Mr. President, I

wish to join with my distinguished colleagues

in our collective call for a

greater engagement. I start off, as I always

do in many years in Congress between

the House and the Senate, with

two questions: What is in the national

interests of the United States? What is

in the national security interests of

the United States? The answer to those

two questions is, in essence, how I determine

my views, my advocacy, my

votes, and the policies I want to pursue.

There are vital U.S. interests engaged

in Syria. First, of course, there

is a humanitarian crisis, probably the

most significant humanitarian crisis at

this moment—70,000 dead and climbing,

4 million displaced. That is, of course,

an urgent call. Beyond that we have

large chemical weapon stockpiles that

potentially can fall into the wrong

hands. Some have, by a whole host of

public reports, already been used

against the Syrian people. Unless you

believe that somehow the rebels have

in their possession chemical weapons,

then this largely has to be from Asad.

He has used them. I think once you use

them, you are willing to use them even

in greater quantities. That is a real

concern.

The Syrian State could collapse.

That would leave a safe heaven for terrorists,

constituting a new threat to

the region. You already have al-Qaida

affiliated al-Nusra, you have Hezbollah,

you have the Iranian Guard. You have

the opportunity for a safe heaven for

terrorists constituting a new threat to

the region with broader implications

for our own security.

The refugee crisis and sectarian violence

spread instability throughout the

region. The King of Jordan was here 2

weeks ago and sat with our committee.

He made it very clear, his population

has already increased by 20 percent. At

the rate it is going, the population of

Jordan could double. That is not sustainable

for the kingdom. This is one of

the countries that has been one of our

most significant and faithful allies,

and a constructive ally in the region.

We cannot afford for that ally to ultimately

find itself in a position in

which it could very well collapse. We

look at all of that.

Finally, there could be no more strategic

setback to Iran—which this body

has spoken collectively and in a bipartisan

united fashion to stop its march

toward nuclear weapons—than to have

the Asad regime collapse. That would

be a tremendous setback to Iran and

would cause a disruption in the terror

pipeline between Iran and Hezbollah in

Lebanon.

These are just some of the vital national

security interests of the United

States in changing the tide. Under the

present set of circumstances, Asad believes

he is winning. For so long, as he

believes he is winning, he will continue

the course he is on. There has to be a

change in the tipping point.

After 2 years I believe there are those

in the opposition—rebels we can and

have thoroughly vetted—we can assist

in trying to change that tipping point.

If you have a monopoly on air power

and on artillery, then the reality is you

will not see a change on the ground.

So the legislation I have introduced

and am working with colleagues on begins

to move us in a different direction.

It is to seek to arm thoroughly vetted

elements of the Syrian opposition so

we can change the tipping point. It is

to, of course, continue to provide humanitarian

assistance and at the same

time work for the assistance of a transition

fund to help those rebels that

are already controlling parts of the civilian

population to help them administrate

there and prepare for the future.

The key point is unless we change

the dynamics on the ground, we will

not have a change in the regime. So

long as the regime can continue to

bomb its citizens indiscriminately—

and if the reports, as we have seen from

various countries, including our own,

suggest that Asad has used chemical

weapons against his own citizens—that

is only an invitation to allow him to

continue to do it unless we act.

I am willing to consider other options.

I know my colleague, Senator

MCCAIN, very distinguished in this

field, has suggested others. I am willing

to consider those as well. But I

think, finally, we strengthen the hand

of the administration and Secretary

Kerry. We all want to see a politically,

diplomatically achieved solution. But

in the absence of changing the calculus

not only of Asad but of his supporters

who have propped him up, unless they

believe he will fall, I am not sure we

have changed the calculus for the political

opportunity to take place and the

diplomacy to be effective.

I think these efforts strengthen the

hand of the administration, create a

parallel track that if diplomacy fails,

we will have an opportunity to pursue

our vital national interests and security

interests, end the humanitarian

tragedy, and create the type of stability

we want to see in the region. I

appreciate my colleague bringing us

together on the floor of the Senate. I

look forward to continuing to work

with him.

I yield the floor.