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

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.