Madam President, my

dad was a pilot in the Army Air Corps

in World War II. He served in the

Eighth Air Force, the 303rd Bomb

Group stationed in Molesworth, England.

On his 26th bombing mission over

Nazi Germany, he was shot down and

captured as a prisoner of war where he

served for the remainder of the war. So

I learned at a very young age that

when we start talking about matters of

war and peace, we must take these

very seriously.

I appreciate the fact that President

Obama came to Capitol Hill yesterday

and spoke to both the Democratic conference

and the Republican conference.

I further appreciate very much the fact

that President Obama spoke to the

American people last night. I actually

wish he had done it a little earlier

since the chemical weapons attacks occurred

on the 21st of August. It was

roughly 3 weeks after that that he finally

spoke to the American people. I

think it would have been better for him

and better for the country if he had

done it sooner and demonstrated a

greater urgency, but I am glad he did

it.

When a President asks the American

people to support our U.S. military and

the use of military force, he has a solemn

obligation to communicate to the

American people how it will protect

America’s vital interests. He has an obligation

to tell the American people

why going to war is absolutely essential

to U.S. national security. He has

an obligation to lay out clear and realistic

objectives; and finally, he has an

obligation to explain how military

intervention fits within America’s

broader foreign policy strategy.

I have used the word war advisedly

because sometimes I think we get

caught up in political correctness

around here—talking about workplace

violence at Fort Hood and overseas

contingency operations.

As a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps

who served 40 years told me last week

when I asked for his advice on what the

President was asking us to do, he said:

Anytime you kill people in the name of

the U.S. Government, it is an act of

war.

So like others in this Chamber over

the last few weeks, I have attended

meetings with the President where I

had the honor of being in his presence

and listening to him in person on two

occasions. I listened to other administration

officials. Like all of us, I sat

through hours of classified briefings

with the Central Intelligence Agency,

the Department of Defense, and the

State Department.

I have listened intently as Senator

Kerry described in what I thought at

first was an inadvertent statement

made as a result of fatigue. I can only

imagine what he must have been going

through. He has been shuttled back and

forth around the world to try to resolve

this issue. But he described this strike

as unbelievably small. I was further

surprised when I heard the White

House press secretary say: No, it

wasn’t a gaffe; he didn’t misspeak. I

mean, we all misspeak from time to

time, so I expected him to say: Well, he

should have used other words or might

have used other words. Then Senator

Kerry himself—now Secretary Kerry—

said: No, I didn’t misspeak.

I was encouraged to hear the President

address the Nation because I believe

before we take our case overseas

to American allies, we should first

make the case here at home to the

American people.

In making their case for a brief, limited

attack against Syria, administration

officials have repeatedly said U.S.

military intervention would not seek

to topple the Asad regime even though

regime change has been the policy of

the U.S. Government since at least August

2011. They said their military

campaign would not seek to change the

momentum in Syria’s civil war, even

though, as I mentioned a moment ago,

our government’s official policy is one

of regime change, that Asad must go.

My view is a U.S. attack that allowed

Asad to remain in power with one of

the world’s largest stockpiles of chemical

weapons would not promote U.S.

national security interests. Indeed, it

is not hard to imagine how that kind of

intervention could actually backfire

and end up being a propaganda disaster.

Many of us are concerned about upholding

America’s credibility, particularly

when it comes to matters such as

this, and I share their concern. But it

would help if before we launch a halfhearted,

ineffectual attack which gives

our enemies a major propaganda victory

that we come up with a more coherent

plan and strategy for accomplishing

our public policy goals.

Murphy’s law says what can go wrong

will go wrong. Well, there is a Murphy’s

law of war too—perhaps many of

them but one of them is no plan to go

to war survives the first contact intact.

In other words, we can plan to

shoot the first bullet, but we can’t control

what happens after that.

In all likelihood, such an attack

would hurt our credibility and reduce

U.S. public support for future interventions.

This is what I mean: If we were

to undertake a limited military attack

against Asad in order to punish him for

using chemical weapons—which is a

horrific act on his part, a barbaric act

on his part—but it left Asad in power,

what is he going to tell the rest of the

world? He is going to say: The world’s

greatest military force took a shot at

me and I am still here. I am still in

power. I won and America lost. That is

how I can see this backfiring in a very

serious way, undermining America’s

credibility—credibility we must keep

intact, particularly as we look at larger,

looming threats such as the Iranian

aspiration for nuclear weapons.

I wish to be clear, though: I would be

willing to support a military operation

in Syria but only if our intervention

met certain criteria. No. 1: If it directly

addressed the nightmare scenario

of Asad’s use of chemical weapons

falling into the hands of terrorists.

It is not just his use of chemical weapons

on his own people; it is the potential

that those chemical weapons could

get into the hands of Al Qaeda and

other terrorist organizations and harm

either Americans or American interests

around the world.

