It is agreeable to me. My

statement will probably be about 7 or 8

minutes. I don’t know how long Senator

MENENDEZ—because he is the

fourth Senator who will participate—

how long his statement will be, but if

40 minutes is what the Senator from

Arizona sought, I think that ought to

be enough.

Mr. President, I thank,

first of all, the Senator from Arizona

for the leadership he has taken on the

question of Syria. In answer to the

question, to the best of my ability, at

least, it would not be the first time

Russia has taken an inconsistent position.

What I am hoping is that the additional

military pressure on Asad,

which we are all calling for this morning,

would help put pressure on Russia

to understand, if that military pressure

is forthcoming, that they should participate

in the political solution. I do

not know that we can stop them, as

much as we would all wish to, from

taking the inconsistent position that

they have, but I believe—and I think

the Senator from Arizona would probably

agree, but he can speak for himself,

obviously—that if President

Obama does as we are urging him to do,

which is find a way to put additional

military pressure on Asad, that would

be an important sign to Russia that:

OK, join in a solution. You participated

enough in the problem already. Join in

the solution.

They are inconsistent. But I think

our goal of trying to get more military

pressure on Asad is very consistent

with the idea that maybe there will be

a political solution, but if there is, it

will be promoted by military pressure

on Asad and his understanding of that

fact.

The worsening situation in Syria and

the snowballing plight of millions in

the region requires a response.

Since nonviolent demonstrations demanding

democratic change began in

Syria in March of 2011, Bashar Asad

and his clique of supporters have unleashed

a massacre that has claimed

the lives of at least 70,000 Syrians, displaced

more than 4 million people

across a region that already suffers

from a massive refugee population,

sparked a civil war with a multitude of

divergent ethnic groups and religious

sects, and placed the security of Syria’s

chemical weapons stockpile—

which is one of the world’s largest—at

risk of falling into the hands of terrorist

groups.

Despite the impact of this horrific

campaign, Asad’s commitment to continuing

the fight appears unwavering.

One must look no further than the increasingly

indiscriminate tactics with

which he conducts his campaign. In recent

months, in addition to Asad’s possible

use of chemical weapons, he has

increased his reliance on airstrikes,

Scud missiles, rockets, mortar shells,

and artillery to terrorize and to kill civilians.

Asad’s ability to conduct this campaign

is enabled by two actors—Iran

and Russia. Iran’s financial, personnel,

and materiel support have been critical

to ensuring Asad’s military remains

operable and that the impact of defections

is mitigated with reinforcements.

Russia’s support to Syria’s more advanced

military weaponry, most notably

air defense systems, is critical to

Asad’s continued ability to project

power into areas of the country he no

longer controls.

To add further complexity to the situation,

al-Nusra Front, an al-Qaida offshoot,

continues to spread its influence

in some areas of Syria. Its presence is

of concern and countering its spread

needs to be a priority. It is also critical

that we ensure that countries in the region

that are seeking to force an end to

the Asad regime are not enabling and

enhancing the capabilities of violent

extremists who will ultimately turn

their weapons on moderate Syrians and

on religious minorities in Syria, such

as the Syrian Christians.

The combination of these circumstances

in Syria demonstrates that

the status quo is unacceptable and that

time is not on our side. Many officials

in Washington share this sentiment

but in the same breath remind us that

the situation in Syria is complex, volatile,

and asymmetric; Syria’s Government

institutions are crumbling, which

could create a dangerous vacuum; any

action by the United States or the

West, even if it is with our Arab partners,

risks significant escalation; and

that any security vacuum could be

filled by Islamist extremists.

I have supported, and I will continue

to support, the President’s contributions

to provide humanitarian relief to

the Syrian people throughout the region,

as well as the additional assistance

he has pledged to Jordan to help

with the devastating impact of this

conflict on that country.

But it is essential that the United

States, working with our allies in the

region, step up the military pressure

on the Asad regime—of course, doing so

in a carefully thought out and regionally

supported way.

Certainly, there are significant challenges

to any plan of action in Syria.

But we not only have to figure out the

consequences of any action, we also

have to figure out the consequences of

not taking additional actions. In my

view, the facts on the ground make the

consequences of inaction too great, and

it is time for the United States and our

allies to use ways to alter the course of

events in Syria by increasing the military

pressure on Asad until he can see

that his current course is not sustainable.

Taking steps to add military pressure

on Asad will also provide backing to

Secretary Kerry’s efforts to bring the

Russians into the dialog politically,

which is aimed at leading to Asad’s departure.

I commend Secretary Kerry

for his efforts to bring Russia into that

dialog.

At the same time, of course, we condemn

Russia’s support for the Asad regime.

I happen to feel very strongly

that even though we are condemning,

and should condemn, Russia’s support

for the Asad regime, it is still in our

interest that Russia participate in putting

pressure on Asad politically to depart,

if Secretary Kerry can possibly do

so.

I have joined Senator MCCAIN recently

in writing to President Obama,

urging the President to consider supporting

a number of efforts, including

the creation by Turkey of a safe zone

inside Syria along its border, the deployment

of our Patriot batteries closer

to that border in order to protect

populations in that safe zone and to

neutralize any Syrian planes that

threaten it and also to provide weapons

to vetted elements of the opposition in

Syria. These actions—raising the military

pressure on Asad—will send the

critical message to Asad that he is

going to go one way or the other.

The Armed Services Committee,

which I chair, recently held an open

hearing on the situation in Syria and

the Defense Department’s efforts to

plan for a full range of possible options

to respond to the contingencies in

Syria. Our committee is set to receive

a classified briefing on Syria next

week. I intend to raise these issues

with our witnesses at that briefing. I

know Senator MCCAIN and Senator

GRAHAM and others are also going to

forcefully raise these issues with those

witnesses at that briefing and to urge

them to carry the message back to the

administration that it is time to up the

military pressure on Asad.

I thank Senator MCCAIN and others

who are participating in this discussion.

I yield the floor.