Mr. President, it is my

honor to join my colleague and friend,

the Senator from Texas. We are on opposite

sides of the aisle, but we are on

the same side of this issue.

Listen to what America has said

about what is happening in Syria: Almost

8,000 innocent people have been

killed in the streets of Syria by Bashar

Asad, the dictator. The people who expressed

their concern and objection to

his policies are mowed down and killed

in the streets, their homes are bombed,

and nothing is being done. Sadly, the

United States tried to engage the

United Nations Security Council to

join the Arab League and others condemning

what Asad is doing to these

innocent people. Our efforts were

stopped by China and Russia.

The relationship between Russia and

Syria is well documented. They have

been close allies for many years. We

also know they are providing about $1

billion in Russian military aid to the

Syrian dictator to kill his own people

in the streets. That is part of this.

I have to join Senator CORNYN in saying

how concerned we were when we

learned that one of the leading military

exporters of Russia,

Rosoboronexport, is not only doing

business in Syria but with the U.S.

Government. Now, I understand the

history. We are buying Russian helicopters

to help the Afghans defend

their country against the Taliban. The

helicopter of choice in Afghanistan

today is, I believe, the old Soviet M–17

or M–18 helicopter. So our government

is buying these Russian helicopters to

give to the Afghan Government to

fight the Taliban.

We are, in fact, doing business with

the very same company and country

that is subsidizing the massacre in

Syria. It is right for us, as Members of

Congress, to make that point to Secretary

Panetta and the Department of

Defense. I think it is also appropriate

for us to ask why we are not converting

the Afghan defense forces, their security

forces, to another helicopter.

Can I be so bold as to suggest it be

made in the United States of America

since we are paying for it? Why aren’t

we doing that? Why aren’t we creating

jobs in America and training these Afghans

on helicopters that come from

our country, that are as good or better

than anything the Soviets ever put in

the air? I don’t have a preference on an

American helicopter. I don’t have any

producers in my State, so I am not into

that particular bidding war. I would

not get into it. But I do believe sending

a word to the Russians immediately

that our relationship of buying these

helicopters for Afghanistan and subsidizing

their military sales to Syria

should come to an end. That is what

this letter is about.

We cannot pass resolutions on the

Senate floor condemning the bloodshed

in Syria and ignore the obvious connection:

Russian military is moving arms

into Syria that are used to kill innocent

people.

I noticed the Senator from Texas

brought a photograph with him. This

photograph I am going to show is one

of a Russian warship, an aircraft carrier,

docked at the Syrian port of

Tartus on January 8 of this year. What

we could not turn into a poster is the

video clip showing the Russian warship

captains being greeted like royalty by

the Syrian Minister of Defense who

went out to welcome the ship. This

Russian aircraft carrier was launched

from a port used by the same export

company.

I cannot go any further in saying

that the particular company involved

sent goods on this particular ship, but

the fact is obvious. Russia has become

a major supplier of military arms to

the Syrian dictator who is killing innocent

people. We are doing business with

that same military company,

Rosoboronexport.

It is time for us to step back and say

to the Russians: We can no longer continue

this relationship. If you are going

to subsidize the killing of innocent

people, we cannot afford to do business

with you.

America, we have to acknowledge the

obvious. No matter what they are paying,

it is not worth the loss of innocent

life in Syria.

I thank the Senator from Texas for

joining me. I think we have 16 or 17 colleagues

who are joining us in the bipartisan

effort to raise this issue.

I hope the Russians will understand

that once and for all they can’t play

both sides of the street, and we in the

United States should draw the line

I say to the Senator

from Texas, a point the Senator said

earlier, and I think bears repeating at

this moment in our dialogue, is that

Rosoboronexport is a Russian state controlled

arms export firm. This is no

so-called private company. This is a

firm run by the Russian Government.

As the Senator from Texas goes

through the litany of countries they

are supplying, he is going through a

litany of countries that have never in

recent times had the best interests of

the United States at heart. If the Russians,

through their government company,

want to supply Iran—which we

know is an exporter of terrorism not

only in the Middle East but around the

world and in the United States—if they

want to supply them, if they want to

supply sniper rifles and arms to the

Syrians to kill their own people—why

in the world are we doing business with

them? There ought to be a line we draw

at some point. We have no moral obligation

to do business with a firm that

is, in fact, supplying those who are

killing innocent people and our enemies

around the world.

I thank the Senator from Texas for

raising those points. I would say to the Senator

from Texas—and I am sure he has

studied this, as I have—it is hard to

parse out the elements in the Middle

East and decide who is fighting for

which team. But when it comes to

Syria, they have consistently aligned

themselves with Iran, and in that alliance

Iran has been very supportive of

Syria and Hezbollah, another terrorist

group that is operating primarily

through Syria. So that close connection

is a matter of concern to me.

Our goal in the Middle East is to create

stability and to stop the march of

these dictators in the Middle East who

are killing innocent people and denying

them their most basic rights. We

have tried everything short of military

intervention, which I would not call for

in the Syrian situation. But we have

tried everything else—diplomatic and

economic—to put pressure on Syria.

We should continue to, and we should

join with other nations and continue

the efforts of the United Nations.

But we can’t get this job done when

Russia plays the roll of outlier, supplying

both Syria and Iran with military

arms and support. If they want to

truly join us in a stable situation in

the Middle East, they should tell Asad

it is over—and it clearly is over. This

man could never legitimately govern

Syria from this point forward after

killing so many innocent people.

I hope what we are doing today is

suggesting to this administration and

Secretary Panetta another avenue to

let the Russians know that we find it

unacceptable for them to supply arms

to what is a destabilizing influence in

that part of the world.