Madam President, I rise

to speak to the grave issue of the Syria

resolution currently pending before the

body.

It is September 11. I know many

Members have expressed thoughts, and

we are all thinking about that day and

what it means to our country. In a few

minutes I will leave and go to the Pentagon

to be with Pentagon staffers and

family members as they commemorate

the anniversary of this horrible tragedy

in American life. The shadow of

that tragedy and its rippling effects

even today, 12 years later, definitely

are a matter on my mind and heart as

I think about this issue with respect to

Syria.

Also on my mind and heart as I think

about this grave issue is its connection

to Virginia. I believe Virginia is the

most militarily connected State in our

country. Our map is a map of American

military history: the battle at Yorktown,

the surrender at Appomattox

Court House, the attack on the Pentagon

on 9/11. Our map is a map of

American military history. We are

more connected to the military in the

sense that one in nine of our citizens is

a veteran. We have Active Duty at the

Pentagon, training to be officers at

Quantico, the largest concentration of

naval power in the world at Hampton

Roads. We have DOD contractors. We

have DOD civilians such as Army

nurses. We have ROTC cadets, Guard

and Reserve members, and military

families, all of whom care very deeply

about the issue we are grappling with

as a nation.

I am sure in the Presiding Officer’s

State, as in mine and across the country,

there is a war weariness on this

12th anniversary of 9/11, and that affects

the way we look at this question

of whether the United States should

potentially engage in military action.

I cast a vote last week in the Senate

Foreign Relations Committee to authorize

limited military action, and I

have spent the days since that vote

talking to Virginians and hearing from

them and hearing from some who

aren’t happy with the vote I cast.

I spent 1 day talking to ROTC cadets

at Virginia State University, folks who

are training to be officers who might

fight in future conflicts for this country.

Then I spent Friday in Hampton

Roads with veterans and military families

talking about the choices before

us.

I heard a teenager last night say

something that truly struck me. This

is a teenager who doesn’t have any direct

connection to the military herself,

no family members in service. But at

an event I was attending, she stood and

said: I don’t know war, but all my generation

and I know is war. Think about

that: I don’t know war, but all my generation

and I know is war. During her

entire life that she has been kind of a

thinking person, aware of the outside

world, we have been at war. That

makes us tremendously war-weary, and

I understand that. So trying to separate

out all those feelings and do what

is right is hard.

Similar to many Virginians, I have

family in the military who are going to

be directly affected by what we do or

what we don’t do. I think about those

family members and all Virginians and

all Americans who have loved ones in

service as I contemplate this difficult

issue.

I wish to say three things. First, I

wish to praise the President for bringing

this matter to Congress, which I

believe is courageous and historic. Secondly,

I wish to talk about why I believe

authorizing limited military action

makes sense. Third, I wish to talk

about the need to exhaust all diplomatic

opportunities and openings, including

the ones that were reported beginning

Monday of this week by Russia

and Syria.

First, on the President coming to

Congress. This was what was intended

by the Framers of the Constitution;

that prior to the initiation of significant

military action—and this would

be significant by all accounts—that

Congress should have to weigh in. The

Framers wanted that to be so. They

had read history. They knew executives

might be a little too prone to initiating

military action, and they wanted

to make sure the people’s elected

representatives had a vote about

whether an action should be initiated.

Once initiated, there is only one Commander

in Chief. But at the initiation,

Congress needs to be involved. That

was the intent from the very beginning

of this Nation from 1787. There was an

understanding that in an emergency, a

President might need to act immediately,

but even in that case there

would need to be a reckoning, a coming

back to Congress and seeking approval

of Presidential action.

In my view, the President, by bringing

this matter to Congress, has acted

in accord with law, acted in accord

with the intent of the Framers of the

Constitution, and actually has done so

in a way that has cleared up some sloppiness

about the way this institution

and the President has actually done

this over time.

Only five times in the history of the

Nation has Congress declared war. Over

120 times Presidents have initiated

military action without congressional

approval—at least prior congressional

approval. Presidents have overreached

their power, and Congress has often

made a decision to avoid being accountable

for this most grave decision

that we make as a nation.

