's been going on for 2 years; 100,000 people have been killed by both sides. Refugees are leaving the country and going to other countries.

I recently was in Turkey on the border of Turkey and Syria, and I saw a refugee camp that had 150,000 Syrians that had escaped the war in Syria. No question the U.S. should help with humanitarian aid.

And finally now the United States, after 2 years, we've decided we're going to take sides. The President has said we're going to give arms to the Syrian rebels and that they're going to be vetted so we make sure that we're not giving those to other terrorist groups. I don't know if we're going to do a universal background check on the rebels, or what; but small arms for the rebels?

Here's what the President said:

We're not taking sides in this religious war between Shia and Sunni. Really, what we are trying to do is take sides against extremists of all sorts.

Well, it seems to me what we are really doing is taking both sides and we're arming extremists at least on one side. And I ask the question: What is the national security interest of the United States to be involved in somebody else's war? There isn't one. We don't have a national security interest to be involved in this war. The United States seems to have a habit of getting involved in other people's business; and once again, we have made the problem in Syria our problem by being involved and supporting the rebel groups.

What is the goal of the United States's involvement? This war is not going to be easily won by the rebels. Are we going to then add more military power to the rebels? What's the end game? What is the goal here, to put another rebel group in power in another country?

You know, we've kind of forgotten what we did in Libya. There's

Muammar Qadhafi, the bad guy of Libya. No question about it, a horrible person. So what does the United States do? We support the rebels who overthrow the Libyan President, the Libyan dictator. We sent small arms. And you know, Mr. Speaker, those small arms are still in North Africa, and they've spread all over North Africa. We don't know what has happened to those weapons that the United States gave to those rebels. Only time will tell.

So this is not our war; yet we seem to be very interested in supporting this, as the President correctly said, a religious war. You've got the Shia's and you've got the Sunnis. They've been at each other since the year 630, and they haven't resolved their conflicts and yet here a century and a half later, another conflict is involved. It's a religious war between two groups in the Middle East. It is escalating. The United States' national interest is not at stake. What the United States should do and work toward is a political solution to this problem, not a military solution to this problem, and do what we can to resolve it politically and help really both sides resolve it.

This is not our war, Mr. Speaker. We have no national security interest. There's no American goal. We don't know the goal. We don't know the end result, and we don't even know who we are arming as those rebels. They could be made up of criminals, patriots, al Qaeda. We ought not be involved in this war that has no national security interest for the United States.

And that's just the way it is.

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<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/9/10/house-section/article/h5440-8>

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NATION-BUILDING AT HOME

(Mr. HIGGINS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, the situation in Syria is that of a national civil war. It's a sectarian and ethnic conflict between two warring factions. This is not about democracy and freedom. There is no social contract. There is no constitution. There is no preamble. There is no unifying vision as to what Syria wants to become. This is a brutal battle between two bad sides for control. Assad is a brutal dictator, for certain; but the opposition's best fighters are al Qaeda and Islamic extremists bent on creating an Islamic state in Syria.

In the international community, 194 countries have said--but for Turkey and France--yes, the United States, go get them; just don't ask us to participate. So the American people will find themselves, once again, for the third time in a decade, in a region of the Middle East in South Asia in another civil war, essentially alone again.

The American people want nation-building. But they want it right here at home, in America.

Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps. (2012, augustus 20). Whitehouse.Gov.

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/20/remarks-president-white-house-press-corps>

Q Mr. President, could you update us on your latest thinking of where you think things are in Syria, and in particular, whether you envision using U.S. military, if simply for nothing else, the safe keeping of the chemical weapons, and if you're confident that the chemical weapons are safe?

I also want to follow up on an answer you just gave to Nancy. You said that one of the reasons you wanted to see Mitt Romney's tax returns was you want to see if everybody is playing by the same set of rules. That actually goes to the question she asked, which is this implication, do you think there's something Mitt Romney is not telling us in his tax returns that indicates he's not playing by the same set of rules?

THE PRESIDENT: No. There's a difference between playing by the same sets of rules and doing something illegal. And in no way have we suggested the latter. But the first disclosure, the one year of tax returns that he disclosed indicated that he used Swiss bank accounts, for example. Well, that may be perfectly legal, but I suspect if you ask the average American, do you have one and is that part of how you manage your tax obligations, they would say no. They would find that relevant information, particularly when we're going into a time where we know we're going to have to make tough choices both about spending and about taxes.

So I think the idea that this is somehow exceptional, that there should be a rationale or a justification for doing more than the very bare minimum has it backwards. I mean, the assumption should be you do what previous presidential candidates did, dating back for decades. And Governor Romney's own dad says, well, the reason I put out 10 or 12 years is because any single year might not tell you the whole story. And everybody has, I think, followed that custom ever since.

The American people have assumed that if you want to be President of the United States, that your life is an open book when it comes to things like your finances. I'm not asking him to disclose every detail of his medical records -- although we normally do that as well -- (laughter.) You know? I mean, this isn't sort of overly personal here, guys. This is pretty standard stuff. I don't think we're being mean by asking him to do what every other presidential candidate has done -- right? It's what the American people expect.

On Syria, obviously this is a very tough issue. I have indicated repeatedly that President al-Assad has lost legitimacy, that he needs to step down. So far, he hasn't gotten the message, and instead has double downed in violence on his own people. The international community has sent a clear message that rather than drag his country into civil war he should move in the direction of a political transition. But at this point, the likelihood of a soft landing seems pretty distant.

What we've said is, number one, we want to make sure we're providing humanitarian assistance, and we've done that to the tune of \$82 million, I believe, so far. And we'll probably end up doing a little more because we want to make sure that the hundreds of thousands of refugees that are fleeing the mayhem, that they don't end up creating -- or being in a terrible situation, or also destabilizing some of Syria's neighbors.

The second thing we've done is we said that we would provide, in consultation with the international community, some assistance to the opposition in thinking about how would a political transition take place, and what are the principles that should be upheld in terms of looking out for minority rights and human rights. And that consultation is taking place.

I have, at this point, not ordered military engagement in the situation. But the point that you made about chemical and biological weapons is critical. That's an issue that doesn't just concern Syria; it concerns our close allies in the region, including Israel. It concerns us. We cannot have a situation where chemical or biological weapons are falling into the hands of the wrong people.

We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation.

Q So you're confident it's somehow under -- it's safe?

THE PRESIDENT: In a situation this volatile, I wouldn't say that I am absolutely confident. What I'm saying is we're monitoring that situation very carefully. We have put together a range of contingency plans. We have communicated in no uncertain terms with every player in the region that that's a red line for us and that there would be enormous consequences if we start seeing movement on the chemical weapons front or the use of chemical weapons. That would change my calculations significantly.

All right, thank you, everybody.

END

1:49 P.M. EDT

The Obama Doctrine

The president explains his hardest decisions about America's role in the world.

Friday, August 30, 2013, the day the feckless Barack Obama brought to a premature end America's reign as the world's sole indispensable superpower—or, alternatively, the day the sagacious Barack Obama peered into the Middle Eastern abyss and stepped back from the consuming void—began with a thundering speech given on Obama's behalf by his secretary of state, John Kerry, in Washington, D.C. The subject of Kerry's uncharacteristically Churchillian remarks, delivered in the Treaty Room at the State Department, was the gassing of civilians by the president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad.

Obama, in whose Cabinet Kerry serves faithfully, but with some exasperation, is himself given to vaulting oratory, but not usually of the martial sort associated with Churchill. Obama believes that the Manichaeism, and eloquently rendered bellicosity, commonly associated with Churchill were justified by Hitler's rise, and were at times defensible in the struggle against the Soviet Union. But he also thinks rhetoric should be weaponized sparingly, if at all, in today's more ambiguous and complicated international arena. The president believes that Churchillian rhetoric and, more to the point, Churchillian habits of thought, helped bring his predecessor, George W. Bush, to ruinous war in Iraq. Obama entered the White House bent on getting out of Iraq and Afghanistan; he was not seeking new dragons to slay. And he was particularly mindful of promising victory in conflicts he believed to be unwinnable. "If you were to say, for instance, that we're going to rid Afghanistan of the Taliban and build a prosperous democracy instead, the president is aware that someone, seven years later, is going to hold you to that promise," Ben Rhodes, Obama's deputy national-security adviser, and his foreign-policy amanuensis, told me not long ago.

But Kerry's rousing remarks on that August day, which had been drafted in part by Rhodes, were threaded with righteous anger and bold promises, including the barely concealed threat of imminent attack. Kerry, like Obama himself, was horrified by the sins committed by the Syrian regime in its attempt to put down a two-year-old rebellion. In the Damascus suburb of Ghouta nine days earlier, Assad's army had murdered more than 1,400 civilians with sarin gas. The strong sentiment inside the Obama administration was that Assad had earned dire punishment. In Situation Room meetings that followed the attack on Ghouta, only the White House chief of staff, Denis McDonough, cautioned explicitly about the perils of intervention. John Kerry argued vociferously for action.

"As previous storms in history have gathered, when unspeakable crimes were within our power to stop them, we have been warned against the temptations of looking the other way," Kerry said in his speech. "History is full of leaders who have warned against inaction, indifference, and especially against silence when it mattered most."

Kerry counted President Obama among those leaders. A year earlier, when the administration suspected that the Assad regime was contemplating the use of chemical weapons, Obama had declared: "We have been very clear to the Assad regime ... that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation."

Despite this threat, Obama seemed to many critics to be coldly detached from the suffering of innocent Syrians. Late in the summer of 2011, he had called for Assad's departure. "For the sake of the Syrian people," Obama said, "the time has come for President Assad to step aside." But Obama initially did little to bring about Assad's end.

He resisted demands to act in part because he assumed, based on the analysis of U.S. intelligence, that Assad would fall without his help. "He thought Assad would go the way Mubarak went," Dennis Ross, a former Middle East adviser to Obama, told me, referring to the quick departure of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in early 2011, a moment that represented the acme of the Arab Spring. But as Assad clung to power, Obama's resistance to direct intervention only grew. After several months of deliberation, he authorized the CIA to train and fund Syrian rebels, but he also shared the outlook of his former defense secretary, Robert Gates, who had routinely asked in meetings, "Shouldn't we finish up the two wars we have before we look for another?"

The current U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, who is the most dispositionally interventionist among Obama's senior advisers, had argued early for arming Syria's rebels. Power, who during this period served on the National Security Council staff, is the author of a celebrated book excoriating a succession of U.S. presidents for their failures to prevent genocide. The book, *A Problem From Hell*, published in 2002, drew Obama to Power while he was in the U.S. Senate, though the two were not an obvious ideological match. Power is a partisan of the doctrine known as "responsibility to protect," which holds that sovereignty should not be considered inviolate when a country is slaughtering its own citizens. She lobbied him to endorse this doctrine in the speech he delivered when he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, but he declined. Obama generally does not believe a president should place American soldiers at great risk in order to prevent humanitarian disasters, unless those disasters pose a direct security threat to the United States.



Obama in the Oval Office, where, two and a half years ago, he shocked national-security aides by calling off air strikes on Syria

Power sometimes argued with Obama in front of other National Security Council officials, to the point where he could no longer conceal his frustration. "Samantha, enough, I've already read your book," he once snapped.

Obama, unlike liberal interventionists, is an admirer of the foreign-policy realism of President George H. W. Bush and, in particular, of Bush's national-security adviser, Brent Scowcroft ("I love that guy," Obama once told me). Bush and Scowcroft removed Saddam Hussein's army from Kuwait in 1991, and they deftly managed the disintegration of the Soviet Union; Scowcroft also, on Bush's behalf, toasted the leaders of China shortly after the slaughter in Tiananmen Square. As Obama was writing his campaign manifesto, *The Audacity of Hope*, in 2006, Susan Rice, then an informal adviser, felt it necessary to remind him to include at least one line of praise for the foreign policy of President Bill Clinton, to partially balance the praise he showered on Bush and Scowcroft.

At the outset of the Syrian uprising, in early 2011, Power argued that the rebels, drawn from the ranks of ordinary citi-zens, deserved America’s enthusiastic support. Others noted that the rebels were farmers and doctors and carpenters, com-paring these revolutionaries to the men who won America’s war for independence.

Obama flipped this plea on its head. “When you have a professional army,” he once told me, “that is well armed and sponsored by two large states”—Iran and Russia—“who have huge stakes in this, and they are fighting against a farmer, a carpenter, an engineer who started out as protesters and suddenly now see themselves in the midst of a civil con-flict ...” He paused. “The notion that we could have—in a clean way that didn’t commit U.S. military forces—changed the equation on the ground there was never true.” The message Obama telegraphed in speeches and interviews was clear: **He would not end up like the second President Bush—a president who became tragically overextended in the Middle East,** whose decisions filled the wards of Walter Reed with grievously wounded soldiers, who was helpless to stop the obliteration of his reputation, even when he recalibrated his policies in his second term. Obama would say privately that the first task of an American president in the post-Bush international arena was **“Don’t do stupid shit.”**



Obama and Vice President Joe Biden meet with members of the National Security Council, including Susan Rice and John Kerry (second and third from left), in December 2014.

Obama’s reticence frustrated Power and others on his national-security team who had a preference for action. Hillary Clinton, when she was Obama’s secretary of state, argued for an early and assertive response to Assad’s violence. In 2014, after she left office, Clinton told me that “the failure to help build up a credible fighting force of the people who were the originators of the protests against Assad ... left a big vacuum, which the jihadists have now filled.” When The Atlantic published this statement, and also published Clinton’s assessment that “great nations need organizing principles, and ‘Don’t do stupid stuff’ is not an organizing principle,” Obama became “rip-shit angry,” according to one of his senior advisers. The

president did not understand how “Don’t do stupid shit” could be considered a controversial slogan. Ben Rhodes recalls that “the questions we were asking in the White House were ‘Who exactly is in the stupid-shit caucus? Who is pro–stupid shit?’” The Iraq invasion, Obama believed, should have taught Democratic interventionists like Clinton, who had voted for its authorization, the dangers of doing stupid shit. (Clinton quickly apologized to Obama for her comments, and a Clin-ton spokesman announced that the two would “hug it out” on Martha’s Vineyard when they crossed paths there later.)