No. 2: I could support a resolution if

it involved the use of decisive and overwhelming

force, without self-imposed

limitations, and without leaking to our

enemies what our tactics are and what

it is we would not do, and ruining one

of the greatest tools in war, which is

the element of surprise. Why in the

world would we tell Asad what we are

going to do—and Secretary Kerry said

it would be a small attack—and why

would we tell Asad what we won’t do,

thereby eliminating both the ambiguity

of our position and the potential

threat of even more serious and overwhelming

military force?

No. 3: I would be willing to support

an authorization if it were an integral

part of a larger coherent Syria policy

that clearly defined the political end

state. I still remember General

Petraeus, the head of Central Command

covering Iraq and Afghanistan,

talking about our policy in those countries.

He said, The most important

question, perhaps, when we go to war is

how does this end. We need a clearly

defined political end state that we are

trying to achieve by what the President

requested and we need an outline

of a realistic path to get there.

No. 4: I believe it is important that

we have a sizable international coalition

of nations, each of which is contributing

to the war effort.

This is an amazing reversal for the

President since the time he was a Senator

and a Presidential candidate. To

say we are not going to the United Nations—

and I understand why; because

of China and Russia, their veto of any

resolution out of the Security Council,

we are not going to go to NATO. Indeed,

the President seemed content, or

at least resigned, to going it alone. And

if it is true this redline is the international

community’s redline, then the

international community needs to contribute

to the effort to hold Asad accountable.

The problem is President Obama’s requested

authorization for the use of

military force under these circumstances

fails to meet each of those

criteria. He has failed to make the case

that a short, limited military campaign

would promote our vital interests

and our national security. He has

failed to lay out clear and realistic objectives

that could be obtained through

the use of military force. And he has

failed to offer a compelling description

of how his proposed intervention would

advance America’s broader foreign policy

strategy; indeed, how it would advance

his own policy of regime change.

Therefore, if we were asked to vote on

an authorization under these circumstances,

I would vote no.

I am under no illusion—none of us

are—about the utter depravity of

Bashar al-Asad. Over the last 21⁄2 years

his regime has committed unspeakable

acts of rape, torture, and murder. The

chemical weapons attacks, by the way,

as described by Secretary Kerry’s own

testimony in the House of Representatives,

included 11 earlier uses of chemical

weapons, but they were smaller.

Can we imagine the difficulty of trying

to impose a redline when that redline

is crossed 11 times before the President

finally decides to try to enforce it? But

there is no question that the use of

chemical weapons shows an appalling

disregard for human life and a cruel desire

to terrorize the Syrian population.

I, as others, have consistently demanded

that Russia stop arming Asad

and stop defending him and blocking

U.N. Security Council resolutions, and

aiding and abetting his barbaric atrocities

against his own people. I want to

see a free democratic Syria as much as

anyone else. But that does not mean I

will vote to support a reckless, ill-advised

military intervention that could

jeopardize our most important national

security interests.

There have been a lot of people who

have opined on the President’s request,

some better informed than others. One

opinion I found particularly convincing

was that of retired Army MG Robert

Scales who has written that the path

to war chosen by the Obama administration

As I said, we know the latest chemical

weapons attack occurred on August

21. Yet President Obama didn’t address

the Nation until 3 weeks later.

The Syrians, of course, have now had

weeks to prepare for any pending military

intervention and no doubt have

moved the chemical weapons to other

locations and their military equipment

to civilian population centers in order

to protect them from any attack. With

no element of surprise, it makes the

potential for success of any military

intervention much less and reveals

there is no real coherent policy in this

regard.

Consider what happened last Monday.

Secretary of State Kerry made what he

calls an off-the-cuff remark about the

possibility of canceling a missile strike

if Asad turned over all of his chemical

weapons. In the same statement he

said he wasn’t sure that would work or

that he would ever be serious about it,

but he did say it. Russia, of course, immediately

responded by offering to

broker a transfer of Syria’s WMD to

international monitors.

After spending weeks trying to make

the case for war, President Obama has

asked that the vote in this Chamber be

canceled and is apparently treating the

Russian-Syrian proposal as a serious

diplomatic breakthrough. I would caution

all of us—the American people and

all of our colleagues—to be skeptical,

for good reason, at this lifeline Vladimir

Putin has now thrown the administration.

I would remind the President

and our colleagues that Russia itself is

not in full compliance with the Chemical

Weapons Convention, nor is it even

in compliance with nuclear arms control

obligations that are subject to an

international treaty. The litany of

Russian offenses is long, but I would

remind President Obama that since he

launched the so-called Russian reset,

Moscow has vetoed U.N. resolutions on

Syria, sent advanced weaponry to the

Asad regime, stolen elections, stoked

anti-Americanism, made threats over

our possible deployment of missile defense

systems; it has expelled USAID

from Russia, pulled out of the Nunn-

Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction

Program; it has banned U.S. citizens

from adopting Russian children, and offered

asylum to NSA leaker Edward

Snowden. In short, we have very little

reason to believe Moscow is a reliable

diplomatic partner. The Russians are

part of the problem in Syria, not part

of the solution. Let me say that clearly.