I praise the President for bringing it

to Congress, the people’s body, because

I think it is in accord with law. But I

praise him for a second reason. It is not

just about the constitutional allocation

of responsibility. Responsibilities

were allocated in the Constitution, in

my view, for a very important moral

reason. The moral reason is this: We

cannot ask our men and women in

service to put their lives on the line if

there is not a consensus of the legislative

and executive branches that the

mission is worthwhile.

That is why it is important for Congress

to weigh in on a decision to initiate

military hostility because, absent

that, we face the situation that would

be a very real possibility in this instance

that a President would make a

decision that an action or a war was

worth fighting but a Congress would

not support it. That would put the men

and women who have to face the risk

and potentially risk their lives in a

very difficult situation. If we are going

to ask people to risk their lives in any

kind of a military action, we shouldn’t

be asking them to do it if the legislative

and political branches haven’t

reached some consensus that it should

be done.

That is the first point I wish to

make. I wish to thank the President

for cleaning up this sloppiness in the

historical allocation of responsibilities

between a President and Congress, for

taking a historic step—as he said he

would as a candidate—of bringing a

question such as this to Congress.

We may be unable to act in certain

cases because we are divided. But if we

act and we act united, we are much

stronger both militarily and in the

moral example that we pose to the

world. It is the right thing to do for the

troops who bear the burden of battle.

Second, I wish to talk about the actual

authorization. We grappled with

this. The news came out about the

chemical weapons attack on August 21,

and 18 of us members of the Foreign

Relations Committee returned last

week. The Presiding Officer came and

attended some of our classified meetings.

We grappled with the question

about whether in this circumstance a

limited military authorization was appropriate,

and I voted yes. I voted yes

for a very simple reason. I believe

there has to be a consequence for using

chemical weapons against civilians.

It is pretty simple. There are a lot of

nuances, a lot of subtleties, and a lot of

questions about whether the plans

might accomplish the particular objective

we hope. Those are all legitimate

questions. But at the end of the day, I

feel so very strongly that if chemical

weapons have been used—and in this

case they were and used on a massive

scale and used against civilians—there

must be a consequence for that. There

must be a sharp consequence for it. If

there isn’t, the whole world will be

worse off.

I believe that if the United States

acts in this way to uphold an important

international norm—perhaps the

most important international norm

that weapons of mass destruction can’t

be used against civilians—if we act to

uphold the norm, we will have partners.

How many partners? We will see.

Maybe not as many as we would wish,

but we will have partners. But I am

also convinced that if the United

States does not act to uphold this principle,

I don’t think anyone will act. If

we act, we will have partners; if we

don’t, I don’t think anyone will act.

That is the burden of leadership that is

on this country’s shoulders.

We know about the history of the

chemical weapons ban, and we are so

used to it that it seems normal. But

just to kind of step back from it, if we

think about it, it is not that normal at

all.

The chemical weapons ban came out

of World War I. World War I was a

mechanized slaughter with over 10 million

deaths, a slaughter unlike anything

that had ever been seen in global

history. There were all kinds of weapons

used in World War I that had never

been used before, including dropping

bombs out of airplanes. Dropping

bombs out of airplanes, new kinds of

artillery, new kinds of munitions, new

kinds of machine guns, chemical weapons,

all kinds of mechanized and industrialized

weapons were used in World

War I. The American troops who served

in 1917 and 1918 were gassed. They

would be sleeping in a trench, trying to

get a couple hours of sleep, and they

would wake up coughing their lungs

out or blinded—or they wouldn’t wake

up because some of the gases were invisible

and silent. With no knowledge,

you could suddenly lose your life or be

disabled for life because of chemical

weapons.

The number of casualties in World

War I because of chemical weapons was

small as a percentage of the total casualties.

But it is interesting what happened.

After World War I, the nations

of the world that had been at each other’s

throats, that had battled each

other, gathered a few years later. It is

interesting to think what they banned

and didn’t ban. They didn’t ban aerial

bombardment. They didn’t ban machine

guns. They didn’t ban rockets.

They didn’t ban shells. They didn’t ban

artillery. But they did decide to ban

chemical weapons. They were able to

all agree, as combatants, that chemical

weapons were unacceptable and should

neither be manufactured nor used.