Syria, for Obama, represented a slope potentially as slip-pery as Iraq. In his first term, he came to believe that only a handful of threats in the Middle East conceivably warranted direct U.S. military intervention. These included the threat posed by al-Qaeda; threats to the continued existence of Israel (“It would be a moral failing for me as president of the United States” not to defend Israel, he once told me); and, not unrelated to Israel’s security, the threat posed by a nuclear-armed Iran. The danger to the United States posed by the Assad regime did not rise to the level of these challenges.

Given Obama’s reticence about intervention, the bright-red line he drew for Assad in the summer of 2012 was striking. Even his own advisers were surprised. “I didn’t know it was coming,” his secretary of defense at the time, Leon Panetta, told me. I was told that Vice President Joe Biden repeatedly warned Obama against drawing a red line on chemical weapons, fearing that it would one day have to be enforced.

Kerry, in his remarks on August 30, 2013, suggested that Assad should be punished in part because the “credibility and the future interests of the United States of America and our allies” were at stake. “It is directly related to our credibility and whether countries still believe the United States when it says something. They are watching to see if Syria can get away with it, because then maybe they too can put the world at greater risk.”



Leon Panetta (left) attends a press briefing on military strategy in January 2012. Panetta, then Obama’s secretary of defense, has criti-cized the president’s failure to enforce the Syrian red line.

Ninety minutes later, at the White House, Obama re-inforced Kerry's message in a public statement: "It's important for us to recognize that when over 1,000 people are killed, including hundreds of innocent children, through the use of a weapon that 98 or 99 percent of humanity says should not be used even in war, and there is no action, then we're sending a signal that that international norm doesn't mean much. And that is a danger to our national security."

It appeared as though Obama had drawn the conclusion that damage to American credibility in one region of the world would bleed into others, and that U.S. deterrent credibility was indeed at stake in Syria. Assad, it seemed, had succeeded in pushing the president to a place he never thought he would have to go. Obama generally believes that the Washington foreign-policy establishment, which he secretly disdains, makes a fetish of "credibility"—particularly the sort of credibility purchased with force. The preservation of credibility, he says, led to Vietnam. Within the White House, Obama would argue that "dropping bombs on someone to prove that you're willing to drop bombs on someone is just about the worst reason to use force."

American national-security credibility, as it is conventionally understood in the Pentagon, the State Department, and the cluster of think tanks headquartered within walking distance of the White House, is an intangible yet potent force—one that, when properly nurtured, keeps America's friends feeling secure and keeps the international order stable.

In White House meetings that crucial week in August, Biden, who ordinarily shared Obama's worries about American overreach, argued passionately that "big nations don't bluff." America's closest allies in Europe and across the Middle East believed Obama was threatening military action, and his own advisers did as well. At a joint press conference with Obama at the White House the previous May, David Cameron, the British prime minister, had said, "Syria's history is being written in the blood of her people, and it is happening on our watch." Cameron's statement, one of his advisers told me, was meant to encourage Obama toward more-decisive action. "The prime minister was certainly under the impression that the president would enforce the red line," the adviser told me. The Saudi ambassador in Washington at the time, Adel al-Jubeir, told friends, and his superiors in Riyadh, that the president was finally ready to strike. Obama "figured out how important this is," Jubeir, who is now the Saudi foreign minister, told one interlocutor. "He will definitely strike."



Obama

and Cuban President Raúl Castro at the Summit of the Americas last spring.

Obama had already ordered the Pentagon to develop target lists. Five Arleigh Burke-class destroyers were in the Mediterranean, ready to fire cruise missiles at regime targets. French President François Hollande, the most enthusiastically pro-intervention among Europe's leaders, was preparing to strike as well. All week, White House officials had publicly built the case that Assad had committed a crime against humanity. Kerry's speech would mark the culmination of this campaign.

But the president had grown queasy. In the days after the gassing of Ghouta, Obama would later tell me, **he found himself recoiling from the idea of an attack unsanctioned by international law or by Congress.** The American people seemed unenthusiastic about a Syria intervention; so too did one of the few foreign leaders Obama respects, Angela Merkel, the German chancellor. She told him that her country would not participate in a Syria campaign. And in a stunning development, on Thursday, August 29, the British Parliament denied David Cameron its blessing for an attack. John Kerry later told me that when he heard that, "internally, I went, Oops."

Obama was also unsettled by a surprise visit early in the week from James Clapper, his director of national intelligence, who interrupted the President's Daily Brief, the threat report Obama receives each morning from Clapper's analysts, to make clear that the intelligence on Syria's use of sarin gas, while robust, was not a "slam dunk." He chose the term carefully. Clapper, the chief of an intelligence community traumatized by its failures in the runup to the Iraq War, was not going to overpromise, in the manner of the onetime CIA director George Tenet, who famously guaranteed George W. Bush a "slam dunk" in Iraq.

While the Pentagon and the White House's national security apparatuses were still moving toward war (John Kerry told me he was expecting a strike the day after his speech), **the president had come to believe that he was walking into a trap—one laid both by allies and by adversaries, and by conventional expectations of what an American president is supposed to do.**

Many of his advisers did not grasp the depth of the president's misgivings; his Cabinet and his allies were certainly unaware of them. But his doubts were growing. Late on Friday afternoon, Obama determined that he was simply not prepared to authorize a strike. He asked McDonough, his chief of staff, to take a walk with him on the South Lawn of the White House. Obama did not choose McDonough randomly: He is the Obama aide most averse to U.S. military intervention, and someone who, in the words of one of his colleagues, "thinks in terms of traps." Obama, ordinarily a preternaturally confident man, was looking for validation, and trying to devise ways to explain his change of heart, both to his own aides and to the public. He and McDonough stayed outside for an hour. Obama told him he was worried that Assad would place civilians as "human shields" around obvious targets. He also pointed out an underlying flaw in the proposed strike: U.S. missiles would not be fired at chemical-weapons depots, for fear of sending plumes of poison into the air. A strike would target military units that had delivered these weapons, but not the weapons themselves.



British Prime Minister David Cameron, flanked by U.K. officials, attends dinner at the White House in January 2015.

Obama also shared with McDonough a long-standing resentment: He was tired of watching Washington unthinkingly drift toward war in Muslim countries. Four years earlier, the president believed, the Pentagon had "jammed" him on a troop surge for Afghanistan. Now, on Syria, he was beginning to feel jammed again.

When the two men came back to the Oval Office, the president told his national-security aides that he planned to stand down. There would be no attack the next day; he wanted to refer the matter to Congress for a vote. Aides in the room were shocked. Susan Rice, now Obama's national-security adviser, argued that the damage to America's credibility would be serious and lasting. Others had difficulty fathoming how the president could reverse himself the day before a planned strike. Obama, however, was completely calm. "If you've been around him, you know when he's ambivalent about something, when it's a 51-49 decision," Ben Rhodes told me. "But he was completely at ease."

Not long ago, I asked Obama to describe his thinking on that day. He listed the practical worries that had preoccupied him. "We had UN inspectors on the ground who were completing their work, and we could not risk taking a shot while they were there. A second major factor was the failure of Cameron to obtain the consent of his parliament."

The third, and most important, factor, he told me, was "our assessment that while we could inflict some damage on Assad, we could not, through a missile strike, eliminate the chemical weapons themselves, and what I would then face was the prospect of Assad having survived

the strike and claiming he had successfully defied the United States, that the United States had acted unlawfully in the absence of a UN mandate, and that that would have potentially strengthened his hand rather than weakened it.”

The fourth factor, he said, was of deeper philosophical importance. “This falls in the category of something that I had been brooding on for some time,” he said. “I had come into office with the strong belief that the scope of executive power in national-security issues is very broad, but not limitless.”

Obama knew his decision not to bomb Syria would likely upset America’s allies. It did. The prime minister of France, Manuel Valls, told me that his government was already worried about the consequences of earlier inaction in Syria when word came of the stand-down. “By not intervening early, we have cre-ated a monster,” Valls told me. “We were absolutely certain that the U.S. administration would say yes. Working with the Ameri-cans, we had already seen the targets. It was a great surprise. If we had bombed as was planned, I think things would be different today.” The crown prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, who was already upset with Obama for “abandoning” Hosni Mubarak, the former president of Egypt, fumed to American visitors that the U.S. was led by an “untrustworthy” president. The king of Jordan, Abdullah II—already dismayed by what he saw as Obama’s illogical desire to distance the U.S. from its traditional Sunni Arab allies and create a new alliance with Iran, Assad’s Shia sponsor—complained privately, “I think I believe in American power more than Obama does.” The Sau-dis, too, were infuriated. They had never trusted Obama—he had, long before he became president, referred to them as a “so-called ally” of the U.S. “Iran is the new great power of the Middle East, and the U.S. is the old,” Jubeir, the Saudi ambassador in Washington, told his superiors in Riyadh.

Obama’s decision caused tremors across Washington as well. John McCain and Lindsey Graham, the two leading Republican hawks in the Senate, had met with Obama in the White House earlier in the week and had been promised an attack. They were angered by the about-face. Damage was done even inside the administration. Neither Chuck Hagel, then the secretary of defense, nor John Kerry was in the Oval Office when the president informed his team of his thinking. Kerry would not learn about the change until later that evening. “I just got fucked over,” he told a friend shortly after talking to the president that night. (When I asked Kerry recently about that tumultuous night, he said, “I didn’t stop to analyze it. I figured the president had a reason to make a decision and, honestly, I understood his notion.”)

The next few days were chaotic. The president asked Con-gress to authorize the use of force—the irrepressible Kerry served as chief lobbyist—and it quickly became apparent in the White House that Congress had little interest in a strike. When I spoke with Biden recently about the red-line decision, he made special note of this fact. “It matters to have Congress with you, in terms of your ability to sustain what you set out to do,” he said. Obama “didn’t go to Congress to get himself off the hook. He had his doubts at that point, but he knew that if he was going to do anything, he better damn well have the public with him, or it would be a very short ride.” Congress’s clear ambivalence convinced Biden that Obama was correct to fear the slippery slope. “What happens when we get a plane shot down? Do we not go in and rescue?” Biden asked. “You need the support of the American people.”

Amid the confusion, a deus ex machina appeared in the form of the Russian president, Vladimir Putin. At the G20 summit in St. Petersburg, which was held the week after the Syria reversal, Obama pulled Putin aside, he recalled to me, and told the Russian president “that if

he forced Assad to get rid of the chemical weapons, that that would eliminate the need for us taking a military strike.” Within weeks, Kerry, working with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, would engineer the removal of most of Syria’s chemical-weapons arsenal—a program whose existence Assad until then had refused to even acknowledge.

The arrangement won the president praise from, of all people, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, with whom he has had a consistently contentious relationship. The removal of Syria’s chemical-weapons stockpiles represented “the one ray of light in a very dark region,” Netanyahu told me not long after the deal was announced.

John Kerry today expresses no patience for those who argue, as he himself once did, that Obama should have bombed Assad-regime sites in order to buttress America’s deterrent capability. “You’d still have the weapons there, and you’d probably be fighting ISIL” for control of the weapons, he said, referring to the Islamic State, the terror group also known as ISIS. “It just doesn’t make sense. But I can’t deny to you that this notion about the red line being crossed and [Obama’s] not doing anything gained a life of its own.”

Obama understands that the decision he made to step back from air strikes, and to allow the violation of a red line he himself had drawn to go unpunished, will be interrogated mercilessly by historians. But today that decision is a source of deep satisfaction for him.

“I’m very proud of this moment,” he told me. “The overwhelming weight of conventional wisdom and the machinery of our national-security apparatus had gone fairly far. The perception was that my credibility was at stake, that America’s credibility was at stake. And so for me to press the pause button at that moment, I knew, would cost me politically. And the fact that I was able to pull back from the immediate pressures and think through in my own mind what was in America’s interest, not only with respect to Syria but also with respect to our democracy, was as tough a decision as I’ve made—and I believe ultimately it was the right decision to make.”

This was the moment the president believes he finally broke with what he calls, derisively, the “Washington playbook.”

“Where am I controversial? When it comes to the use of military power,” he said. “That is the source of the controversy. There’s a playbook in Washington that presidents are supposed to follow. It’s a playbook that comes out of the foreign-policy establishment. And the playbook prescribes responses to different events, and these responses tend to be militarized responses. Where America is directly threatened, the playbook works. But the playbook can also be a trap that can lead to bad decisions. In the midst of an international challenge like Syria, you get judged harshly if you don’t follow the playbook, even if there are good reasons why it does not apply.”

I have come to believe that, in Obama’s mind, August 30, 2013, was his liberation day, the day he defied not only the foreign-policy establishment and its cruise-missile playbook, but also the demands of America’s frustrating, high-maintenance allies in the Middle East—countries, he complains privately to friends and advisers, that seek to exploit American “muscle” for their own narrow and sectarian ends. By 2013, Obama’s resentments were well developed. He resented military leaders who believed they could fix any problem if the commander in chief would simply give them what they wanted, and he resented the foreign-policy think-tank complex. A widely held sentiment inside the White House is that many of

the most prominent foreign-policy think tanks in Washington are doing the bidding of their Arab and pro-Israel funders. I've heard one administration official refer to Massachusetts Avenue, the home of many of these think tanks, as "Arab-occupied territory."

For some foreign-policy experts, even within his own administration, Obama's about-face on enforcing the red line was a dispiriting moment in which he displayed irresolution and naïveté, and did lasting damage to America's standing in the world. "Once the commander in chief draws that red line," Leon Panetta, who served as CIA director and then as secretary of defense in Obama's first term, told me recently, "then I think the credibility of the commander in chief and this nation is at stake if he doesn't enforce it." Right after Obama's reversal, Hillary Clinton said privately, "If you say you're going to strike, you have to strike. There's no choice."

"Assad is effectively being rewarded for the use of chemical weapons, rather than 'punished' as originally planned." Shadi Hamid, a scholar at the Brookings Institution, wrote for *The Atlantic* at the time. "He has managed to remove the threat of U.S. military action while giving very little up in return."

