I thank the Senator

from California.

Mr. President, I rise as a cosponsor in

strong support of the Syria Accountability

Act.

Syria plays a key role in the Mideast

region and it could play a constructive

role, but all too often, it has not.

After September 11, Syria offered to

share information that could help in

the U.S. fight against terrorists. It

joined us in the first Gulf War to oust

Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991,

and it joined in peace negotiations

with Israel in the 1990s. But Syria has

taken steps and pursued policies that

have undermined regional peace and

damaged U.S. interests.

Syria was opposed to the US invasion

of Iraq and it certainly has a right to

that opinion but Syria has not taken

robust action to keep foreign fighters

from crossing its borders to fight

Americans.

Syria objects to the U.S. occupation

of Iraq, but has itself occupied Lebanon

since 1976. More than 20,000 Syrian

troops and police occupy much of Lebanon,

dominating its politics and government

and undermining its independence.

Syria harbors terrorists that promote

and organize violence, undermining

hope and progress for a comprehensive

Arab-Israeli peace settlement.

Hizballah, Hamas, the Popular Front

for the Liberation of Palestine, and the

Popular Front for the Liberation of

Palestine-General Command have offices,

maintain training camps, and

other facilities on Syrian territory and

operate in areas of Lebanon occupied

by the Syrian army, such as the Beqaa

Valley. Some of these groups,

Hizballah in particular, receive supplies

from Iran through Syria.

The people of Syria are repressed,

ruled by a small ethnic minority in a

police state. There is no freedom of

speech, no political freedom, and no

freedom to dissent. The Syrian regime

is also run by the Ba’ath Party, but

split from Saddam Hussein’s branch of

this party.

The President has recently spoken

about how badly the Middle East needs

an infusion of democracy. He has argued

that, despite the fact that the

United States has found no weapons of

mass destruction in Iraq, this country’s

war was justified because of the

repressive nature of that regime.

I agree wholeheartedly with the

President that one of the most important

things that this country can do to

fight terrorism is to promote democracy

in the Middle East.

The lack of democracy in many Middle

Eastern countries has led directly

to Islamic extremism. There are almost

no outlets for political expression

in a region filled with kings, emirs, and

rubberstamp parliaments—except at

the mosque.

It is no accident that most of the terrorists

were originally from countries

that do not allow dissent or meaningful

political participation.

I, for one, do not believe this nation

can remove every dictator and repressive

regime. We cannot impose democracy

from the other end of an M–16.

Mideast countries will not become

models of democracy and openness

overnight. But we must look to a

longer term future where we call on

them to embark on a ‘‘soft-landing’’ towards

a more democratic future.

The bill we consider today, the Syria

Accountability Act, will send a strong

message of disapproval to Syria regarding

its actions supporting terrorism,

undermining regional peace, repressing

its people, and undermining the independence

of Lebanon. It will send those

messages short of going to war.

The bill will broaden U.S. sanctions

against Syria unless the President certifies

that Syria does not support terrorism;

that it has withdrawn its military,

intelligence, and security personnel

from Lebanon; stopped developing

ballistic missiles and chemical

and biological weapons; and that it is

no longer in violation of UN Security

Council resolutions. The bill allows the

President to waive sanctions if he believes

waiving them would be in the interests

of U.S. national security.

I believe that Syria could play a constructive

role in bringing peace to the

region, ending the scourge of terrorism,

and take its place as a regional

leader. Syria and the United States

could enjoy strong and growing relations.

The bill we pass today will hold

Syria accountable for its actions and

send a strong message that Syria must

change.

Syria has a great opportunity to decide

whether it will be part of the family

of civilized nations dedicated to

self-government, dedicated to the principles

of equality, and dedicated to

peace in the region, or Syria can turn

a different course. There has been

ample evidence of I guess the experience

we have had in Syria to suggest

they have decided to chart a course

that is not consistent with those values.

After September 11, Syria was one of

the first to come to our side and say

they would help us fight terrorism in

the world. I had a chance to visit that

nation and its leader shortly thereafter.

He expressed condolences for our

losses in the United States and pledged

support in our effort to end terrorism.

Sadly, the accumulated evidence

since that date does not suggest Syria

has made the real commitment we

need, not only for the sake of ending

terrorism in our country but for the

sake of ending terrorism in the world.

In fact, too many times Syria has been

on the wrong side of history in the past

and the current day.

This Syria Accountability Act basically

says to Syria they will be held accountable

for their conduct. Frankly,

we understand that today Damascus,

Syria, is the international headquarters

for a variety of terrorist

groups. That is totally unacceptable.

The President was right when he said

we are opposed to not only terrorists,

but those who harbor and support

them. Syria has to take those words to

heart, and this act is a measure that

needs to be passed by Congress and

signed into law by the President so

Syria understands the importance of

the role it plays in the Middle East and

how closely it will be watched.