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,

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.

I yield to the gentleman

from Pennsylvania.

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 initiates

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

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.

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

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-

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.