Even commentators who have been broadly sympathetic to Obama's policies saw this episode as calamitous. Gideon Rose, the editor of *Foreign Affairs*, wrote recently that Obama's handling of this crisis—"first casually announcing a major commitment, then dithering about living up to it, then frantically tossing the ball to Congress for a decision—was a case study in embarrassingly amateurish improvisation."

Obama's defenders, however, argue that he did no damage to U.S. credibility, citing Assad's subsequent agreement to have his chemical weapons removed. "The threat of force was credible enough for them to give up their chemical weapons," Tim Kaine, a Democratic senator from Virginia, told me. "We threatened military action and they responded. That's deterrent credibility."

History may record August 30, 2013, as the day Obama prevented the U.S. from entering yet another disastrous Muslim civil war, and the day he removed the threat of a chemical attack on Israel, Turkey, or Jordan. Or it could be remembered as the day he let the Middle East slip from America's grasp, into the hands of Russia, Iran, and ISIS.

I FIRST SPOKE WITH OBAMA about foreign policy when he was a U.S. senator, in 2006. At the time, I was familiar mainly with the text of a speech he had delivered four years earlier, at a Chicago antiwar rally. It was an unusual speech for an antiwar rally in that it was not antiwar; Obama, who was then an Illinois state senator, argued only against one specific and, at the time, still theoretical, war. "I suffer no illusions about Saddam Hussein," he said. "He is a brutal man. A ruthless man ... But I also know that Saddam poses no imminent and direct threat to the United States or to his neighbors." He added, "I know that an invasion of Iraq without a clear rationale and without strong international support will only fan the flames of the Middle East, and encourage the worst, rather than best, impulses of the Arab world, and strengthen the recruitment arm of al-Qaeda."

This speech had made me curious about its author. I wanted to learn how an Illinois state senator, a part-time law professor who spent his days traveling between Chicago and Springfield, had come to a more prescient understanding of the coming quagmire than the most experienced foreign-policy thinkers of his party, including such figures as Hillary

Clinton, Joe Biden, and John Kerry, not to mention, of course, most Republicans and many foreign-policy analysts and writers, including me.

Since that first meeting in 2006, I've interviewed Obama periodically, mainly on matters related to the Middle East. But over the past few months, I've spent several hours talking with him about the broadest themes of his "long game" foreign policy, including the themes he is most eager to discuss—namely, the ones that have nothing to do with the Middle East.

"ISIS is not an existential threat to the United States," he told me in one of these conversations. "Climate change is a potential existential threat to the entire world if we don't do something about it." Obama explained that climate change worries him in particular because "it is a political problem perfectly designed to repel government intervention. It involves every single country, and it is a comparatively slow-moving emergency, so there is always something seemingly more urgent on the agenda."

At the moment, of course, the most urgent of the "seemingly more urgent" issues is Syria. But at any given moment, Obama's entire presidency could be upended by North Korean aggression, or an assault by Russia on a member of nato, or an ISIS-planned attack on U.S. soil. Few presidents have faced such diverse tests on the international stage as Obama has, and the challenge for him, as for all presidents, has been to distinguish the merely urgent from the truly important, and to focus on the important.

My goal in our recent conversations was to see the world through Obama's eyes, and to understand what he believes America's role in the world should be. This article is informed by our recent series of conversations, which took place in the Oval Office; over lunch in his dining room; aboard Air Force One; and in Kuala Lumpur during his most recent visit to Asia, in November. It is also informed by my previous interviews with him and by his speeches and prolific public ruminations, as well as by conversations with his top foreign-policy and national-security advisers, foreign leaders and their ambassadors in Washington, friends of the president and others who have spoken with him about his policies and decisions, and his adversaries and critics.

Over the course of our conversations, I came to see Obama as a president who has grown steadily more fatalistic about the constraints on America's ability to direct global events, even as he has, late in his presidency, accumulated a set of potentially historic foreign-policy achievements—controversial, provisional achievements, to be sure, but achievements nonetheless: the opening to Cuba, the Paris climate-change accord, the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, and, of course, the Iran nuclear deal. These he accomplished despite his growing sense that larger forces—the riptide of tribal feeling in a world that should have already shed its atavism; the resilience of small men who rule large countries in ways contrary to their own best interests; the persistence of fear as a governing human emotion—frequently conspire against the best of America's intentions. But he also has come to learn, he told me, that very little is accomplished in international affairs without U.S. leadership.

Obama talked me through this apparent contradiction. "I want a president who has the sense that you can't fix everything," he said. But on the other hand, "if we don't set the agenda, it doesn't happen." He explained what he meant. "The fact is, there is not a summit I've attended since I've been president where we are not setting the agenda, where we are not responsible for the key results," he said. "That's true whether you're talking about nuclear

security, whether you're talking about saving the world financial system, whether you're talking about climate."

One day, over lunch in the Oval Office dining room, I asked the president how he thought his foreign policy might be understood by historians. He started by describing for me a four-box grid representing the main schools of American foreign-policy thought. One box he called isolationism, which he dismissed out of hand. "The world is ever-shrinking," he said. "Withdrawal is untenable." The other boxes he labeled realism, liberal interventionism, and internationalism. "I suppose you could call me a realist in believing we can't, at any given moment, relieve all the world's misery," he said. "We have to choose where we can make a real impact." He also noted that he was quite obviously an internationalist, de-voted as he is to strengthening multilateral organizations and international norms.

I told him my impression was that the various traumas of the past seven years have, if anything, intensified his commitment to realist-driven restraint. Had nearly two full terms in the White House soured him on interventionism?

"For all of our warts, the United States has clearly been a force for good in the world," he said. "If you compare us to previous superpowers, we act less on the basis of naked self-interest, and have been interested in establishing norms that benefit everyone. If it is possible to do good at a bearable cost, to save lives, we will do it."

If a crisis, or a humanitarian catastrophe, does not meet his stringent standard for what constitutes a direct national-security threat, Obama said, he doesn't believe that he should be forced into silence. He is not so much the realist, he suggested, that he won't pass judgment on other leaders. Though he has so far ruled out the use of direct American power to depose Assad, he was not wrong, he argued, to call on Assad to go. "Oftentimes when you get critics of our Syria policy, one of the things that they'll point out is 'You called for Assad to go, but you didn't force him to go. You did not invade.' And the notion is that if you weren't going to overthrow the regime, you shouldn't have said anything. That's a weird argument to me, the notion that if we use our moral authority to say 'This is a brutal regime, and this is not how a leader should treat his people,' once you do that, you are obliged to invade the country and install a government you prefer."

"I am very much the internationalist," Obama said in a later conversation. "And I am also an idealist insofar as I believe that we should be promoting values, like democracy and human rights and norms and values, because not only do they serve our interests the more people adopt values that we share—in the same way that, economically, if people adopt rule of law and property rights and so forth, that is to our advantage—but because it makes the world a better place. And I'm willing to say that in a very corny way, and in a way that probably Brent Scowcroft would not say."

"Having said that," he continued, "I also believe that the world is a tough, complicated, messy, mean place, and full of hardship and tragedy. And in order to advance both our security interests and those ideals and values that we care about, we've got to be hardheaded at the same time as we're bighearted, and pick and choose our spots, and recognize that there are going to be times where the best that we can do is to shine a spotlight on something that's terrible, but not believe that we can automatically solve it. There are going to be times where our security interests conflict with our concerns about human rights. There are going to be

times where we can do something about innocent people being killed, but there are going to be times where we can't."

If Obama ever questioned whether America really is the world's one indispensable nation, he no longer does so. But he is the rare president who seems at times to resent indispensability, rather than embrace it. "Free riders aggravate me," he told me. Recently, Obama warned that Great Britain would no longer be able to claim a "special relationship" with the United States if it did not commit to spending at least 2 percent of its GDP on defense. "You have to pay your fair share," Obama told David Cameron, who subsequently met the 2percent threshold.

Part of his mission as president, Obama explained, is to spur other countries to take action for them-selves, rather than wait for the U.S. to lead. The defense of the liberal international order against jihadist terror, Russian adventurism, and Chinese bullying depends in part, he believes, on the willingness of other nations to share the burden with the U.S. This is why the controversy surrounding the assertion—made by an anonymous administration official to The New Yorker during the Libya crisis of 2011—that his policy consisted of "leading from behind" perturbed him. "We don't have to always be the ones who are up front," he told me. "Sometimes we're going to get what we want precisely because we are sharing in the agenda. The irony is that it was precisely in order to prevent the Europeans and the Arab states from holding our coats while we did all the fighting that we, by design, insisted" that they lead during the mission to remove Muammar Qaddafi from power in Libya. "It was part of the antifree rider campaign."

The president also seems to believe that sharing leadership with other countries is a way to check America's more unruly impulses. "One of the reasons I am so focused on taking action multilaterally where our direct interests are not at stake is that multilateralism regulates hubris," he explained. He consistently invokes what he understands to be America's past failures overseas as a means of checking American self-righteousness. "We have history," he said. "We have history in Iran, we have history in Indonesia and Central America. So we have to be mindful of our history when we start talking about intervening, and understand the source of other people's suspicions."

In his efforts to off-load some of America's foreign-policy responsibilities to its allies, Obama appears to be a classic retrenchment president in the manner of Dwight D. Eisenhower and Richard Nixon. Retrenchment, in this context, is defined as "pulling back, spending less, cutting risk, and shifting burdens to allies," Stephen Sestanovich, an expert on presidential foreign policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, explained to me. "If John McCain had been elected in 2008, you would still have seen some degree of retrenchment," Sestanovich said. "It's what the country wanted. If you come into office in the middle of a war that is not going well, you're convinced that the American people have hired you to do less." One difference between Eisenhower and Nixon, on the one hand, and Obama, on the other, Sestanovich said, is that Obama "appears to have had a personal, ideological commitment to the idea that foreign policy had consumed too much of the nation's attention and resources."

I asked Obama about retrenchment. "Almost every great world power has succumbed" to overextension, he said. "What I think is not smart is the idea that every time there is a problem, we send in our military to impose order. We just can't do that."

But once he decides that a particular challenge represents a direct national-security threat, he has shown a willingness to act unilaterally. This is one of the larger ironies of the Obama

presidency: He has relentlessly questioned the efficacy of force, but he has also become the most successful terrorist-hunter in the history of the presidency, one who will hand to his successor a set of tools an accomplished assassin would envy. “He applies different standards to direct threats to the U.S.,” Ben Rhodes says. “For instance, despite his misgivings about Syria, he has not had a second thought about drones.” Some critics argue he should have had a few second thoughts about what they see as the overuse of drones. But John Brennan, Obama’s CIA director, told me recently that he and the president “have similar views. One of them is that sometimes you have to take a life to save even more lives. We have a similar view of just-war theory. The president requires near-certainty of no collateral damage. But if he believes it is necessary to act, he doesn’t hesitate.”

Those who speak with Obama about jihadist thought say that he possesses a no-illusions understanding of the forces that drive apocalyptic violence among radical Muslims, but he has been careful about articulating that publicly, out of concern that he will exacerbate anti-Muslim xenophobia. He has a tragic realist’s understanding of sin, cowardice, and corruption, and a Hobbesian appreciation of how fear shapes human behavior. And yet he consistently, and with apparent sincerity, professes optimism that the world is bending toward justice. He is, in a way, a Hobbesian optimist.

The contradictions do not end there. Though he has a reputation for prudence, he has also been eager to question some of the long-standing assumptions undergirding traditional U.S. foreign-policy thinking. To a remarkable degree, he is willing to question why America’s enemies are its enemies, or why some of its friends are its friends. He overthrew half a century of bipartisan consensus in order to reestablish ties with Cuba. He questioned why the U.S. should avoid sending its forces into Pakistan to kill al-Qaeda leaders, and he privately questions why Pakistan, which he believes is a disastrously dysfunctional country, should be considered an ally of the U.S. at all. According to Leon Panetta, he has questioned why the U.S. should maintain Israel’s so-called qualitative military edge, which grants it access to more sophisticated weapons systems than America’s Arab allies receive; but he has also questioned, often harshly, the role that America’s Sunni Arab allies play in fomenting anti-American terrorism. He is clearly irritated that foreign-policy orthodoxy compels him to treat Saudi Arabia as an ally. And of course he decided early on, in the face of great criticism, that he wanted to reach out to America’s most ardent Middle Eastern foe, Iran. The nuclear deal he struck with Iran proves, if nothing else, that Obama is not risk-averse. He has bet global security and his own legacy that one of the world’s leading state sponsors of terrorism will adhere to an agreement to curtail its nuclear program.

It is assumed, at least among his critics, that Obama sought the Iran deal because he has a vision of a historic American-Persian rapprochement. But his desire for the nuclear agreement was born of pessimism as much as it was of optimism. “The Iran deal was never primarily about trying to open a new era of relations between the U.S. and Iran,” Susan Rice told me. “It was far more pragmatic and minimalist. The aim was very simply to make a dangerous country substantially less dangerous. No one had any expectation that Iran would be a more benign actor.”

I ONCE MENTIONED TO OBAMA a scene from *The Godfather: Part III*, in which Michael Corleone complains angrily about his failure to escape the grasp of organized crime. I told Obama that the Middle East is to his presidency what the Mob is to Corleone, and I started to quote the Al Pacino line: “Just when I thought I was out—”

“It pulls you back in,” Obama said, completing the thought.

The story of Obama’s encounter with the Middle East follows an arc of disenchantment. In his first extended spree of fame, as a presidential candidate in 2008, Obama often spoke with hope about the region. In Berlin that summer, in a speech to 200,000 adoring Germans, he said, “This is the moment we must help answer the call for a new dawn in the Middle East.”

The next year, as president, he gave a speech in Cairo meant to reset U.S. relations with the world’s Muslims. He spoke about Muslims in his own family, and his childhood years in Indonesia, and confessed America’s sins even as he criticized those in the Muslim world who demonized the U.S. What drew the most attention, though, was his promise to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which was then thought to be the central animating concern of Arab Muslims. His sympathy for the Palestinians moved the audience, but complicated his relations with Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister—especially because Obama had also decided to by-pass Jerusalem on his first presidential visit to the Middle East.

