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.

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

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.

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

international response that stabilizes

the situation and protects innocent

people. I think that’s the best outcome

that we could potentially hope for

here.

I yield to the

gentleman from Pennsylvania.

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 singlehandedly

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.

I yield to the

gentleman from Pennsylvania.

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.