Mr. Chairman, this amendment is about what is happening in

Syria today as we speak.

What began as peaceful demonstrations against a nonrepresentative

minority government quickly became violent when Bashar al-Assad chose

the path of violence over an inclusionary government. Since the

uprising began in March of last year, at least 16,000 Syrians have been

killed, countless thousands have been seriously injured, and at least

200,000 people have been displaced.

In neighborhoods like Homs, as well as in defenseless refugee camps,

women and children are being attacked, sexually assaulted, and

summarily executed. Accused civilian sympathizers are being brutally

tortured, I won't even go into the manner in which they are torturing

them with all the acid burns, and sexual assaults, and so on.

And, this country's violence is only going to get worse. We read what

happened yesterday when some of President Assad's closest military

advisers,

including the minister of defense, were assassinated in Damascus. As

the unrest spreads, as all this violence continues, the international

community has had to sit on the sidelines, unable to take action

because of Russian opposition at the United Nations. Mr. Chairman,

perhaps one reason the Russians oppose more forceful steps against

Syria is because they are the regime's principal weapons supplier. They

have a vested economic interest. That's why they won't cooperate with

the rest of the international community who is trying to act

responsibly.

Just last year, Moscow sold Damascus $1 billion in arms. In

particular, a Russian state-owned firm, known as Rosoboronexport, has

provided Assad's regime with mortars, sniper rifles, attack

helicopters, and even recently agreed to provide advanced fighter jets.

In a recent letter from the Pentagon to the Congress, the Pentagon

wrote that there is evidence that this Rosoboronexport's arms are being

used to kill the civilians in Syria. As we speak, more Russian arms,

including refurbished helicopters, are steaming towards Syria on a

ship. I raise this ongoing humanitarian disaster in Syria and the role

of this particular Russian firm in it because the U.S. Government has

substantial business dealings with Rosoboronexport, and that makes us

in some ways complicit in what is happening.

To date, the Department of Defense has purchased 23 Mi-17 helicopters

from Rosoboronexport for use by the Afghan National Security Forces.

Just this past weekend, DOD agreed to purchase 10 more, which will not

be delivered until 2016, 2 years after we've left Afghanistan. I don't

know about you, but I'm nervous about how those helicopters might be

used 2 years after we've already left the country. Who are they going

to be used by? And who are they going to be used against?

Even more distressing is that DOD is buying these helicopters for our

Afghan allies from Syria's main arms supplier through a no-bid

contract. It's an earmark for the Russians, no less. There has never

been competition for supplying rotorcraft for the Afghan National

Security Forces. If there had been, our American firms would have won

it.

Mr. Chairman, I should think it's troubling to all of us that we are

purchasing helicopters from a Russian firm that is directly complicit

in the deaths of thousands of innocent Syrian men, women, and children.

This has got to stop.

What this amendment would do is to simply say no more purchases from

this Russian arms supplier. We don't need to be purchasing any more

helicopters for years in advance when we're not even going to have a

military presence in the country.

The Russians have vetoed U.N. resolutions designed to stop this

violence in Syria. They are preventing an expansion of the current U.N.

mandate. Our financial support for Rosoboronexport, has to be stopped.

We have to divest ourselves from dependence on this state owned arms

supplier.

This amendment would stop our business dealings with Syria's

principal arms supplier. Otherwise, our condemnations of Syria's regime

ring hollow.

Mr. Chairman, I urge support for the American taxpayer and for this

amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you, first of all, for your

support of this amendment as well as your leadership of this committee.

I think this is an excellent idea. Perhaps, if we were to get into

conference with the Senate on this bill, which I expect we will, we

could add that national security waiver at that time and, thus, we

would not be compromising the things that don't need to be discussed on

the floor.

But I think that's an excellent suggestion, and I appreciate the

gentleman's deference to concerns that HASC might have. With that, I do

appreciate the very distinguished chairman's support.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I very much thank my friend

and colleague, the ranking member of the committee.

That is an important point to make. The Pentagon not only has to be

concerned about the operability in Afghanistan, which is quite

different.

It is very unique. Plus, the Afghans need helicopters they

can maintain after we leave. They are used to maintaining Russian

helicopters. During the occupation, they learned that. I understand

they are easier to maintain than some of ours.

But notwithstanding that, I think the gentleman would agree that

there is reason for some apprehension after we have left the country to

continue supplying these helicopters.

The other point, if the gentleman would further yield, is

this firm is not someone we ought to be dealing with unless we

absolutely have to. These are people that have violated our concerns

about providing nuclear capacity to Iran. They have been cited about

that. They are supplying a billion dollars of arms to Assad; and its

principal reason, I suspect, because it's a state-owned firm, that

Russia won't comply with the rest of the world.

It does need to be seen in that context, as well, to send this kind

of a message. It's not a message I am necessarily sending to the

Pentagon. It's a message we're trying to send to Russia: Let's get on

board.