When I asked Obama recently what he had hoped to accomplish with his Cairo reset speech, he said that he had been trying—unsuccessfully, he acknowledged—to persuade Muslims to more closely examine the roots of their unhappiness.

“My argument was this: Let’s all stop pretending that the cause of the Middle East’s problems is Israel,” he told me. “We want to work to help achieve statehood and dignity for the Palestinians, but I was hoping that my speech could trigger a discussion, could create space for Muslims to address the real problems they are confronting—problems of governance, and the fact that some currents of Islam have not gone through a reformation that would help people adapt their religious doctrines to modernity. My thought was, I would communicate that the U.S. is not standing in the way of this progress, that we would help, in whatever way possible, to advance the goals of a practical, successful Arab agenda that provided a better life for ordinary people.”

Through the first flush of the Arab Spring, in 2011, Obama continued to speak optimistically about the Middle East’s future, coming as close as he ever would to embracing the so-called freedom agenda of George W. Bush, which was characterized in part by the belief that democratic values could be implanted in the Middle East. He equated protesters in Tunisia and Tahrir Square with Rosa Parks and the “patriots of Boston.”

“After decades of accepting the world as it is in the region, we have a chance to pursue the world as it should be,” he said in a speech at the time. “The United States supports a set of universal rights. And these rights include free speech, the freedom of peaceful assembly, the freedom of religion, equality for men and women under the rule of law, and the right to choose your own leaders ... Our support for these principles is not a second-ary interest.”

But over the next three years, as the Arab Spring gave up its early promise, and brutality and dysfunction overwhelmed the Middle East, the president grew disillusioned. Some of his deepest disappointments concern Middle Eastern leaders themselves. Benjamin Netanyahu is in his own category: Obama has long believed that Netanyahu could bring about a two-state solution that would protect Israel’s status as a Jewish-majority democracy, but is too fearful and politically paralyzed to do so. Obama has also not had much patience for Netanyahu and other Middle Eastern leaders who question his understanding of the region. In one of Netanyahu’s meetings with the president, the Israeli prime minister launched into something

of a lecture about the dangers of the brutal region in which he lives, and Obama felt that Netanyahu was behaving in a condescending fashion, and was also avoiding the subject at hand: peace negotiations. Finally, the president interrupted the prime minister: “Bibi, you have to understand something,” he said. “I’m the African American son of a single mother, and I live here, in this house. I live in the White House. I managed to get elected president of the United States. You think I don’t understand what you’re talking about, but I do.” Other leaders also frustrate him immensely. Early on, Obama saw Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the president of Turkey, as the sort of moderate Muslim leader who would bridge the divide between East and West—but Obama now considers him a failure and an authoritarian, one who refuses to use his enormous army to bring stability to Syria. And on the sidelines of a NATO summit in Wales in 2014, Obama pulled aside King Abdullah II of Jordan. Obama said he had heard that Abdullah had complained to friends in the U.S. Congress about his leadership, and told the king that if he had complaints, he should raise them directly. The king denied that he had spoken ill of him.

In recent days, the president has taken to joking privately, “All I need in the Middle East is a few smart autocrats.” Obama has always had a fondness for pragmatic, emotionally contained technocrats, telling aides, “If only everyone could be like the Scandinavians, this would all be easy.”

The unraveling of the Arab Spring darkened the president’s view of what the U.S. could achieve in the Middle East, and made him realize how much the chaos there was distracting from other priorities. “The president recognized during the course of the Arab Spring that the Middle East was consuming us,” John Brennan, who served in Obama’s first term as his chief counterterrorism adviser, told me recently.

But what sealed Obama’s fatalistic view was the failure of his administration’s intervention in Libya, in 2011. That intervention was meant to prevent the country’s then-dictator, Muammar Qaddafi, from slaughtering the people of Benghazi, as he was threatening to do. Obama did not want to join the fight; he was counseled by Joe Biden and his first-term secretary of defense Robert Gates, among others, to steer clear. But a strong faction within the national-security team—Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Susan Rice, who was then the ambassador to the United Nations, along with Samantha Power, Ben Rhodes, and Antony Blinken, who was then Biden’s national-security adviser—lobbied hard to protect Benghazi, and prevailed. (Biden, who is acerbic about Clinton’s foreign-policy judgment, has said privately, “Hillary just wants to be Golda Meir.”) American bombs fell, the people of Benghazi were spared from what may or may not have been a massacre, and Qaddafi was captured and executed.

But Obama says today of the intervention, “It didn’t work.” The U.S., he believes, planned the Libya operation carefully— and yet the country is still a disaster.

Why, given what seems to be the president’s natural reticence toward getting militarily ensnarled where American national security is not directly at stake, did he accept the recommendation of his more activist advisers to intervene?

“The social order in Libya has broken down,” Obama said, explaining his thinking at the time. “You have massive pro-tests against Qaddafi. You’ve got tribal divisions inside of Libya. Benghazi is a focal point for the opposition regime. And Qaddafi is marching his army toward Benghazi, and he has said, ‘We will kill them like rats.’”

“Now, option one would be to do nothing, and there were some in my administration who said, as tragic as the Libyan situation may be, it’s not our problem. The way I looked at it was that it would be our problem if, in fact, complete chaos and civil war broke out in Libya. But this is not so at the core of U.S. interests that it makes sense for us to unilaterally strike against the Qaddafi regime. At that point, you’ve got Europe and a number of Gulf countries who despise Qaddafi, or are concerned on a humanitarian basis, who are calling for action. But what has been a habit over the last several decades in these circumstances is people pushing us to act but then showing an unwillingness to put any skin in the game.”

“Free riders?” I interjected.

“Free riders,” he said, and continued. “So what I said at that point was, we should act as part of an international coalition. But because this is not at the core of our interests, we need to get a UN mandate; we need Europeans and Gulf countries to be actively involved in the coalition; we will apply the military capabilities that are unique to us, but we expect others to carry their weight. And we worked with our defense teams to ensure that we could execute a strategy without putting boots on the ground and without a long-term military commitment in Libya.”

“So we actually executed this plan as well as I could have expected: We got a UN mandate, we built a coalition, it cost us \$1 billion—which, when it comes to military operations, is very cheap. We averted large-scale civilian casualties, we prevented what almost surely would have been a prolonged and bloody civil conflict. And despite all that, Libya is a mess.”

Mess is the president’s diplomatic term; privately, he calls Libya a “shit show,” in part because it’s subsequently become an ISIS haven—one that he has already targeted with air strikes. It became a shit show, Obama believes, for reasons that had less to do with American incompetence than with the passivity of America’s allies and with the obdurate power of tribalism.

“When I go back and I ask myself what went wrong,” Obama said, “there’s room for criticism, because I had more faith in the Europeans, given Libya’s proximity, being invested in the follow-up,” he said. He noted that Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president, lost his job the following year. And he said that British Prime Minister David Cameron soon stopped paying attention, becoming “distracted by a range of other things.” Of France, he said, “Sarkozy wanted to trumpet the flights he was taking in the air campaign, despite the fact that we had wiped out all the air defenses and essentially set up the entire infrastructure” for the intervention. This sort of bragging was fine, Obama said, because it allowed the U.S. to “purchase France’s involvement in a way that made it less expensive for us and less risky for us.” In other words, giving France extra credit in exchange for less risk and cost to the United States was a useful trade-off—except that “from the perspective of a lot of the folks in the foreign-policy establishment, well, that was terrible. If we’re going to do something, obviously we’ve got to be up front, and nobody else is sharing in the spotlight.”

Obama also blamed internal Libyan dynamics. “The degree of tribal division in Libya was greater than our analysts had expected. And our ability to have any kind of structure there that we could interact with and start training and start providing resources broke down very quickly.”

Libya proved to him that the Middle East was best avoided. “There is no way we should commit to governing the Middle East and North Africa,” he recently told a former colleague from the Senate. “That would be a basic, fundamental mistake.”

PRESIDENT OBAMA DID NOT come into office pre-occupied by the Middle East. He is the first child of the Pacific to become president—born in Hawaii, raised there and, for four years, in Indonesia—and he is fixated on turning America’s attention to Asia. For Obama, Asia represents the future. Africa and Latin America, in his view, deserve far more U.S. attention than they receive. Europe, about which he is unromantic, is a source of global stability that requires, to his occasional annoyance, American hand-holding. And the Middle East is a region to be avoided—one that, thanks to America’s energy revolution, will soon be of negligible relevance to the U.S. economy.

It is not oil but another of the Middle East’s exports, terrorism, that shapes Obama’s understanding of his responsibilities there. Early in 2014, Obama’s intelligence advisers told him that ISIS was of marginal importance. According to administration officials, General Lloyd Austin, then the commander of Central Command, which oversees U.S. military operations in the Middle East, told the White House that the Islamic State was “a flash in the pan.” This analysis led Obama, in an interview with *The New Yorker*, to describe the constellation of jihad-ist groups in Iraq and Syria as terrorism’s “jayvee team.” (A spokesman for Austin told me, “At no time has General Austin ever considered ISIS a ‘flash in the pan’ phenomenon.”)

But by late spring of 2014, after ISIS took the northern-Iraq city of Mosul, he came to believe that U.S. intelligence had failed to appreciate the severity of the threat and the inadequacies of the Iraqi army, and his view shifted. After ISIS beheaded three American civilians in Syria, it became obvious to Obama that defeating the group was of more immediate urgency to the U.S. than overthrowing Bashar al-Assad.

Advisers recall that Obama would cite a pivotal moment in *The Dark Knight*, the 2008 Batman movie, to help explain not only how he understood the role of ISIS, but how he understood the larger ecosystem in which it grew. “There’s a scene in the beginning in which the gang leaders of Gotham are meeting,” the president would say. “These are men who had the city divided up. They were thugs, but there was a kind of order. Everyone had his turf. And then the Joker comes in and lights the whole city on fire. ISIS is the Joker. It has the capacity to set the whole region on fire. That’s why we have to fight it.”

The rise of the Islamic State deepened Obama’s conviction that the Middle East could not be fixed—not on his watch, and not for a generation to come.

ON A RAINY WEDNESDAY in mid-November, President Obama appeared on a stage at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Manila with Jack Ma, the founder of the Chinese e-commerce company Alibaba, and a 31-year-old Filipina inventor named Aisa Mijeno. The ballroom was crowded with Asian CEOs, American business leaders, and government officials from across the region. Obama, who was greeted warmly, first delivered informal remarks from behind a podium, mainly about the threat of climate change.

Obama made no mention of the subject preoccupying much of the rest of the world—the ISIS attacks in Paris five days earlier, which had killed 130 people. Obama had arrived in Manila the day before from a G20 summit held in Antalya, Turkey. The Paris attacks had been a main

topic of conversation in Antalya, where Obama held a particularly contentious press conference on the subject.

The traveling White House press corps was unrelenting: “Isn’t it time for your strategy to change?” one reporter asked. This was followed by “Could I ask you to address your critics who say that your reluctance to enter another Middle East war, and your preference of diplomacy over using the military, makes the United States weaker and emboldens our enemies?” And then came this imperishable question, from a CNN reporter: “If you’ll forgive the language—why can’t we take out these bastards?” Which was followed by “Do you think you really understand this enemy well enough to defeat them and to protect the homeland?”

As the questions unspooled, Obama became progressively more irritated. He described his isis strategy at length, but the only time he exhibited an emotion other than disdain was when he addressed an emerging controversy about America’s refugee policy. Republican governors and presidential candidates had suddenly taken to demanding that the United States block Syrian refugees from coming to America. Ted Cruz had proposed accepting only Christian Syrians. Chris Christie had said that all refugees, including “orphans under 5,” should be banned from entry until proper vetting procedures had been put in place.

This rhetoric appeared to frustrate Obama immensely. “When I hear folks say that, well, maybe we should just admit the Christians but not the Muslims; when I hear political leaders suggesting that there would be a religious test for which person who’s fleeing from a war-torn country is admitted,” Obama told the assembled reporters, “that’s not American. That’s not who we are. We don’t have religious tests to our compassion.”

Air Force One departed Antalya and arrived 10 hours later in Manila. That’s when the president’s advisers came to understand, in the words of one official, that “everyone back home had lost their minds.” Susan Rice, trying to comprehend the rising anxiety, searched her hotel television in vain for CNN, finding only the BBC and Fox News. She toggled between the two, looking for the mean, she told people on the trip.

Later, the president would say that he had failed to fully appreciate the fear many Americans were experiencing about the possibility of a Paris-style attack in the U.S. Great distance, a frantic schedule, and the jet-lag haze that envelops a globe-spanning presidential trip were working against him. But he has never believed that terrorism poses a threat to America commensurate with the fear it generates. Even during the period in 2014 when isis was executing its American captives in Syria, his emotions were in check. Valerie Jarrett, Obama’s closest adviser, told him people were worried that the group would soon take its beheading campaign to the U.S. “They’re not coming here to chop our heads off,” he reassured her. Obama frequently reminds his staff that terrorism takes far fewer lives in America than handguns, car accidents, and falls in bathtubs do. Several years ago, he expressed to me his admiration for Israelis’ “resilience” in the face of constant terrorism, and it is clear that he would like to see resilience replace panic in American society. Nevertheless, his advisers are fighting a constant rearguard action to keep Obama from placing terrorism in what he considers its “proper” perspective, out of concern that he will seem insensitive to the fears of the American people.

The frustration among Obama’s advisers spills over into the Pentagon and the State Department. John Kerry, for one, seems more alarmed about isis than the president does. Recently, when I asked the secretary of state a general question— is the Middle East still

important to the U.S.?—he answered by talking exclusively about isis. “This is a threat to everybody in the world,” he said, a group “overtly committed to destroying people in the West and in the Middle East. Imagine what would happen if we don’t stand and fight them, if we don’t lead a coalition—as we are doing, by the way. If we didn’t do that, you could have allies and friends of ours fall. You could have a massive migration into Europe that destroys Europe, leads to the pure destruction of Europe, ends the European project, and everyone runs for cover and you’ve got the 1930s all over again, with nationalism and fascism and other things breaking out. Of course we have an interest in this, a huge interest in this.”