It can seem maybe a little bit illogical

or even absurd: Why is it worse to

be killed by a chemical weapon than a

machine gun or by an artillery shell? I

don’t know what the logic is to it. All

I can assume is that the experience of

that day and moment had inspired

some common spark of humanity in all

of these cultures and combating nations,

and they all agreed the use of

chemical weapons should be banned

heretofore on the Earth.

Nations agreed with that ban. The

Soviet Union was on board. The United

States was on board. So many nations

were on board. Syria ultimately signed

that accord in 1968. Even in the midst

of horrific wars where humans have

done horrific things to each other,

since 1925 and the passage of the ban,

the ban has stuck. The international

community has kept that ember of humanity

alive that says these weapons

should not be used, and only two dictators

until now have used these weapons—

Adolph Hitler using these weapons

against millions of Jews and others

and Saddam Hussein using the weapons

against Kurds, his own people, and

then against Iranians in the Iraq-Iran

war.

When we think about it, it is pretty

amazing. With all the barbarity that

has happened since 1925, this has generally

stuck, with the exception of Adolph

Hitler and Saddam Hussein, until

now. The beneficiaries of this policy

have been civilians, but they have also

been American service men and

women. The service men and women

who fought in World War I were gassed

from this country, but the Americans

who fought in World War II, in Europe

and North Africa and the Pacific, who

fought in Korea, who fought in Vietnam,

who fought in Afghanistan, who

fought in Iraq, who fought in other

minor military involvements have

never had to worry about facing chemical

weapons. No matter how bad the

opponent was, American troops haven’t

had to worry about it, and the troops of

other nations haven’t had to worry

about it either. This is a very important

principle, and it is a positive thing

for humanity that we reached this accord

and we have honored it.

So what happens now if there isn’t a

consequence for Bashar al-Assad’s escalating

use of chemical weapons, to include

chemical weapons against civilians.

What happens if we let go of the

norm and we say: Look, that may have

been OK for the 20th century, but we

are tougher and more cynical now.

There are not any more limits now, so

we don’t have to abide by any norms

now. What I believe the lesson is—and

I think the lessons of history will demonstrate

that this will apply—is that

an atrocity unpunished will engender

future atrocities. We will see more

atrocities in Syria against civilians

and others. We will see more atrocities

abroad. We will see atrocities, and we

will have to face the likely consequence

that our servicemembers, who

have not had to face chemical weapons

since 1925, will now have to prepare to

face them on the battlefield.

If countries can use chemical weapons

and there is no serious consequence,

guess what else they can do.

They can manufacture chemical weapons.

Guess what else. They can sell

chemical weapons and proliferate

chemical weapons. It is not just a matter

that the use of chemical weapons

would be encouraged, but the manufacture

and sale of chemical weapons by

individuals or companies or countries

that want to make money will proliferate.

This has a devastating potential effect

on allies of the United States and

the neighbors around Syria such as

Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and Turkey. It

would have a devastating impact on

other allies, such as South Korea, that

border nations that use chemical weapons.

It could encourage other nations

that have nonchemical weapons of

mass destruction, for example, nuclear

weapons, to think that the world will

not stand up, there is no consequence

for their use so they can violate treaties,

violate norms, and no one is willing

to stand and oppose it.

That was the reason I voted last

week in the Foreign Relations Committee

for this limited authorization of

military force. I was fully aware the

debate on the floor might amend or

change it, and I was open to that possibility.

But I thought it was important

to stand as a representative of Virginia

and a representative of this country to

say: The use of chemical weapons may

suddenly be OK in the 21st century for

Bashar al-Asad, it may suddenly be OK

to Vladimir Putin and others, but it is

not OK to the United States of America,

and we are willing to stand and oppose

them.

The limited military authorization

that is on this floor, as the Presiding

Officer knows, talks about action to

punish, deter, and degrade the ability

of the Syrian regime to use chemical

weapons. The goal is to take the chemical

weapons stockpile of that nation

out of the battlefield equation. The

civil war will continue. We don’t have

the power, as the United States, to dictate

the outcome of that war. But

chemical weapons should not be part of

that war, and they should not be part

of any war.

