Mr. President, I come to

the floor this morning to discuss another

senseless act of violence and our

Nation’s response.

In the early morning hours of August

21, the Syrian military began firing artillery

rockets into the suburbs east of

Damascus, hitting neighborhoods held

by opposition forces that had been

fighting to end the brutal dictatorship

of Bashar al Assad.

We know from the accounts of independent

observers such as Human

Rights Watch, the work of our intelligence

services, and those of our allies,

that many of these rockets were

armed with warheads carrying sarin, a

deadly nerve gas. We know these rockets

were launched from areas under the

control of Assad’s regime, using munitions

known to be part of Assad’s arsenal,

and into areas held by opposition

forces. We know from the report of the

U.N. weapons inspectors released yesterday

that the weapons used, both the

rockets and the chemicals themselves,

were of professional manufacture, including

weapons known to be in the

Syrian Government’s arsenal. There is

no other source of this deadly gas except

the Syrian Government. Nothing

else makes any sense whatsoever.

President Obama declared that the

United States would act in response to

this threat to global security. He determined

it was necessary to use American

military force to degrade Assad’s

chemical capability and deter future

use of such weapons by Assad or others.

He did so because a failure to act would

weaken the international prohibition

on chemical weapons use. He did so because

the failure to act could lead to

greater proliferation of these weapons

of mass destruction, including the potential

that they could fall into the

hands of terrorists and used against

our people. He did so because if the use

of chemical weapons becomes routine,

our troops could pay a huge price in future

conflicts.

On September 4, a bipartisan majority

of the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee approved the President’s

request for an authorization of the limited

use of military force.

Faced with this credible threat of the

use of force and in response to a diplomatic

probe by Secretary Kerry, Russia—

which had for more than 2 years

blocked every diplomatic initiative to

hold Assad accountable for the violent

repression of his people—announced

that Assad’s chemical arsenal should

be eliminated.

The agreement that followed requires

Syria to give up its chemical arsenal

on a historically rapid timetable.

Within a week Syria must fully account

for its chemical weapons stockpiles

and infrastructure. By the end of

November, U.N. inspectors must be allowed

to complete their assessments

and key equipment used to produce

chemical agents must be destroyed. All

of Syria’s chemical stocks, materials

and equipment must be destroyed by

the end of next year.

Any failure to abide by the terms of

the agreement would lead to consideration

of penalties under Chapter VII of

the U.N. Charter, under which the U.N.

Security Council may authorize among

other steps ‘‘action by air, sea, or land

forces as may be necessary to maintain

or restore international peace and security.’’

Regardless of U.N. action or

inaction, the President retains the option

of using force if Assad fails to

fully comply.

This agreement is a significant step

toward a goal we could not have

achieved with the use of force. The authorization

approved by the Senate

Foreign Relations Committee had the

stated purpose of degrading Assad’s

chemical capability and deterring the

use of chemical weapons by Assad or by

others. What can now be achieved is

more than degrading and deterring. We

may be able to eliminate one of the

world’s largest stockpiles of chemical

weapons.

We should have no illusions that

achieving this outcome will be easy.

First are the technical and logistical

challenges. Many have expressed concern

about the likelihood that Assad’s

stockpiles can be secured and disposed

of as quickly as this agreement provides—

by the end of 2014—especially

given the dangerous security environment

in Syria. I share these concerns.

But accepting and addressing these

challenges is a better course than not

acting against the certain danger of

leaving these weapons in the hands of a

brutal dictator allied with Hezbollah, a

dictator who has demonstrated a willingness

to use them against civilians.

Some have expressed doubts that

Assad and Russia will follow through

on the agreement which was reached in

Geneva. To address these doubts, we

must inspect, verify, and continue to

hold open the option of a strike against

Assad’s chemical capability if he fails

to fully abide by the Geneva agreement.

What I do not understand is why

some of the same voices who called for

the United States to get Russia to end

its obstructionism now criticize the

President for getting the Russians involved.