When I noted to Kerry that the president’s rhetoric doesn’t match his, he said, “President Obama sees all of this, but he doesn’t gin it up into this kind of—he thinks we are on track. He has escalated his efforts. But he’s not trying to create hysteria ... I think the president is always inclined to try to keep things on an appropriate equilibrium. I respect that.”

Obama modulates his discussion of terrorism for several reasons: He is, by nature, Spockian. And he believes that a mis-placed word, or a frightened look, or an ill-considered hyperbolic claim, could tip the country into panic. The sort of panic he worries about most is the type that would manifest itself in anti-Muslim xenophobia or in a challenge to American openness and to the constitutional order.

The president also gets frustrated that terrorism keeps swamping his larger agenda, particularly as it relates to re-balancing America’s global priorities. For years, the “pivot to Asia” has been a paramount priority of his. America’s economic future lies in Asia, he believes, and the challenge posed by China’s rise requires constant attention. From his earliest days in office, Obama has been focused on rebuilding the some-times-threadbare ties between the U.S. and its Asian treaty partners, and he is perpetually on the hunt for opportunities to draw other Asian nations into the U.S. orbit. His dramatic opening to Burma was one such opportunity; Vietnam and the entire constellation of South-east Asian countries fearful of Chinese domination presented others.

In Manila, at apec, Obama was determined to keep the conversation focused on this agenda, and not on what he viewed as the containable challenge presented by isis. Obama’s secretary of defense, Ashton Carter, told me not long ago that Obama has maintained his focus on Asia even as Syria and other Middle Eastern conflicts continue to flare. Obama believes, Carter said, that Asia “is the part of the world of greatest consequence to the American future, and that no president can take his eye off of this.” He added, “He consistently asks, even in the midst of every-thing else that’s going on, ‘Where are we in the Asia-Pacific rebalance? Where are we in terms of resources?’ He’s been extremely consistent about that, even in times of Middle East tension.”

After Obama finished his presentation on climate change, he joined Ma and Mijeno, who had seated themselves on nearby armchairs, where Obama was preparing to interview them in the manner of a daytime talk-show host—an approach that seemed to induce a momentary bout of status-inversion vertigo in an audience not accustomed to such behavior in their own leaders. Obama began by asking Ma a question about climate change. Ma, un-surprisingly, agreed with Obama that it was a very important issue. Then Obama turned to Mijeno. A laboratory operating in the hidden recesses of the West Wing could not have fashioned a person more expertly designed to appeal to Obama’s wonkish enthusiasms than Mijeno, a young engineer who, with her brother, had invented a lamp that is somehow powered by salt water.

“Just to be clear, Aisa, so with some salt water, the device that you’ve set up can provide—am I right?—about eight hours of lighting?,” Obama asked.

“Eight hours of lighting,” she responded.

Obama: “And the lamp is \$20—” Mijeno: “Around \$20.”

“I think Aisa is a perfect example of what we’re seeing in a lot of countries—young entrepreneurs coming up with leapfrog technologies, in the same ways that in large portions of Asia and Africa, the old landline phones never got set up,” Obama said, because those areas jumped straight to mobile phones. Obama encouraged Jack Ma to fund her work. “She’s won, by the way, a lot of prizes and gotten a lot of attention, so this is not like one of those infomercials where you order it, and you can’t make the thing work,” he said, to laughter.

The next day, aboard Air Force One en route to Kuala Lumpur, I mentioned to Obama that he seemed genuinely happy to be onstage with Ma and Mijeno, and then I pivoted away from Asia, asking him if anything about the Middle East makes him happy.

“Right now, I don’t think that anybody can be feeling good about the situation in the Middle East,” he said. “You have countries that are failing to provide prosperity and opportunity for their people. You’ve got a violent, extremist ideology, or ideologies, that are turbocharged through social media. You’ve got countries that have very few civic traditions, so that as autocratic regimes start fraying, the only organizing principles are sectarian.”

He went on, “Contrast that with Southeast Asia, which still has huge problems—enormous poverty, corruption—but is filled with striving, ambitious, energetic people who are every single day scratching and clawing to build businesses and get education and find jobs and build infrastructure. The contrast is pretty stark.”

In Asia, as well as in Latin America and Africa, Obama says, he sees young people yearning for self-improvement, modernity, education, and material wealth.

“They are not thinking about how to kill Americans,” he says. “What they’re thinking about is How do I get a better education? How do I create something of value?”

He then made an observation that I came to realize was representative of his bleakest, most visceral understanding of the Middle East today—not the sort of understanding that a White House still oriented around themes of hope and change might choose to advertise. “If we’re not talking to them,” he said, referring to young Asians and Africans and Latin Americans, “because the only thing we’re doing is figuring out how to destroy or cordon off or control the malicious, nihilistic, violent parts of humanity, then we’re missing the boat.”

Obama’s critics argue that he is ineffective in cordoning off the violent nihilists of radical Islam because he doesn’t understand the threat. He does resist refracting radical Islam through the “clash of civilizations” prism popularized by the late political scientist Samuel Huntington. But this is because, he and his advisers argue, he does not want to enlarge the ranks of the enemy. “The goal is not to force a Huntington template onto this conflict,” said John Brennan, the CIA director.

Both François Hollande and David Cameron have spoken about the threat of radical Islam in more Huntingtonesque terms, and I've heard that both men wish Obama would use more-direct language in discussing the threat. When I mentioned this to Obama he said, "Hollande and Cameron have used phrases, like radical Islam, that we have not used on a regular basis as our way of targeting terrorism. But I've never had a conversation when they said, 'Man, how come you're not using this phrase the way you hear Republicans say it?'" Obama says he has demanded that Muslim leaders do more to eliminate the threat of violent fundamentalism. "It is very clear what I mean," he told me, "which is that there is a violent, radical, fanatical, nihilistic interpretation of Islam by a faction—a tiny faction—within the Muslim community that is our enemy, and that has to be defeated."

He then offered a critique that sounded more in line with the rhetoric of Cameron and Hollande. "There is also the need for Islam as a whole to challenge that interpretation of Islam, to isolate it, and to undergo a vigorous discussion within their community about how Islam works as part of a peaceful, modern society," he said. But he added, "I do not persuade peaceful, tolerant Muslims to engage in that debate if I'm not sensitive to their concern that they are being tagged with a broad brush."

In private encounters with other world leaders, Obama has argued that there will be no comprehensive solution to Islamist terrorism until Islam reconciles itself to modernity and undergoes some of the reforms that have changed Christianity.

Though he has argued, controversially, that the Middle East's conflicts "date back millennia," he also believes that the intensified Muslim fury of recent years was encouraged by countries considered friends of the U.S. In a meeting during apec with Malcolm Turnbull, the new prime minister of Australia, Obama described how he has watched Indonesia gradually move from a relaxed, syncretistic Islam to a more fundamentalist, unforgiving interpretation; large numbers of Indonesian women, he observed, have now adopted the hijab, the Muslim head covering.

Why, Turnbull asked, was this happening?

Because, Obama answered, the Saudis and other Gulf Arabs have funneled money, and large numbers of imams and teachers, into the country. In the 1990s, the Saudis heavily funded Wahhabist madrassas, seminaries that teach the fundamentalist version of Islam favored by the Saudi ruling family, Obama told Turnbull. Today, Islam in Indonesia is much more Arab in orientation than it was when he lived there, he said.

"Aren't the Saudis your friends?," Turnbull asked.

Obama smiled. "It's complicated," he said.

Obama's patience with Saudi Arabia has always been limited. In his first foreign-policy commentary of note, that 2002 speech at the antiwar rally in Chicago, he said, "You want a fight, President Bush? Let's fight to make sure our so-called allies in the Middle East—the Saudis and the Egyptians— stop oppressing their own people, and suppressing dissent, and tolerating corruption and inequality." In the White House these days, one occasionally hears Obama's National Security Council officials pointedly reminding visitors that the large majority of 9/11 hijackers were not Iranian, but Saudi—and Obama himself rails against Saudi Arabia's state-sanctioned misogyny, arguing in private that "a country cannot function

in the modern world when it is repressing half of its population.” In meetings with foreign leaders, Obama has said, “You can gauge the success of a society by how it treats its women.”

His frustration with the Saudis informs his analysis of Middle Eastern power politics. At one point I observed to him that he is less likely than previous presidents to axiomatically side with Saudi Arabia in its dispute with its archrival, Iran. He didn’t disagree.

“Iran, since 1979, has been an enemy of the United States, and has engaged in state-sponsored terrorism, is a genuine threat to Israel and many of our allies, and engages in all kinds of destructive behavior,” the president said. “And my view has never been that we should throw our traditional allies”—the Saudis—“overboard in favor of Iran.”

But he went on to say that the Saudis need to “share” the Middle East with their Iranian foes. “The competition between the Saudis and the Iranians—which has helped to feed proxy wars and chaos in Syria and Iraq and Yemen—requires us to say to our friends as well as to the Iranians that they need to find an effective way to share the neighborhood and institute some sort of cold peace,” he said. “An approach that said to our friends ‘You are right, Iran is the source of all problems, and we will support you in dealing with Iran’ would essentially mean that as these sectarian conflicts continue to rage and our Gulf partners, our traditional friends, do not have the ability to put out the flames on their own or decisively win on their own, and would mean that we have to start coming in and using our military power to settle scores. And that would be in the interest neither of the United States nor of the Middle East.”

One of the most destructive forces in the Middle East, Obama believes, is tribalism—a force no president can neutralize. Tribalism, made manifest in the reversion to sect, creed, clan, and village by the desperate citizens of failing states, is the source of much of the Muslim Middle East’s problems, and it is another source of his fatalism. Obama has deep respect for the destructive resilience of tribalism—part of his memoir, *Dreams From My Father*, concerns the way in which tribalism in post-colonial Kenya helped ruin his father’s life—which goes some distance in explaining why he is so fastidious about avoiding entanglements in tribal conflicts.

“It is literally in my DNA to be suspicious of tribalism,” he told me. “I understand the tribal impulse, and acknowledge the power of tribal division. I’ve been navigating tribal divisions my whole life. In the end, it’s the source of a lot of destructive acts.”



Obama and Japa-nese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Washington, D.C., April 2015.

WHILE FLYING TO Kuala Lumpur with the president, I recalled a passing reference he had once made to me about the Hobbesian argument for strong government as an antidote to the unforgiving state of nature. When Obama looks at swathes of the Middle East, Hobbes's "war of all against all" is what he sees. "I have a recognition that us serving as the Leviathan clamps down and tames some of these impulses," Obama had said. So I tried to reopen this conversation with an unfortunately prolix question about, among other things, "the Hobbesian notion that people organize themselves into collectives to stave off their supreme fear, which is death."

Ben Rhodes and Joshua Earnest, the White House spokesman, who were seated on a couch to the side of Obama's desk on Air Force One, could barely suppress their amusement at my discursiveness. I paused and said, "I bet if I asked that in a press conference my colleagues would just throw me out of the room."

"I would be really into it," Obama said, "but every-body else would be rolling their eyes."

Rhodes interjected: "Why can't we get the bas-tards?" That question, the one put to the president by the CNN reporter at the press conference in Turkey, had become a topic of sardonic conversation during the trip.

I turned to the president: "Well, yeah, and also, why can't we get the bastards?"

He took the first question.

"Look, I am not of the view that human beings are inherently evil," he said. "I believe that there's more good than bad in humanity. And if you look at the trajectory of history, I am optimistic."

"I believe that overall, humanity has become less violent, more tolerant, healthier, better fed, more empathetic, more able to manage difference. But it's hugely uneven. And what has been clear throughout the 20th and 21st centuries is that the progress we make in social order and taming our baser impulses and steadying our fears can be reversed very quickly. Social order starts breaking down if people are under profound stress. Then the default position is tribe—us/them, a hostility toward the unfamiliar or the unknown."

He continued, "Right now, across the globe, you're seeing places that are undergoing severe stress because of globalization, because of the collision of cultures brought about by the Internet and social media, because of scarcities—some of which will be attributable to climate change over the next several decades—because of population growth. And in those places, the Middle East being Exhibit A, the default position for a lot of folks is to organize tightly in the tribe and to push back or strike out against those who are different."

"A group like isil is the distillation of every worst impulse along these lines. The notion that we are a small group that defines ourselves primarily by the degree to which we can kill others who are not like us, and attempting to impose a rigid orthodoxy that produces nothing, that celebrates nothing, that really is contrary to every bit of human progress—it indicates the degree to which that kind of mentality can still take root and gain adherents in the 21st century."

So your appreciation for tribalism's power makes you want to stay away?, I asked. "In other words, when people say 'Why don't you just go get the bastards?', you step back?"

"We have to determine the best tools to roll back those kinds of attitudes," he said. "There are going to be times where either because it's not a direct threat to us or because we just don't have the tools in our toolkit to have a huge impact that, tragi-cally, we have to refrain from jumping in with both feet."

I asked Obama whether he would have sent the Marines to Rwanda in 1994 to stop the genocide as it was happening, had he been president at the time. "Given the speed with which the killing took place, and how long it takes to crank up the machinery of the U.S. government, I understand why we did not act fast enough," he said. "Now, we should learn from that. I actually think that Rwanda is an interesting test case because it's possible—not guaranteed, but it's possible—that this was a situation where the quick application of force might have been enough."

He related this to Syria: "Ironically, it's probably easier to make an argument that a relatively small force inserted quickly with international support would have resulted in averting genocide [more successfully in Rwanda] than in Syria right now, where the degree to which the various groups are armed and hardened fighters and are supported by a whole host of external actors with a lot of resources requires a much larger commitment of forces."

