I rise in support of my colleague's bipartisan

amendment, which prohibits any funds provided in this act from being

used to fulfill the Defense Department's current contract with

Rosoboronexport, the Russian state arms dealer currently providing

weapons to Syria for Mi-17 helicopters for the Afghan security forces.

This amendment builds upon the bipartisan support of the amendment

added to the House authorization bill that prohibits future contracts

along the same lines and requires future contracts to be competitively

bid so that U.S. manufacturers can compete on these taxpayer-funded

deals.

For over a year now, we have seen Syrian President Bashar al-Assad

respond to peaceful demonstrations by the Syrian people with a brutal

crackdown. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, over

17,000 people have been killed by the regime since violence began there

in March 2011. Fighting this week has further intensified in and around

Damascus, and there are reports, after similar violence in Houla and

Qubair, that more than 100 civilians have been massacred in Tremseh.

This is on top of torture, sexual violence, inference with access to

medical treatment and many other gross human rights violations

perpetrated by the al-Assad regime.

At the same time, Russia continues to provide that regime with the

means to perpetrate widespread systemic attacks on its civilians. Last

year alone, they reportedly sold Damascus $1 billion in weapons. In

January, they signed a deal with Damascus to supply Syria with 36

combat jets.

Last month Secretary of State Clinton expressed concern that Russia

is sending attack helicopters to Syria. The New York Times last

Saturday, in an article on the defection of Syrian Air Force Captain

Akhmed Trad, detailed the use of rocket-equipped Mi-17 helicopters by

the regime. Earlier today, Russia, along with China, vetoed a U.N.

Security Council resolution that would have sanctioned the Assad regime

for the continued use of heavy weapons.

Yet, incredibly, the U.S. Defense Department has purchased 21 Mi-17

helicopters for the Afghan security forces and is reportedly purchasing

10 more through a no-bid with that Russian company, even though it

supplies arms to Syria and was, for years, on the U.S. sanctions list

for providing illegal nuclear assistance to Iran.

If U.S. taxpayer dollars are going to be spent providing helicopters

to the Afghans, those dollars should be spent on American systems that

create jobs here at home. There are American companies available to

manufacture the aircraft, which would increase interoperability with

both the U.S. and NATO forces and support American manufacturing. The

Defense Department is reportedly already training the Afghans how to

fly and maintain American-made helicopters.

At the very least, there should be an open competition for

procurement of these helicopters, a competition we believe superior

American manufacturers would win. In any case, the American taxpayer

dollars should not be used to subsidize al-Assad's murderous regime in

Syria.

This amendment will end this no-bid contract, stop the use of Federal

dollars to subsidize the massacres being perpetrated by the al-Assad

regime. I urge you to support this bipartisan amendment.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The bipartisan amendment that Congressman Jones and I

offer ensures that any security agreement between the United States and

Afghanistan will not be legal unless it comes in the form of a treaty

or is specifically authorized by a law.

The gentleman's point of order argues that this amendment requires

the Secretary of Defense to know the definition of ``any agreement with

the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan that includes

security assurances for mutual defense.'' While this definition is not

written into statute, it is common sense.

I also believe our responsibility under the Constitution takes

precedence over this point of order. As it is, this point would cut

into the heart of our constitutional duties as a Congress under article

I, section 8. The power to declare war has been entrusted to the

Congress and to the Congress alone.

At the recent NATO summit in Chicago, President Obama and NATO

leaders announced an end to combat operations in Afghanistan in 2013

and the transition of lead responsibility for security to the Afghan

Government by the end of 2014. But even though Bin Laden is dead and al

Qaeda has been decimated, the administration has also announced an

agreement with the Government of Afghanistan that would keep an untold

number of American troops there until 2024, which is 12 years from now.

Whether you agree or disagree with the policy, it is

imperative for our form of government that Congress be consulted on any

such agreement that maintains our troops abroad or, for that matter,

any defense or Status of Forces agreement that is made by the United

States. It is our task as representatives of the people to debate the

critical issues and to make the ultimate decision of whether to put or

keep our troops in harm's way.

This amendment will simply ensure in our relationship with

Afghanistan that no defense agreement will be enacted without the

ultimate consent of Congress, as is mandated by our Constitution.