I was disappointed to hear my

Michigan colleague, Congressman MIKE

ROGERS, make the irresponsible claim

that this agreement amounts to ‘‘being

led by the nose’’ by Russia. This contradicts

his previous statements that

we need to put pressure on Russia to

get involved in a solution to the Syrian

threat.

Chairman ROGERS has also said:

‘‘What keeps me up at night: We know

of at least a dozen or so sites that have

serious chemical weapons caches’’ in

Syria, and stressed the urgency that

‘‘all the right steps are taken so that

we don’t lose these weapons caches and

something more horrific happens.’’

Thanks to U.S. pressure and a threat

to take military action in response to

Assad’s use of chemicals, the Russians

are finally getting involved in getting

Syria to respond. We have taken a

major step toward securing these

chemical weapons as Chairman ROGERS

himself so strongly urged.

We need not rely on good intentions

from those who have not shown good

intentions in the past. It was the credible

threat of the use of military force

that brought Russia and Syria to the

bargaining table. It is a continued

credible threat of military force that

will keep them on track to uphold the

provisions of that agreement.

The President has made it clear, and

rightfully so, that ‘‘if diplomacy fails,

the United States remains prepared to

act.’’

Secretary Kerry, standing right beside

his Russian counterpart in Geneva,

emphasized this agreement in no

way limits President Obama’s option

to use force if it becomes necessary.

Many of our colleagues have stressed

repeatedly in recent weeks that the

credible force, the credible threat of

military force, is essential to reining

in Assad. I strongly agree. For the life

of me, I cannot understand why those

who have taken that position would

now argue, as some of those same colleagues

are arguing, that the Geneva

agreement is somehow of little or no

use because they say it somehow removes

the option to use force. The Geneva

agreement says nothing of that

sort.

Their argument isn’t just inaccurate,

it is damaging to our efforts. Why

would those who believe the threat of

force is essential to keeping pressure

on Syria and Russia want to argue it is

no longer available? Why would those

who have accurately said the United

States does not need international approval

to use its military forces now

argue the Geneva agreement leaves us

in the position of needing to get international

approval to use force in this

case when the Geneva agreement does

nothing of the sort?

Some have criticized the Geneva

agreement for not doing more to aid

the Syrian opposition. Russia and

Syria tried to get an agreement from

us to not support the opposition, but

they failed to get that agreement from

us in the Geneva agreement or anywhere

else. Indeed, the administration

is seeking ways to facilitate the additional

support for the opposition that

so many of us believe is essential.

I believe we should facilitate the provision

of additional military aid to the

opposition, particularly the vetted elements

of Syria’s opposition forces, including

antitank weapons. Such aid

will help the Syrian people defend

themselves from the brutal Assad regime,

furthering our goal of bringing a

negotiated end to his rule.

I find it troubling that so much of

the commentary on this topic has not

dealt with substance and policy. Washington

has been and always will be a

political town, but we now reach the

point where politics seems to be the

only lens through which so many people

around here view the most important

and serious matters of the day, including

national security.

Speculation as to motives, or about

potential winners or losers, or who is

up and who is down, misses the point.

This is not an ice-skating contest with

points awarded for style. What is important

is our national security and

whether this agreement advances it.

Removing weapons of mass destruction

from the hands of a brutal dictator—a

preliminary outcome, yes, but real and

tangible—is the direct result of American

leadership.

A month, a year, or 5 years ago, an

agreement to eliminate Assad’s chemical

weapons would have been seen as a

significant gain for our security and

for the world’s security, not just for

the President who achieved it but far

more importantly, again, for the safety

of our people, of our troops, and the entire

world.

I hope as we continue with the hard

work of implementing this agreement

and as we seek an end to Bashar al

Assad’s rule, we can keep our eyes on

those goals and skip the superficial political

scorekeeping and inaccurate

potshots that distract us from achieving

those goals.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.