The authorization was limited. There

will be no ground troops. It was limited

in scope and duration, but make no

mistake, the authorization was a clear

statement of American resolve that

there has to be a consequence for use of

these weapons in violation of international

norms that have been in place

since 1925.

Finally, I want to talk about diplomacy

and the urgent need that I know

we all feel in this body, and as Americans,

to pursue diplomatic alternatives—

including some current alternatives

on the table—that would be far

preferable to military action. It is very

important that we be creative. It is

very important that we have direct

talks with the perpetrators and

enablers of these crimes, but also important

to look to intermediaries and

independent nations for diplomatic alternatives.

We have been trying to do so until recently

and have been blocked in the

United Nations. But the authorization

for military force actually had that as

its first caveat. The authorization said:

Mr. President, if this passes, we authorize

you to use military force, but

before you do, you have to come back

to Congress and stipulate that all diplomatic

angles, options, and possibilities

have been exhausted.

So on the committee, and with the

wording of this authorization, we were

very focused on the need to continue a

diplomatic effort, and that is why it

was so gratifying on Monday, on my

way back to DC after a long week, to

hear that Russia had come to the table

with a proposal inspired by a discussion

with administration figures. It is a

proposal that the Syrian chemical

weapons stockpile—one of the largest

in the world—would be placed under

international control.

Then a few hours later—and this was

no coincidence—Syria, essentially Russia’s

client state, spoke up and said: We

will very much entertain placing our

chemical weapons under international

control. Syria has even suggested, beyond

that, they would finally sign on

to the 1990s-era Chemical Weapons Convention.

They are one of six nations in

the world that refused to sign it. Syria

would not even acknowledge they had

chemical weapons until 2012—even

though the world knew it.

Over the last 48 hours, we have seen

diplomatic options emerge that are

very serious and meaningful. In fact—

and it is too early to tell—if we can

have these discussions and find an accord

where Syria will sign on to the

convention and put these weapons

under international control, we will

not only have avoided a bad thing, such

as military action, which none of us

want unless it is necessary, but we will

have accomplished a good thing for

Syrians and humanity by taking this

massive chemical weapons stockpile off

the battlefield and submitting it to

international control and eventually

destruction.

The offer that is on the table, and the

action that has happened since Monday

is very serious, very significant, and

very encouraging, and it could be a

game changer in this discussion. I said

it is serious, but what we still need to

determine is if it is sincere. It is serious

and significant, but obviously what

the administration needs to do in tandem

with the U.N. is to determine

whether it is sincere.

I will conclude by saying I think it is

very important for Americans, for citizens,

and for the Members of Congress

to understand—we should make no

mistake about this—that the diplomatic

offer that is on the table was not

on the table until America demonstrated

it was prepared to stand for

the proposition that chemical weapons

cannot be used.

I have no doubt that had we not

taken the action in Congress last week

in the Foreign Relations Committee to

show America is resolved to do something,

if no one else in the world is resolved

to do something, at least we

would be resolved to do something, had

we not taken that action, Russia would

not have suddenly changed its position—

they have been blocking action

after action in the Security Council—

and come forward with this serious recommendation.

Had we not taken that

action, and had they not been frightened

of what America might do,

Syria—which was willing to use with

impunity these weapons against civilians—

would not have come forward either.

So American resolve is important.

American resolve is important to show

the world that we value this norm and

we will enforce it, even to the point of

limited military action. But even more

important, American resolve is important

because it encourages other nations—

even the perpetrators and

enablers of the use of these weapons—

to come forward and shoulder the responsibilities

they have, or so we pray,

in the days ahead.

What I ask of my colleagues and my

countrymen is that because it has been

our resolve that has produced a possibility

for a huge diplomatic breakthrough

and win, I ask we continue to

be resolved, continue to show strength,

continue to hold out the option that

there will be a consequence for this

international crime, that America will

play a leading role in making sure

there is a consequence, and as long as

we stand strong with this resolve, we

will maximize the chance that we will

be able to obtain the diplomatic result

we want.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor.