Mr. President, I ask

unanimous consent that myself, Senator

LEVIN, Senator MENENDEZ, and

Senator GRAHAM be permitted to participate

in a colloquy for up to 40 minutes.

If it is agreeable to

Senator LEVIN, I say to my friend from

South Carolina, we could each make a

brief opening statement, maybe a 6-, 7-

minute opening statement, and then

maybe have a colloquy amongst us. Is

that agreeable to the Senator from

Michigan?

I thank my colleagues.

I wish to thank my dear friend from

South Carolina whose efforts on another

issue in Benghazi have brought

the attention of the American people

to a tragic situation that happened

there. We need to place responsibility

for it, and if it had not been for his tenacity

and effort on this issue, I do not

believe it would have been brought to

the attention of the American people

yesterday. So I wish to thank him for

his usual and unusual continuation of

efforts on behalf of the families who

were killed.

Mr. President, today I

and my colleagues are here to speak

about Syria. The strategic and humanitarian

costs of this conflict continue to

be devastating, not just for the people

of Syria but for vital American interests.

As today’s Washington Post editorial

makes clear, nearly all of the

terrible consequences that those opposed

to intervention predicted would

happen if we intervened in Syria have

happened because we have not.

There is mounting evidence that

chemical weapons have been used by

the Asad regime. As many of our colleagues

have noted—including Senator

FEINSTEIN, the chairman of the Intelligence

Committee—President Obama’s

redline on Syria has been crossed. But

instead of acting, the Obama administration

has called for additional evidence

to be collected by U.N. investigators

who have not yet set foot in Syria

and probably never will. In the absence

of more robust action, I fear it will not

be long before Asad takes this delay as

an invitation to use chemical weapons

again on an even larger scale.

Moreover, as I have said before, by

drawing a redline on chemical weapons,

the President actually gave the Asad

regime a green light to use every other

weapon in his arsenal with impunity.

More than 70,000 Syrians have been

killed indiscriminately with snipers,

artillery, helicopter gunships, fighter

jets, and even ballistic missiles. Indeed,

according to a recent Human

Rights Watch report, more than 4,300

civilians have been killed by Syria’s

airstrikes alone since July 2012.

At the same time, Iran and its proxy

Hezbollah are building a network of

militias inside Syria and the al-Qaidaaligned

al-Nusra Front has gained unprecedented

strength on the ground.

According to estimates published in

the media, some believe there were no

more than a few hundred al-Nusra

fighters in Syria last year, but today it

is widely believed there could be thousands

of extremist fighters inside

Syria. They are gaining strength by

the day because they are the best, most

experienced fighters. They are wellfunded

and are providing humanitarian

assistance in the parts of Syria where

people need it most.

At the same time, this conflict is

having increasingly devastating consequences

to the security and stability

of our allies and partners in Israel, Jordan,

Turkey, Iraq, and Lebanon. The

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees

has characterized the situation in

Syria as an ‘‘existential threat’’ for

Lebanon, where the government estimates

that 1 million Syrians have entered

the country—1 million Syrians

have entered the country of Lebanon—

which has a population of just over 4

million. Similarly, over the past 2

years, more than 500,000 Syrians have

flooded into Jordan, a country of only

6 million people. Consider for a moment

that in proportional terms this

would be equivalent to 26 million refugees,

or the entire population of Texas,

suddenly crossing our own borders.

In short, Syria is becoming a failed

state in the heart of the Middle East

overrun by thousands of al-Qaida-affiliated

fighters, with possibly tons of

chemical weapons, and poised to ignite

a wider sectarian conflict that could

profoundly destabilize the region.

Yesterday brought news that the administration

plans to organize, together

with Russia, an international

peace conference later this month to

seek a negotiated settlement to the

war in Syria. All of us—all of us—are

in favor of such a political resolution

to this conflict. No one wants to see

this conflict turn into a fight to the

death and total victory for one side or

the other. We all want to work toward

a political settlement that forms a new

governing structure in Syria reflective

of the democratic aspirations of the

Syrian people.

But let’s be realistic. One of the lessons

of the past 2 years is that such a

negotiated settlement will not be possible

in Syria until the balance of

power shifts more decisively against

Asad and those around him. Until

Asad, as well as his Iranian, Hezbollah,

and Russian backers no longer believe

they are winning, what incentive do

they have to come to the table and

make a deal? This is what two wellmeaning

United Nations senior envoys

have already learned.

Yes, Syrian opposition forces are

gaining strength and territory on the

ground. But Asad still has air power—

a decisive factor in that climate, in

that terrain—ballistic missiles, chemical

weapons, and a host of other advanced

weaponry, and he is using all of

it. Furthermore, today’s news reports

that Russia has agreed to sell an advanced

air defense system to the Asad

regime should lead us once again to

ask ourselves whether the path to

peace in Syria runs through Moscow.

I know Americans are war-weary and

eager to focus on our domestic and economic

problems and not foreign affairs.