OBAMA-ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL S ARGUE that he has a comprehensible approach to fighting terrorism: a drone air force, Special Forces raids, a clandestine CIA-aided army of 10,000 rebels battling in Syria. So why does Obama stumble when explaining to the American people that he, too, cares about terrorism? The Turkey press conference, I told him, "was a moment for you as a politician to say, 'Yeah, I hate the bastards too, and by the way, I am taking out the bastards.'" The easy thing to do would have been to reassure Americans in visceral terms that he will kill the people who want to kill them. Does he fear a knee-jerk reaction in the direction of another Middle East invasion? Or is he just inalterably Spockian?

"Every president has strengths and weaknesses," he answered. "And there is no doubt that there are times where I have not been attentive enough to feelings and emotions and politics in communicating what we're doing and how we're doing it."

But for America to be successful in leading the world, he continued, "I believe that we have to avoid being simplistic. I think we have to build resilience and make sure that our political debates are grounded in reality. It's not that I don't appreciate the value of theater in political communications; it's that the habits we—the media, politicians—have gotten into, and how we talk about these issues, are so detached so often from what we need to be doing that for me to satisfy the cable news hype-fest would lead to us making worse and worse decisions over time."

As Air Force One began its descent toward Kuala Lumpur, the president mentioned the successful U.S.-led effort to stop the Ebola epidemic in West Africa as a positive example of steady, nonhysterical management of a terrifying crisis.

"During the couple of months in which everybody was sure Ebola was going to destroy the Earth and there was 24/7 cover-age of Ebola, if I had fed the panic or in any way strayed from 'Here are the facts, here's what needs to be done, here's how we're handling it, the likelihood

of you getting Ebola is very slim, and here's what we need to do both domestically and overseas to stamp out this epidemic," then "maybe people would have said 'Obama is taking this as seriously as he needs to be.'" But feeding the panic by overreacting could have shut down travel to and from three African countries that were already crippling poor, in ways that might have destroyed their economies—which would likely have meant, among other things, a recurrence of Ebola. He added, "It would have also meant that we might have wasted a huge amount of resources in our public-health systems that need to be devoted to flu vaccinations and other things that actually kill people" in large numbers in America.

The plane landed. The president, leaning back in his office chair with his jacket off and his tie askew, did not seem to notice. Outside, on the tarmac, I could see that what appeared to be a large portion of the Malaysian Armed Forces had assembled to welcome him. As he continued talking, I began to worry that the waiting soldiers and dignitaries would get hot. "I think we're in Malaysia," I said. "It seems to be outside this plane."

He conceded that this was true, but seemed to be in no rush, so I pressed him about his public reaction to terrorism: If he showed more emotion, wouldn't that calm people down rather than rile them up?

"I have friends who have kids in Paris right now," he said. "And you and I and a whole bunch of people who are writing about what happened in Paris have strolled along the same streets where people were gunned down. And it's right to feel fearful. And it's important for us not to ever get complacent. There's a difference between resilience and complacency." He went on to describe another difference—between making considered decisions and making rash, emotional ones. "What it means, actually, is that you care so much that you want to get it right and you're not going to indulge in either impetuous or, in some cases, manufactured responses that make good sound bites but don't produce results. The stakes are too high to play those games."

With that, Obama stood up and said, "Okay, gotta go." He headed out of his office and down the stairs, to the red carpet and the honor guard and the cluster of Malaysian officials waiting to greet him, and then to his armored limousine, flown to Kuala Lumpur ahead of him. (Early in his first term, still unaccustomed to the massive military operation it takes to move a president from one place to another, he noted ruefully to aides, "I have the world's largest carbon footprint.")

The president's first stop was another event designed to highlight his turn to Asia, this one a town-hall meeting with students and entrepreneurs participating in the administration's Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative. Obama entered the lecture hall at Taylor's University to huge applause. He made some opening remarks, then charmed his audience in an extended Q&A session.

But those of us watching from the press section became distracted by news coming across our phones about a new jihadist attack, this one in Mali. Obama, busily mesmerizing adoring Asian entrepreneurs, had no idea. Only when he got into his limousine with Susan Rice did he get the news.

Later that evening, I visited the president in his suite at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in downtown Kuala Lumpur. The streets around the hotel had been sealed. Armored vehicles ringed the building; the lobby was filled with SWAT teams. I took the elevator to a floor crowded with

Secret Service agents, who pointed me to a staircase; the elevator to Obama's floor was disabled for security reasons. Up two flights, to a hallway with more agents. A moment's wait, and then Obama opened the door. His two-story suite was outlandish: Tara-like drapes, overstuffed couches. It was enormous and lonely and claustrophobic all at once.

"It's like the Hearst Castle," I observed.

"Well, it's a long way from the Hampton Inn in Des Moines," Obama said.

ESPN was playing in the background.

When we sat down, I pointed out to the president a central challenge of his pivot to Asia. Earlier in the day, at the moment he was trying to inspire a group of gifted and eager hijab-wearing Indonesian entrepreneurs and Burmese innovators, attention was diverted by the latest Islamist terror attack.

A writer at heart, he had a suggestion: "It's probably a pretty easy way to start the story," he said, referring to this article.

Possibly, I said, but it's kind of a cheap trick.

"It's cheap, but it works," Obama said. "We're talking to these kids, and then there's this attack going on."

The split-screen quality of the day prompted a conversation about two recent meetings he'd held, one that generated major international controversy and headlines, and one that did not. The one that drew so much attention, I suggested, would ultimately be judged less consequential. This was the Gulf summit in May of 2015 at Camp David, meant to mollify a crowd of visiting sheikhs and princes who feared the impending Iran deal. The other meeting took place two months later, in the Oval Office, between Obama and the general secretary of the Viet-namese Communist Party, Nguyen Phu Trong. This meeting took place only because John Kerry had pushed the White House to violate protocol, since the general secretary was not a head of state. But the goals trumped decorum: Obama wanted to lobby the Vietnamese on the Trans-Pacific Partnership—his negotiators soon extracted a promise from the Vietnamese that they would legalize independent labor unions—and he wanted to deepen cooperation on strategic issues. Administration officials have repeatedly hinted to me that Vietnam may one day soon host a permanent U.S. military presence, to check the ambitions of the country it now fears most, China. The U.S. Navy's return to Cam Ranh Bay would count as one of the more improbable developments in recent American history. "We just moved the Vietnamese Communist Party to recognize labor rights in a way that we could never do by bullying them or scaring them," Obama told me, calling this a key victory in his campaign to replace stick-waving with diplomatic persuasion.

I noted that the 200 or so young Southeast Asians in the room earlier that day—including citizens of Communist-ruled countries—seemed to love America. "They do," Obama said. "In Vietnam right now, America polls at 80 percent."

The resurgent popularity of America throughout Southeast Asia means that "we can do really big, important stuff—which, by the way, then has ramifications across the board," he said, "because when Malaysia joins the anti-isil campaign, that helps us leverage resources and

credibility in our fight against terrorism. When we have strong relations with Indonesia, that helps us when we are going to Paris and trying to negotiate a climate treaty, where the temptation of a Russia or some of these other countries may be to skew the deal in a way that is unhelpful.”

Obama then cited America’s increased influence in Latin America—increased, he said, in part by his removal of a region-wide stumbling block when he reestablished ties with Cuba—as proof that his deliberate, nonthreatening, diplomacy-centered approach to foreign relations is working. The alba movement, a group of Latin American governments oriented around anti-Americanism, has significantly weakened during his time as president. “When I came into office, at the first Summit of the Americas that I attended, Hugo Chávez”—the late anti-American Venezuelan dictator—“was still the dominant figure in the conversation,” he said. “We made a very strategic decision early on, which was, rather than blow him up as this 10-foot giant adversary, to right-size the problem and say, ‘We don’t like what’s going on in Venezuela, but it’s not a threat to the United States.’”

Obama said that to achieve this rebalancing, the U.S. had to absorb the diatribes and insults of superannuated Cas-tro manqués. “When I saw Chávez, I shook his hand and he handed me a Marxist critique of the U.S.–Latin America relationship,” Obama recalled. “And I had to sit there and lis-ten to Ortega”—Daniel Ortega, the radical leftist president of Nicaragua—“make an hour-long rant against the United States. But us being there, not taking all that stuff seriously—because it really wasn’t a threat to us”—helped neutralize the region’s anti-Americanism.

The president’s unwillingness to counter the baiting by American adversaries can feel emotionally unsatisfying, I said, and I told him that every so often, I’d like to see him give Vladimir Putin the finger. It’s atavistic, I said, understanding my audience.

“It is,” the president responded coolly. “This is what they’re looking for.”

He described a relationship with Putin that doesn’t quite conform to common perceptions. I had been under the impression that Obama viewed Putin as nasty, brutish, and short. But, Obama told me, Putin is not particularly nasty.

“The truth is, actually, Putin, in all of our meetings, is scrupulously polite, very frank. Our meetings are very businesslike. He never keeps me waiting two hours like he does a bunch of these other folks.” Obama said that Putin believes his relationship with the U.S. is more important than Americans tend to think. “He’s constantly interested in being seen as our peer and as working with us, because he’s not completely stupid. He understands that Russia’s overall position in the world is significantly diminished. And the fact that he invades Crimea or is trying to prop up Assad doesn’t suddenly make him a player. You don’t see him in any of these meetings out here helping to shape the agenda. For that matter, there’s not a G20 meeting where the Russians set the agenda around any of the issues that are important.”

RUSSIA’S INVASION OF CRIMEA in early 2014, and its decision to use force to buttress the rule of its client Bashar al-Assad, have been cited by Obama’s critics as proof that the post-red-line world no longer fears America.

So when I talked with the president in the Oval Ofce in late January, I again raised this question of deterrent cred-ibility. “The argument is made,” I said, “that Vladimir Putin

watched you in Syria and thought, He's too logical, he's too rational, he's too into retrenchment. I'm going to push him a little bit further in Ukraine."

Obama didn't much like my line of inquiry. "Look, this theory is so easily disposed of that I'm always puzzled by how people make the argument. I don't think anybody thought that George W. Bush was overly rational or cautious in his use of military force. And as I recall, because apparently nobody in this town does, Putin went into Georgia on Bush's watch, right smack dab in the middle of us having over 100,000 troops de-ployed in Iraq." Obama was referring to Putin's 2008 invasion of Georgia, a former Soviet republic, which was undertaken for many of the same reasons Putin later invaded Ukraine—to keep an ex-Soviet republic in Russia's sphere of influence.

"Putin acted in Ukraine in response to a client state that was about to slip out of his grasp. And he improvised in a way to hang on to his control there," he said. "He's done the exact same thing in Syria, at enormous cost to the well-being of his own country. And the notion that somehow Russia is in a stronger position now, in Syria or in Ukraine, than they were before they invaded Ukraine or before he had to deploy military forces to Syria is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of power in foreign affairs or in the world generally. Real power means you can get what you want without having to exert violence. Russia was much more powerful when Ukraine looked like an independent country but was a kleptocracy that he could pull the strings on."

Obama's theory here is simple: Ukraine is a core Russian interest but not an American one, so Russia will always be able to maintain escalatory dominance there.

"The fact is that Ukraine, which is a non-nato country, is going to be vulnerable to military domination by Russia no matter what we do," he said.

I asked Obama whether his position on Ukraine was real-istic or fatalistic.

"It's realistic," he said. "But this is an example of where we have to be very clear about what our core interests are and what we are willing to go to war for. And at the end of the day, there's always going to be some ambiguity." He then offered up a critique he had heard directed against him, in order to knock it down. "I think that the best argument you can make on the side of those who are critics of my foreign policy is that the president doesn't exploit ambiguity enough. He doesn't maybe react in ways that might cause people to think, Wow, this guy might be a little crazy."

"The 'crazy Nixon' approach," I said: Confuse and frighten your enemies by making them think you're capable of committing irrational acts.

"But let's examine the Nixon theory," he said. "So we dropped more ordnance on Cambodia and Laos than on Europe in World War II, and yet, ultimately, Nixon withdrew, Kissinger went to Paris, and all we left behind was chaos, slaughter, and authoritarian governments that finally, over time, have emerged from that hell. When I go to visit those countries, I'm going to be trying to figure out how we can, today, help them remove bombs that are still blowing off the legs of little kids. In what way did that strategy promote our interests?"

But what if Putin were threatening to move against, say, Moldova—another vulnerable post-Soviet state? Wouldn't it be helpful for Putin to believe that Obama might get angry and irrational about that?

“There is no evidence in modern American foreign policy that that's how people respond. People respond based on what their imperatives are, and if it's really important to somebody, and it's not that important to us, they know that, and we know that,” he said. “There are ways to deter, but it requires you to be very clear ahead of time about what is worth going to war for and what is not. Now, if there is somebody in this town that would claim that we would consider going to war with Russia over Crimea and eastern Ukraine, they should speak up and be very clear about it. The idea that talking tough or engaging in some military action that is tangential to that particular area is somehow going to influence the decision making of Russia or China is contrary to all the evidence we have seen over the last 50 years.”

Obama went on to say that the belief in the possibilities of projected toughness is rooted in “mythologies” about Ronald Reagan's foreign policy.

“If you think about, let's say, the Iran hostage crisis, there is a narrative that has been promoted today by some of the Republican candidates that the day Reagan was elected, because he looked tough, the Iranians decided, ‘We better turn over these hostages,’” he said. “In fact what had happened was that there was a long negotiation with the Iranians and because they so disliked Carter—even though the negotiations had been completed—they held those hostages until the day Reagan got elected. Reagan's posture, his rhetoric, etc., had nothing to do with their release. When you think of the military actions that Reagan took, you have Grenada—which is hard to argue helped our ability to shape world events, although it was good politics for him back home. You have the Iran-Contra affair, in which we supported right-wing paramilitaries and did nothing to enhance our image in Central America, and it wasn't successful at all.” He reminded me that Reagan's great foe, Daniel Ortega, is today the unrepentant president of Nicaragua.

Obama also cited Reagan's decision to almost immediately pull U.S. forces from Lebanon after 241 servicemen were killed in a Hezbollah attack in 1983. “Apparently all these things really helped us gain credibility with the Russians and the Chinese,” because “that's the narrative that is told,” he said sarcastically. “Now, I actually think that Ronald Reagan had a great success in foreign policy, which was to recognize the opportunity that Gorbachev presented and to engage in extensive diplomacy—which was roundly criticized by some of the same people who now use Ronald Reagan to promote the notion that we should go around bombing people.”