The Russians are part of the problem

in Syria; they are not credibly part

of the solution.

Moreover, I am curious to learn how

international monitors would adequately

confirm the disposal of chemical

weapons by a terrorist-sponsoring

dictatorship among a ferocious civil

war. While this strike the President

talked about might have been limited

in his imagination, if you are Bashar

al-Asad, this is total war, because he

realizes the only way he will leave

power is in a pine box. He knows that.

This is total war. I asked the President

yesterday: What happens if, in order to

punish Asad, we intervene militarily

and it doesn’t work? In his fight for his

survival and the survival of his regime,

he uses them again in an act of desperation?

The President said, We will

hit him again. Well, clearly, what had

become a limited strike could quickly

spiral out of control into a full-blown

engagement in Syria. I think the President’s

own words suggest that.

But, of course, the Asad regime is the

same one that refuses to acknowledge

the full extent of its chemical arsenal—

and this is something we will be

hearing more about. It has bioweapons

capability. Bioweapons capability is

actually a much greater threat to

American interests than chemical

weapons, which are more difficult to

transport and much harder to handle.

And this is the same dictatorship that

was secretly working on a nuclear

weapons program before the Israelis

took care of it in 2007.

We have been told that however unfortunate

President Obama’s ‘‘redline’’

comment might have been, upholding

his threat is about maintaining American

credibility. And I admit, American

credibility in matters of war and

peace and national security are very,

very important. But America’s credibility

on the world stage is about more

than just Presidential rhetoric. It is

about defining clear objectives and establishing

a coherent strategy for

achieving them. In the case of Syria,

President Obama has not offered a

clear strategy or clearly laid out his

objectives.

Given all that, I am not surprised

that the American people do not support

the President’s call for the use of

limited military force in Syria. Those

are the calls I got in my office. As I

went back to Texas, I kept hearing people—

who I would think under almost

any other circumstances would say: If

America’s national security interests

are at stake, then we are behind the

President, we are behind military

intervention, but they simply saw an

incoherent policy and objectives that

were not clearly laid out to obtain the

result the President himself said is our

policy.

Well, the most recent experience we

have had as a country with limited war

has been Libya, and I have heard the

President tout that as perhaps an example

about how we can get in and get

out. The 2011 military operation that

deposed Muammar Qadhafi was supposed

to be a showcase example of a

limited operation in which America led

from behind and still obtained its objectives

without putting U.S. boots on

the ground. Unfortunately, the administration

had no real plan for what happened

after Qadhafi fell.

We all know it was 1 year ago today

in Benghazi when terrorists linked to

Al Qaeda massacred four brave Americans,

including U.S. Ambassador Chris

Stevens. Today Libya is spiraling into

chaos and rapidly becoming a failed

state. Earlier this month a leading

British newspaper reported that

All sorts of bad actors,

including terrorist groups, are flooding

into the security vacuum, and

Before I conclude, I want to say a few

words about America’s Armed Forces

and America’s role in the world.

We all know and are extraordinarily

proud of our men and women who wear

the uniform of the U.S. military. No

military in history has been more powerful.

No military has ever been more

courageous. No military has been more

selfless and fought and bled and died to

protect innocent people in far-flung

places across the planet. No military

has ever done more to promote peace

and prosperity around the world. I have

every confidence that if called upon to

act our men and women in uniform will

do just that. They will perform their

duties with the utmost skill, bravery,

and professionalism. But we should

never send them to war tying one hand

behind their back and ask them to

wage limited war against a dictator for

whom, as I said earlier, this is total

war. This is win or die. Military force

is like a hammer, and you cannot

thread the needle President Obama

wants to thread with a hammer.

I would like to conclude by saying

that this debate—which is important

and serious and one the American people

expect us to have—is not about isolationism

versus internationalism. Believe

me, I am no isolationist, and I

fully support the global security role

America has played since World War II,

since my dad was a POW. A world without

American military dominance

would be, as Ronald Reagan noted, a

much more dangerous place. I believe

peace comes with American strength.

However, it will be harder to maintain

our global military dominance if we

waste precious resources, our credibility,

and political capital on hasty,

misguided, unbelievably small interventions.

Once again, I would be willing to support

an authorization for a military

strike against Syria if it met certain

basic criteria I have laid out. But I

cannot support an operation that is so

poorly conceived, so foolishly

telegraphed, and virtually guaranteed

to fail.

I yield the floor.