I also know the situation in Syria is

complex and there are no ideal options.

But the basic choice we face is not

complicated: Do the costs of inaction

outweigh the costs of action? I believe

they do.

No one should think the United

States has to act alone, put boots on

the ground, or destroy every Syrian air

defense system to make a difference for

the better in Syria. We have more limited

options at our disposal, including

limited military options, that can

make a positive impact on this crisis.

We could, for example, organize an

overt and large-scale operation to train

and arm well-vetted Syrian opposition

forces—a course of action that was recommended

last year by President

Obama’s entire national security team.

I am encouraged that Senator MENENDEZ,

the chairman of the Foreign Relations

Committee, has introduced legislation

this week on this very issue and

that he is speaking out about the need

for more robust action in Syria, including

addressing Asad’s air power.

As several key leaders in our own

military have pointed out in testimony

to the Senate Armed Services Committee

over the past several months—

from Gen. James Mattis to ADM James

Stavridis—we have the capacity—we

have the capacity—to significantly

weaken both the Asad regime’s air

power and its increasing use of ballistic

missiles, which pose significant risks

as delivery vehicles for chemical weapons.

To address this threat, we could use

our precision strike capabilities to target

Asad’s aircraft and Scud missile

launchers on the ground without our

pilots having to fly into the teeth of

Syria’s air defenses. Similar weapons

could be used to selectively destroy artillery

pieces and make Asad’s forces

think twice about remaining at their

posts. We could use the Patriot missile

batteries outside of Syria to help protect

safe zones inside Syria from Asad’s

aerial bombing and missile attacks.

Would any of these options immediately

end the conflict? Probably not.

But they could save innocent lives in

Syria. They could give the moderate

opposition a better chance to succeed

in marginalizing radical actors and

eventually provide security and responsible

governance in Syria after Asad

falls. However, the longer we wait, the

worse the situation gets and the tougher

it will be to confront, as we will inevitably

be forced to do sooner or later.

I am encouraged that a consensus is

emerging and many of our colleagues—

Democrats and Republicans alike—

share this view. I note the leadership of

Senator LEVIN, the chairman of our

Armed Services Committee, whom I

joined in writing a letter to President

Obama urging him to take more active

steps in Syria. I also note the important

voice Senator BOB CASEY has lent

to this debate and ask unanimous consent

that his op-ed printed last week in

the Huffington Post, ‘‘Time to Act in

Syria’’—which calls for consideration

of more options, including cruise missile

strikes to neutralize the Syrian

Air Force—be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material

was ordered to be printed in the

RECORD, as follows:

Let me conclude with

one final thought. For America, our interests

are our values and our values

are our interests. The moral dimension

cannot be lost from our foreign policy.

If ever a case should remind us of this,

it is Syria.

Leon Wieseltier captured this point

powerfully in the New Republic this

week:

Nearly two decades ago, I worked

with Democratic and Republican colleagues

in Congress to support President

Clinton as he led America to do

the right thing in stopping mass atrocities

in Bosnia. The question for another

President today, and for all

Americans, is whether we will again

answer the desperate pleas for rescue

that are made uniquely to us, as the

United States of America.

I, first, would ask both of my colleagues

one question, if it would be all

right. There is news today that the

Secretary of State wants to convene a

conference, including the Russians, in

order to try to bring about a resolution

at the same time we read reports that

the Russians are selling Syria the most

advanced weapons. I guess I would ask

my colleague from South Carolina and

then Senator LEVIN because I know he

has a statement.

I thank the distinguished

chairman. May I say, it has

been a great pleasure for me to have

the opportunity to serve on the Foreign

Relations Committee, of which

Senator MENENDEZ is the chairman. I

think his stewardship of that committee

has been outstanding. I appreciate

the very articulate argument the

chairman just presented, including the

strategic dimension of this whole issue

which sometimes in our—particularly,

when you focus so much on the humanitarian

side, the strategic interest of

the fall of Bashar Al-Asad is something

which I think adds another dimension.

I thank the Senator and chairman of

the Foreign Relations Committee.

Can I just ask one question

of my colleague? I understand recently

he made a trip to the Middle

East. There is nothing like seeing the

terrible consequences of war. I understand

the Senator visited a refugee

camp.

Maybe for the benefit of our colleagues

the Senator could take a

minute to describe the horrible conditions

people who have now been made

refugees have been subjected to and

their failure to understand why we

won’t be able to be of more assistance

to them.

Mr. President, I ask

unanimous consent to have printed in

the RECORD a Washington Post editorial

entitled ‘‘Repercussions Of Inaction,’’

a Wall Street Journal article,

‘‘U.S. Is Warned Russia Plans Syria

Arms Sale,’’ and, finally, a piece by

Leon Wieseltier that is in the Washington

Diarist.

There being no objection, the material

was ordered to be printed in the

RECORD, as follows:

I thank my colleagues.

I yield.