IN A CONVERSATION at the end of January, I asked the president to describe for me the threats he worries about most as he prepares, in the coming months, to hand off power to his successor.

“As I survey the next 20 years, climate change worries me profoundly because of the effects that it has on all the other problems that we face,” he said. “If you start seeing more severe drought; more significant famine; more displacement from the Indian subcontinent and coastal regions in Africa and Asia; the continuing problems of scarcity, refugees, poverty, disease—this makes every other problem we've got worse. That's above and beyond just the existential issues of a planet that starts getting into a bad feedback loop.”

Terrorism, he said, is also a long-term problem “when combined with the problem of failed states.”

What country does he consider the greatest challenge to America in the coming decades? “In terms of traditional great-state relations, I do believe that the relationship between the United States and China is going to be the most critical,” he said. “If we get that right and China continues on a peaceful rise, then we have a partner that is growing in capability and sharing with us the burdens and responsibilities of maintaining an international order. If China fails; if it is not able to maintain a trajectory that satisfies its population and has to resort to nationalism as an organizing principle; if it feels so over-whelmed that it never takes on the responsibilities of a country its size in maintaining the international order; if it views the world only in terms of regional spheres of influence—then not only do we see the potential for conflict with China, but we will find ourselves having more difficulty dealing with these other challenges that are going to come.”

Many people, I noted, want the president to be more forceful in confronting China, especially in the South China Sea. Hillary Clinton, for one, has been heard to say in private settings, “I don’t want my grandchildren to live in a world dominated by the Chinese.”

“I’ve been very explicit in saying that we have more to fear from a weakened, threatened China than a successful, rising China,” Obama said. “I think we have to be firm where China’s actions are undermining international interests, and if you look at how we’ve operated in the South China Sea, we have been able to mobilize most of Asia to isolate China in ways that have surprised China, frankly, and have very much served our interest in strengthening our alliances.”

A weak, flailing Russia constitutes a threat as well, though not quite a top-tier threat. “Unlike China, they have demo-graphic problems, economic structural problems, that would require not only vision but a generation to overcome,” Obama said. “The path that Putin is taking is not going to help them overcome those challenges. But in that environment, the temptation to project military force to show greatness is strong, and that’s what Putin’s inclination is. So I don’t under-estimate the dangers there.” Obama returned to a point he had made repeatedly to me, one that he hopes the country, and the next president, absorbs: “You know, the notion that diplo-macy and technocrats and bureaucrats somehow are helping to keep America safe and secure, most people think, Eh, that’s nonsense. But it’s true. And by the way, it’s the element of American power that the rest of the world appreciates un-ambiguously. When we deploy troops, there’s always a sense on the part of other countries that, even where necessary, sovereignty is being violated.”

OVER THE PAST YEAR, John Kerry has visited the White House regularly to ask Obama to violate Syria’s sovereignty. On several occasions, Kerry has asked Obama to launch missiles at specific regime targets, under cover of night, to “send a message” to the regime. The goal, Kerry has said, is not to overthrow Assad but to encourage him, and Iran and Russia, to negotiate peace. When the Assad alliance has had the upper hand on the battlefield, as it has these past several months, it has shown no inclination to take seriously Kerry’s entreaties to negotiate in good faith. A few cruise missiles, Kerry has argued, might concentrate the attention of Assad and his backers. “Kerry’s looking like a chump with the Russians, because he has no leverage,” a senior administration official told me.

The U.S. wouldn't have to claim credit for the attacks, Kerry has told Obama—but Assad would surely know the missiles' return address.

Obama has steadfastly resisted Kerry's requests, and seems to have grown impatient with his lobbying. Recently, when Kerry handed Obama a written outline of new steps to bring more pressure to bear on Assad, Obama said, "Oh, another proposal?" Administration officials have told me that Vice President Biden, too, has become frustrated with Kerry's demands for action. He has said privately to the secretary of state, "John, remember Vietnam? Remember how that started?" At a National Security Council meeting held at the Pentagon in December, Obama announced that no one except the secretary of defense should bring him proposals for military action. Pentagon officials understood Obama's announcement to be a brushback pitch directed at Kerry.

One day in January, in Kerry's office at the State Department, I expressed the obvious: He has more of a bias toward action than the president does.

"I do, probably," Kerry acknowledged. "Look, the final say on these things is in his hands ... I'd say that I think we've had a very symbiotic, synergistic, whatever you call it, relationship, which works very effectively. Because I'll come in with the bias toward 'Let's try to do this, let's try to do that, let's get this done.'"

Obama's caution on Syria has vexed those in the administration who have seen opportunities, at different moments over the past four years, to tilt the battlefield against Assad. Some thought that Putin's decision to fight on behalf of Assad would prompt Obama to intensify American efforts to help anti-regime rebels. But Obama, at least as of this writing, would not be moved, in part because he believed that it was not his business to stop Russia from making what he thought was a terrible mistake. "They are overextended. They're bleeding," he told me. "And their economy has contracted for three years in a row, drastically."

In recent National Security Council meetings, Obama's strategy was occasionally referred to as the "Tom Sawyer approach." Obama's view was that if Putin wanted to expend his regime's resources by painting the fence in Syria, the U.S. should let him. By late winter, though, when it appeared that Russia was making advances in its campaign to solidify Assad's rule, the White House began discussing ways to deepen support for the rebels, though the president's ambivalence about more-extensive engagement remained. In conversations I had with National Security Council officials over the past couple of months, I sensed a foreboding that an event—another San Bernardino-style attack, for instance—would compel the United States to take new and direct action in Syria. For Obama, this would be a nightmare.

If there had been no Iraq, no Afghanistan, and no Libya, Obama told me, he might be more apt to take risks in Syria. "A president does not make decisions in a vacuum. He does not have a blank slate. Any president who was thoughtful, I believe, would recognize that after over a decade of war, with obligations that are still to this day requiring great amounts of resources and attention in Afghanistan, with the experience of Iraq, with the strains that it's placed on our military—any thoughtful president would hesitate about making a renewed commitment in the exact same region of the world with some of the exact same dynamics and the same probability of an un-satisfactory outcome."

Are you too cautious?, I asked.

“No,” he said. “Do I think that had we not invaded Iraq and were we not still involved in sending billions of dollars and a number of military trainers and advisers into Afghanistan, would I potentially have thought about taking on some additional risk to help try to shape the Syria situation? I don’t know.”



Obama with Jack Ma, the chairman of Alibaba, at the APEC summit in the Philippines last November—days after ISIS killed 130 people in Paris

What has struck me is that, even as his secretary of state warns about a dire, Syria-fueled European apocalypse, Obama has not recategorized the country’s civil war as a top-tier security threat.

Obama’s hesitation to join the battle for Syria is held out as proof by his critics that he is too naive; his decision in 2013 not to fire missiles is proof, they argue, that he is a bluffer.

This critique frustrates the president. “Nobody remembers bin Laden anymore,” he says. “Nobody talks about me ordering 30,000 more troops into Afghanistan.” The red-line crisis, he said, “is the point of the inverted pyramid upon which all other theories rest.”

One afternoon in late January, as I was leaving the Oval Office, I mentioned to Obama a moment from an interview in 2012 when he told me that he would not allow Iran to gain possession of a nuclear weapon. “You said, ‘I’m the president of the United States, I don’t bluff.’”

He said, “I don’t.”

Shortly after that interview four years ago, Ehud Barak, who was then the defense minister of Israel, asked me whether I thought Obama’s no-bluff promise was itself a bluff. I answered that I found it difficult to imagine that the leader of the United States would bluff about something so consequential. But Barak’s question had stayed with me. So as I stood in the

door-way with the president, I asked: “Was it a bluff?” I told him that few people now believe he actually would have attacked Iran to keep it from getting a nuclear weapon.

“That’s interesting,” he said, noncommittally.

I started to talk: “Do you—”

He interrupted. “I actually would have,” he said, meaning that he would have struck Iran’s nuclear facilities. “If I saw them break out.”

He added, “Now, the argument that can’t be resolved, because it’s entirely situational, was what constitutes them get-ting” the bomb. “This was the argument I was having with Bibi Netanyahu.” Netanyahu wanted Obama to prevent Iran from being capable of building a bomb, not merely from possessing a bomb.

“You were right to believe it,” the president said. And then he made his key point. “This was in the category of an American interest.”

I was reminded then of something Derek Chollet, a former National Security Council official, told me: “Obama is a gambler, not a bluffer.”

The president has placed some huge bets. Last May, as he was trying to move the Iran nuclear deal through Congress, I told him that the agreement was making me nervous. His response was telling. “Look, 20 years from now, I’m still going to be around, God willing. If Iran has a nuclear weapon, it’s my name on this,” he said. “I think it’s fair to say that in addition to our profound national-security interests, I have a personal interest in locking this down.”

In the matter of the Syrian regime and its Iranian and Russian sponsors, Obama has bet, and seems prepared to continue betting, that the price of direct U.S. action would be higher than the price of inaction. And he is sanguine enough to live with the perilous ambiguities of his decisions. Though in his Nobel Peace Prize speech in 2009, Obama said, “Inaction tears at our conscience and can lead to more costly intervention later,” today the opinions of humanitarian interventionists do not seem to move him, at least not publicly. He undoubtedly knows that a next-generation Samantha Power will write critically of his unwillingness to do more to prevent the continuing slaughter in Syria. (For that matter, Samantha Power will also be the subject of criticism from the next Samantha Power.) As he comes to the end of his presidency, Obama believes he has done his country a large favor by keeping it out of the maelstrom—and he believes, I suspect, that historians will one day judge him wise for having done so.

Inside the West Wing, officials say that Obama, as a president who inherited a financial crisis and two active wars from his predecessor, is keen to leave “a clean barn” to whoever succeeds him. This is why the fight against isis, a group he considers to be a direct, though not existential, threat to the U.S., is his most urgent priority for the remainder of his presidency; killing the so-called caliph of the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is one of the top goals of the American national-security apparatus in Obama’s last year.

Of course, isis was midwifed into existence, in part, by the Assad regime. Yet by Obama’s stringent standards, Assad’s continued rule for the moment still doesn’t rise to the level of direct challenge to America’s national security.

This is what is so controversial about the president’s approach, and what will be controversial for years to come— the standard he has used to define what, exactly, constitutes a direct threat.



Obama visits a refugee center in Kuala Lumpur on a tour through Southeast Asia last fall. He sees the region as more integral to America’s future than the Middle East.

Obama has come to a number of dovetailing conclusions about the world, and about America’s role in it. The first is that the Middle East is no longer terribly important to American interests. The second is that even if the Middle East were sur-passingly important, there would still be little an American president could do to make it a better place. The third is that the innate American desire to fix the sorts of problems that manifest themselves most drastically in the Middle East inevitably leads to warfare, to the deaths of U.S. soldiers, and to the eventual hemorrhaging of U.S. credibility and power. The fourth is that the world cannot afford to see the diminishment of U.S. power. Just as the leaders of several American allies have found Obama’s leadership inadequate to the tasks before him, he himself has found world leadership wanting: global partners who often lack the vision and the will to spend political capital in pursuit of broad, progressive goals, and adversaries who are not, in his mind, as rational as he is. Obama believes that history has sides, and that America’s adversaries—and some of its putative allies—have situated themselves on the wrong one, a place where tribalism, fundamentalism, sectarianism, and militarism still flourish. What they don’t understand is that history is bending in his direction.

“The central argument is that by keeping America from immersing itself in the crises of the Middle East, the foreign-policy establishment believes that the president is precipitating our decline,” Ben Rhodes told me. “But the president himself takes the opposite view, which is that overextension in the Middle East will ultimately harm our economy, harm our ability to look for other opportunities and to deal with other challenges, and, most important, endanger

the lives of American service members for reasons that are not in the direct American national-security interest.”

If you are a supporter of the president, his strategy makes eminent sense: Double down in those parts of the world where success is plausible, and limit America’s exposure to the rest. His critics believe, however, that problems like those presented by the Middle East don’t solve themselves—that, without American intervention, they metastasize.

At the moment, Syria, where history appears to be bending toward greater chaos, poses the most direct challenge to the president’s worldview.

George W. Bush was also a gambler, not a bluffer. He will be remembered harshly for the things he did in the Middle East. Barack Obama is gambling that he will be judged well for the things he didn’t do.

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The White House
Office of the Press Secretary
For Immediate Release
August 31, 2013

Statement by the president on Syria

1:52 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon, everybody. Ten days ago, the world watched in horror as men, women and children were massacred in Syria in the worst chemical weapons attack of the 21st century. Yesterday the United States presented a powerful case that the Syrian government was responsible for this attack on its own people.

Our intelligence shows the Assad regime and its forces preparing to use chemical weapons, launching rockets in the highly populated suburbs of Damascus, and acknowledging that a chemical weapons attack took place. And all of this corroborates what the world can plainly see -- hospitals overflowing with victims; terrible images of the dead. All told, well over 1,000 people were murdered. Several hundred of them were children -- young girls and boys gassed to death by their own government.

This attack is an assault on human dignity. It also presents a serious danger to our national security. It risks making a mockery of the global prohibition on the use of chemical weapons. It endangers our friends and our partners along Syria’s borders, including Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq. It could lead to escalating use of chemical weapons, or their proliferation to terrorist groups who would do our people harm.

In a world with many dangers, this menace must be confronted.

Now, after careful deliberation, I have decided that the United States should take military action against Syrian regime targets. This would not be an open-ended intervention. We

would not put boots on the ground. Instead, our action would be designed to be limited in duration and scope. But I'm confident we can hold the Assad regime accountable for their use of chemical weapons, deter this kind of behavior, and degrade their capacity to carry it out.

Our military has positioned assets in the region. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs has informed me that we are prepared to strike whenever we choose. Moreover, the Chairman has indicated to me that our capacity to execute this mission is not time-sensitive; it will be effective tomorrow, or next week, or one month from now. **And I'm prepared to give that order.**

But having made my decision as Commander-in-Chief based on what I am convinced is our national security interests, I'm also mindful that I'm the President of the world's oldest constitutional democracy. I've long believed that our power is rooted not just in our military might, but in our example as a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. And that's why I've made a second decision: I will seek authorization for the use of force from the American people's representatives in Congress.

