Mr. President, I am

pleased that the Senate soon will be

taking action on the Syria Accountability

Act. Much work has been devoted

to this legislation, and I believe

that we are ready to pass the bill. I

would like to thank the majority leader

for his support of this bill and the

process that led to it. I also would like

to thank Senators SANTORUM and

BOXER for their commitment to this

bill and their bipartisan cooperation in

reaching agreement of an important

amendment. A critical component of

this amendment provides the President

with the ability to calibrate U.S. sanctions

against Syria in response to positive

Syrian behavior when such adjustment

is in the national security interests

of the United States.

On October 30, the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee held an excellent

hearing on U.S. relations with Syria.

Among other witnesses, we heard from

William Burns, Assistant Secretary of

State for Near Eastern Affairs, and

Ambassador Cofer Black, the Counter-

Terrorism Coordinator.

These hearings underscored the difficulties

presented by recent Syrian behavior.

Hopes that reform could take

root in Syria after the fall of Saddam

Hussein have dimmed considerably. Instead,

tensions have increased between

the United States and Syria, and a

cycle of retaliation and revenge has derailed

possible progress in the ‘‘Road

Map’’ to peace for Israelis and Palestinians.

The Israeli retaliatory attack

on an Islamic Jihad terrorist

camp in Syria has underscored that the

‘‘no war and no peace’’ status quo in

the region cannot be taken for granted.

Many experts thought that when

President Bashar al-Assad replaced his

father 3 years ago, he would adopt a

more pragmatic approach to negotiations

with Israel and to internal political

and economic reforms. Syrian cooperation

with the United States in relation

to al-Qaida terrorists held promise

for cooperation in other areas. Assistant

Secretary Burns noted last

June in Congressional testimony that

‘‘the cooperation the Syrians have provided

in their own self-interest on al-

Qaida has saved American lives.’’

But Syria’s subsequent failure to

stop terrorist groups, including

Hezbollah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic

Jihad, from using Syria as a base

for training and planning suicide bombings

in Israel has continued. Syria also

has failed to withdraw its forces from

Lebanon or take concrete steps in support

of the Road Map peace plan. It reportedly

has continued to maintain

stockpiles of chemical weapons and to

pursue development of lethal biological

agents.

Moreover, Syria is working against

the U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq by

refusing to release assets in Syrian accounts

that Saddam Hussein’s regime

stole from the Iraqi people.

These and other Syrian transgressions

have led both Houses of the

U.S. Congress to support the bill before

us today, which stiffens the economic

and diplomatic sanctions already imposed

on Damascus for being a state

sponsor of terrorism. I support this

bill, which is based on the presumption

that modifying Syria’s behavior requires

a tough response. But as we give

the administration additional sticks to

use against Syria, we should be careful

about restricting our government’s

flexibility in responding to new diplomatic

opportunities. Syria has shown

the ability to make better choices—for

example, supporting U.N. Security

Council Resolution 1441 in November

2002, which held Iraq in ‘‘material

breach’’ of its disarmament obligations

and voting for the more recent Resolution

1511, which calls upon all nations

to support the U.S.-led effort in Iraq. I

believe the amendment to this bill provides

the President with the necessary

flexibility.

Even as we tighten restrictions on

Syria, we should be emphasizing to the

Syrians why it is in their interest to

recalculate their approach towards the

United States. Syria shares a 400-mile

border with Iraq. With more than 135,00

U.S. troops deployed in Iraq, Syria

needs to reconsider where its future security

interests lie. This is not a threat

of U.S. military action but a statement

of the new reality on Syria’s borders.

Moreover, Syrian forces that continue

to occupy Lebanon are draining the

Syrian economy while providing few

positive returns. Continued Syrian occupation

of Lebanon invites further

possible military action from Israel.

The Syrian leadership also must adjust

to the end of its ‘‘under the

counter’’ oil deals with Saddam Hussein.

Syria must negotiate new and

transparent arrangements to meet its

energy needs. Syria’s economy will not

thrive without opening up to investment

and trade, particularly with Iraq.

Significant benefits could accrue to

Syria from an economically vibrant

Iraqi trading partner, increased trade

with Europe and the United States, and

even possible membership in a Middle

East Free Trade Agreement down the

road.

In this context, Syria may find motivation

to return to the negotiating

table. An agreement on the Golan

Heights that would provide security

guarantees for Israel while respecting

Syria’s sovereignty could be the key to

resolving a host of other problems, including

Syria’s occupation of Lebanon,

its support of Palestinian terror

groups, and its economic and political

isolation. Although success of such an

agreement would depend ultimately on

the parties themselves, the United

States must seek to leverage obvious

Syrian interests in pursuit of a viable

settlement.

The Syrian regime has some difficult

choices to make. It can continue to

harbor and support groups devoted to

terror, or it can act in ways that will

help restore stability and peace in the

region and thereby create a better economic

future for its people. It cannot

do both. This bill, as amended, adds to

the tools available to the President to

move Syria toward a more responsible

course. I commend the bill to the Senate

and hope that we will pass it by a

strong vote.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.