Mr. President, I am voting

for the Syria Accountability Act

because I believe it is important to call

attention to Syria’s continuing military

occupation of Lebanon in violation

of international law, and its support

for terrorist organizations, including

Hezbollah, that are responsible for

ongoing, deadly incursions into Israel.

It is well established that the Syrian

Government rules through fear and repression.

Torture by Syrian security

forces is routine. The denial of basic

human rights has been widely documented.

We should condemn these policies.

And there are allegations that Syria

supplied Iraqi forces with military

equipment, which the Secretary of Defense

has described as hostile acts

against the United States.

The United States is justified in

seeking to apply political and economic

pressure on Syria in an effort to

change its policies. That said, there are

some aspects of this legislation that I

do not support, and I want to take a

moment to discuss them as I do not

want there to be any misunderstanding

about my vote. Most importantly, I do

not want my vote for this legislation

to be cited as an endorsement for military

action against Syria.

For examples, Section 4, entitled

‘‘Statement of Policy,’’ says that it is

the policy of the United State that

‘‘the United States shall impede Syria’s

ability to support acts of international

terrorism and efforts to develop

or acquire weapons of mass destruction.’’

I doubt that anyone disagrees

that we should try to do that.

But by what means? Will support for

this legislation be cited at some point

in the future by the administration, or

others, as a green light for launching a

unilateral, military attack to ‘‘impede

Syria’s ability to support acts of international

terrorism?’’ That is precisely

what was done by the White House

when it cited resolutions passed a decade

ago to justify a unilateral attack

against Iraq years later, even though

that was not what many, if any of us

who supported those resolutions intended

at the time. Over and over

again, the administration, in an effort

to justify their precipitous use of force

against Iraq, cited passage of the Iraq

Liberation Act in 1998 as evidence that

Congress supported the overthrow of

Saddam Hussein in 2003. What the administration

kept omitting in numerous

public statements is that one section

of that act made clear that nothing

in the act was to be construed as

authorizing the use of U.S. military

force against Iraq. I am concerned that

the Syria Accountability Act could be

distorted in a similar way. I do not

support military action against Syria,

and I am in no way endorsing such action

by voting for this legislation

today.

The same can be said of the statement

that it is the policy of the United

States that ‘‘efforts against Hezbollah

will be expanded given the recognition

that Hezbollah is equally or more capable

than al Qaeda.’’ First, I do not

know if it is true that Hezbollah is

‘‘equally or more capable than al

Qaeda.’’ Perhaps it is. I don’t know,

and I doubt the authors of this legislation

can be certain that it is, especially

given the difficulties we have had in

obtaining reliable information about

these organizations. In any event,

while I might support expanded efforts

against Hezbollah, it would depend on

what those efforts are. For example, I

am not in favor of sending U.S. troops

to Lebanon to engage in combat

against Hezbollah. I do not want my

vote today to be construed as supporting

any expanded efforts against

Hezbollah regardless of what they

might be.

Similarly, the legislation states that

it is United States policy that ‘‘Syria

will be held accountable for any harm

to Coalition armed forces or to any

U.S. citizens in Iraq if the Government

of Syria is found to be responsible due

to its facilitation of terrorist activities

and its shipments of military supplies

to Iraq.’’ Syria should be held accountable.

But in what way? The legislation,

once again, is silent. My support for efforts

to hold Syria accountable, should

the evidence warrant it, depends on

what those efforts are.

Finally, the legislation says that it is

the policy of the united States that

‘‘the United States will not provide

any assistance to Syria and will oppose

multilateral assistance for Syria until

Syria ends all support for terrorism,

withdraws it armed forces from Lebanon,

and halts the development and

deployment of weapons of mass destruction

and medium- and long-range

surface-to-surface ballistic missiles.’’

We all want Syria to do those things,

and I am not in favor of providing assistance

to the Syrian Government.

But this legislation goes farther. It

purports to cut off any assistance to

the Syrian people, even through private

voluntary organizations. I do not

believe in punishing the citizens of a

country simply because their government

is corrupt or abusive, so I have

concerns about this provision.

There are also aspects of Section 5 of

the legislation, entitled ‘‘Penalties and

Authorization,’’ which concern me. For

example, among the sanctions that the

President could impose are a prohibition

on U.S. businesses from investing

or operating in Syria. It is not obvious

to me how this will penalize the Syrian

Government, but it will hurt U.S. businesses.

While the record is mixed, there

are examples of U.S. businesses contributing

to social, economic and even

political change in other repressive

countries.

Of more concern is that the legislation

encourages the President to reduce

U.S. diplomatic contacts with

Syria. I am uneasy with this approach,

as I believe we should consider expanding

our diplomacy and people-to-people

contacts with Syria. It is in our interest

to promote dialogue with a country

with which we have such profound differences,

and which poses a military

threat to Israel. Reducing those contacts

could further misunderstanding

and exacerbate tensions between us. It

is also worth mentioning that after the

September 11 attacks, Syria reportedly

cooperated with the United States in

intelligence sharing about al-Qaida.

I do not believe this legislation will

persuade Syria to do any of the things

we want it to do. I am aware that the

Administration has opposed it in the

past. This legislation seems to start us

down a road of intensifying tensions

between the U.S. and Syria without a

clear end game other than invading

Syria, which I do not support and I

doubt many other Senators support.

However, I agree that Syria’s support

for terrorism and its violations of

human rights deserve condemnation,

and I will vote for this legislation with

the caveats I have mentioned.