Over the last several days, we've heard from members of Congress who want their voices to be heard. I absolutely agree. So this morning, I spoke with all four congressional leaders, and they've agreed to schedule a debate and then a vote as soon as Congress comes back into session.

In the coming days, my administration stands ready to provide every member with the information they need to understand what happened in Syria and why it has such profound implications for America's national security. And all of us should be accountable as we move forward, and that can only be accomplished with a vote.

I'm confident in the case our government has made without waiting for U.N. inspectors. I'm comfortable going forward without the approval of a United Nations Security Council that, so far, has been completely paralyzed and unwilling to hold Assad accountable. As a consequence, many people have advised against taking this decision to Congress, and undoubtedly, they were impacted by what we saw happen in the United Kingdom this week when the Parliament of our closest ally failed to pass a resolution with a similar goal, even as the Prime Minister supported taking action.

Yet, while I believe I have the authority to carry out this military action without specific congressional authorization, I know that the country will be stronger if we take this course, and our actions will be even more effective. **We should have this debate, because the issues are too big for business as usual.** And this morning, John Boehner, Harry Reid, Nancy Pelosi and Mitch McConnell agreed that this is the right thing to do for our democracy.

A country faces few decisions as grave as using military force, even when that force is limited. I respect the views of those who call for caution, particularly as our country emerges from a time of war that I was elected in part to end. **But if we really do want to turn away from taking appropriate action in the face of such an unspeakable outrage, then we must acknowledge the costs of doing nothing.**

Here's my question for every member of Congress and every member of the global community: **What message will we send if a dictator can gas hundreds of children to death in plain sight and pay no price? What's the purpose of the international system that we've built if**

a prohibition on the use of chemical weapons that has been agreed to by the governments of 98 percent of the world's people and approved overwhelmingly by the Congress of the United States is not enforced?

Make no mistake -- this has implications beyond chemical warfare. If we won't enforce accountability in the face of this heinous act, what does it say about our resolve to stand up to others who flout fundamental international rules? To governments who would choose to build nuclear arms? To terrorist who would spread biological weapons? To armies who carry out genocide?

We cannot raise our children in a world where we will not follow through on the things we say, the accords we sign, the values that define us.

So just as I will take this case to Congress, I will also deliver this message to the world. While the U.N. investigation has some time to report on its findings, we will insist that an atrocity committed with chemical weapons is not simply investigated, it must be confronted.

I don't expect every nation to agree with the decision we have made. Privately we've heard many expressions of support from our friends. But I will ask those who care about the writ of the international community to stand publicly behind our action.

And finally, let me say this to the American people: I know well that we are weary of war. We've ended one war in Iraq. We're ending another in Afghanistan. And the American people have the good sense to know we cannot resolve the underlying conflict in Syria with our military. In that part of the world, there are ancient sectarian differences, and the hopes of the Arab Spring have unleashed forces of change that are going to take many years to resolve. And that's why we're not contemplating putting our troops in the middle of someone else's war.

Instead, we'll continue to support the Syrian people through our pressure on the Assad regime, our commitment to the opposition, our care for the displaced, and our pursuit of a political resolution that achieves a government that respects the dignity of its people.

But we are the United States of America, and we cannot and must not turn a blind eye to what happened in Damascus. Out of the ashes of world war, we built an international order and enforced the rules that gave it meaning. And we did so because we believe that the rights of individuals to live in peace and dignity depends on the responsibilities of nations. We aren't perfect, but this nation more than any other has been willing to meet those responsibilities.

So to all members of Congress of both parties, I ask you to take this vote for our national security. I am looking forward to the debate. And in doing so, I ask you, members of Congress, to consider that some things are more important than partisan differences or the politics of the moment.

Ultimately, this is not about who occupies this office at any given time; it's about who we are as a country. I believe that the people's representatives must be invested in what America does abroad, and now is the time to show the world that America keeps our commitments. We do what we say. And we lead with the belief that right makes might -- not the other way around.

We all know there are no easy options. But I wasn't elected to avoid hard decisions. And neither were the members of the House and the Senate. I've told you what I believe, that our security and our values demand that we cannot turn away from the massacre of countless civilians with chemical weapons. And our democracy is stronger when the President and the people's representatives stand together.

I'm ready to act in the face of this outrage. Today I'm asking Congress to send a message to the world that we are ready to move forward together as one nation.

Thanks very much

Remarks by the president in address to the nation on Syria

9:01 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: My fellow Americans, tonight I want to talk to you about Syria -- why it matters, and where we go from here.

Over the past two years, what began as a series of peaceful protests against the repressive regime of Bashar al-Assad has turned into a brutal civil war. Over 100,000 people have been killed. Millions have fled the country. In that time, America has worked with allies to provide humanitarian support, to help the moderate opposition, and to shape a political settlement. But I have resisted calls for military action, because we cannot resolve someone else's civil war through force, particularly after a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The situation profoundly changed, though, on August 21st, when Assad's government gassed to death over a thousand people, including hundreds of children. The images from this massacre are sickening: Men, women, children lying in rows, killed by poison gas. Others foaming at the mouth, gasping for breath. A father clutching his dead children, imploring them to get up and walk. On that terrible night, the world saw in gruesome detail the terrible nature of chemical weapons, and why the overwhelming majority of humanity has declared them off-limits -- a crime against humanity, and a violation of the laws of war.

This was not always the case. In World War I, American GIs were among the many thousands killed by deadly gas in the trenches of Europe. In World War II, the Nazis used gas to inflict the horror of the Holocaust. Because these weapons can kill on a mass scale, with no distinction between soldier and infant, the civilized world has spent a century working to ban them. And in 1997, the United States Senate overwhelmingly approved an international agreement prohibiting the use of chemical weapons, now joined by 189 governments that represent 98 percent of humanity.

On August 21st, these basic rules were violated, along with our sense of common humanity. No one disputes that chemical weapons were used in Syria. The world saw thousands of videos, cell phone pictures, and social media accounts from the attack, and humanitarian organizations told stories of hospitals packed with people who had symptoms of poison gas.

Moreover, we know the Assad regime was responsible. In the days leading up to August 21st, we know that Assad's chemical weapons personnel prepared for an attack near an area where they mix sarin gas. They distributed gasmasks to their troops. Then they fired rockets from a regime-controlled area into 11 neighborhoods that the regime has been trying to wipe clear of opposition forces. Shortly after those rockets landed, the gas spread, and hospitals filled with the dying and the wounded. We know senior figures in Assad's military machine reviewed the results of the attack, and the regime increased their shelling of the same neighborhoods in the days that followed. We've also studied samples of blood and hair from people at the site that tested positive for sarin.

When dictators commit atrocities, they depend upon the world to look the other way until those horrifying pictures fade from memory. But these things happened. The facts cannot be denied. The question now is what the United States of America, and the international community, is prepared to do about it. Because what happened to those people -- to those children -- is not only a violation of international law, it's also a danger to our security.

Let me explain why. If we fail to act, the Assad regime will see no reason to stop using chemical weapons. As the ban against these weapons erodes, other tyrants will have no reason to think twice about acquiring poison gas, and using them. Over time, our troops would again face the prospect of chemical warfare on the battlefield. And it could be easier for terrorist organizations to obtain these weapons, and to use them to attack civilians.

If fighting spills beyond Syria's borders, these weapons could threaten allies like Turkey, Jordan, and Israel. And a failure to stand against the use of chemical weapons would weaken prohibitions against other weapons of mass destruction, and embolden Assad's ally, Iran -- which must decide whether to ignore international law by building a nuclear weapon, or to take a more peaceful path.

This is not a world we should accept. This is what's at stake. And that is why, after careful deliberation, I determined that it is in the national security interests of the United States to respond to the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons through a targeted military strike. The purpose of this strike would be to deter Assad from using chemical weapons, to degrade his regime's ability to use them, and to make clear to the world that we will not tolerate their use.

That's my judgment as Commander-in-Chief. But I'm also the President of the world's oldest constitutional democracy. So even though I possess the authority to order military strikes, I believed it was right, in the absence of a direct or imminent threat to our security, to take this debate to Congress. I believe our democracy is stronger when the President acts with the support of Congress. And I believe that America acts more effectively abroad when we stand together.

This is especially true after a decade that put more and more war-making power in the hands of the President, and more and more burdens on the shoulders of our troops, while sidelining the people's representatives from the critical decisions about when we use force.

Now, I know that after the terrible toll of Iraq and Afghanistan, the idea of any military action, no matter how limited, is not going to be popular. After all, I've spent four and a half years working to end wars, not to start them. Our troops are out of Iraq. Our troops are coming home from Afghanistan. And I know Americans want all of us in Washington

-- especially me -- to concentrate on the task of building our nation here at home: putting people back to work, educating our kids, growing our middle class.

It's no wonder, then, that you're asking hard questions. So let me answer some of the most important questions that I've heard from members of Congress, and that I've read in letters that you've sent to me.

First, many of you have asked, won't this put us on a slippery slope to another war? One man wrote to me that we are "still recovering from our involvement in Iraq." A veteran put it more bluntly: "This nation is sick and tired of war."

My answer is simple: I will not put American boots on the ground in Syria. I will not pursue an open-ended action like Iraq or Afghanistan. I will not pursue a prolonged air campaign like Libya or Kosovo. This would be a targeted strike to achieve a clear objective: deterring the use of chemical weapons, and degrading Assad's capabilities.

Others have asked whether it's worth acting if we don't take out Assad. As some members of Congress have said, there's no point in simply doing a "pinprick" strike in Syria.

Let me make something clear: The United States military doesn't do pinpricks. Even a limited strike will send a message to Assad that no other nation can deliver. I don't think we should remove another dictator with force -- we learned from Iraq that doing so makes us responsible for all that comes next. But a targeted strike can make Assad, or any other dictator, think twice before using chemical weapons.

Other questions involve the dangers of retaliation. We don't dismiss any threats, but the Assad regime does not have the ability to seriously threaten our military. Any other retaliation they might seek is in line with threats that we face every day. Neither Assad nor his allies have any interest in escalation that would lead to his demise. And our ally, Israel, can defend itself with overwhelming force, as well as the unshakeable support of the United States of America.

Many of you have asked a broader question: Why should we get involved at all in a place that's so complicated, and where -- as one person wrote to me -- "those who come after Assad may be enemies of human rights?"

It's true that some of Assad's opponents are extremists. But al Qaeda will only draw strength in a more chaotic Syria if people there see the world doing nothing to prevent innocent civilians from being gassed to death. The majority of the Syrian people -- and the Syrian opposition we work with -- just want to live in peace, with dignity and freedom. And the day after any military action, we would redouble our efforts to achieve a political solution that strengthens those who reject the forces of tyranny and extremism.

Finally, many of you have asked: Why not leave this to other countries, or seek solutions short of force? As several people wrote to me, "We should not be the world's policeman."

I agree, and I have a deeply held preference for peaceful solutions. Over the last two years, my administration has tried diplomacy and sanctions, warning and negotiations -- but chemical weapons were still used by the Assad regime.

However, over the last few days, we've seen some encouraging signs. In part because of the credible threat of U.S. military action, as well as constructive talks that I had with President Putin, the Russian government has indicated a willingness to join with the international community in pushing Assad to give up his chemical weapons. The Assad regime has now admitted that it has these weapons, and even said they'd join the Chemical Weapons Convention, which prohibits their use.

It's too early to tell whether this offer will succeed, and any agreement must verify that the Assad regime keeps its commitments. But this initiative has the potential to remove the threat of chemical weapons without the use of force, particularly because Russia is one of Assad's strongest allies.

I have, therefore, asked the leaders of Congress to postpone a vote to authorize the use of force while we pursue this diplomatic path. I'm sending Secretary of State John Kerry to meet his Russian counterpart on Thursday, and I will continue my own discussions with President Putin. I've spoken to the leaders of two of our closest allies, France and the United Kingdom, and we will work together in consultation with Russia and China to put forward a resolution at the U.N. Security Council requiring Assad to give up his chemical weapons, and to ultimately destroy them under international control. We'll also give U.N. inspectors the opportunity to report their findings about what happened on August 21st. And we will continue to rally support from allies from Europe to the Americas -- from Asia to the Middle East -- who agree on the need for action.

Meanwhile, I've ordered our military to maintain their current posture to keep the pressure on Assad, and to be in a position to respond if diplomacy fails. And tonight, I give thanks again to our military and their families for their incredible strength and sacrifices.

My fellow Americans, for nearly seven decades, the United States has been the anchor of global security. This has meant doing more than forging international agreements -- it has meant enforcing them. The burdens of leadership are often heavy, but the world is a better place because we have borne them.

And so, to my friends on the right, I ask you to reconcile your commitment to America's military might with a failure to act when a cause is so plainly just. To my friends on the left, I ask you to reconcile your belief in freedom and dignity for all people with those images of children writhing in pain, and going still on a cold hospital floor. For sometimes resolutions and statements of condemnation are simply not enough.

Indeed, I'd ask every member of Congress, and those of you watching at home tonight, to view those videos of the attack, and then ask: What kind of world will we live in if the United States of America sees a dictator brazenly violate international law with poison gas, and we choose to look the other way?

Franklin Roosevelt once said, "Our national determination to keep free of foreign wars and foreign entanglements cannot prevent us from feeling deep concern when ideals and principles that we have cherished are challenged." Our ideals and principles, as well as our national security, are at stake in Syria, along with our leadership of a world where we seek to ensure that the worst weapons will never be used.

America is not the world's policeman. Terrible things happen across the globe, and it is beyond our means to right every wrong. But when, with modest effort and risk, we can stop children from being gassed to death, and thereby make our own children safer over the long run, I believe we should act. That's what makes America different. That's what makes us exceptional. With humility, but with resolve, let us never lose sight of that essential truth.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

END

9:17 P.M. EDT