Mr. President, I rise

in strong support of the Syria Accountability

Act, of which I am a proud cosponsor

of the Senate companion.

Syria is listed by the State Department

as a state sponsor of terrorism,

and yet fewer U.S. sanctions apply to

Syria than to any other country on the

list. This Act will authorize a range of

sanctions against Syria, prohibiting

exports to Syria of dual-use items and

requiring the President to choose from

a set of other sanctions, including prohibitions

on exports of most U.S. goods

to Syria and on American investment

in Syria, restrictions on Syrian diplomats

in the United States and on

U.S. diplomatic contacts with Syria,

prohibitions on Syrian aircraft in the

United States, and blocking of transactions

in Syrian government property.

These sanctions are appropriate, and,

in my view, long overdue. Despite recent

U.S. efforts to engage in dialogue

with Syria, Damascus has refused to

renounce its support for terrorism. It

provides terrorist organizations with

political and material support. It has

turned away from negotiations with

Israel. And it continues to occupy

southern Lebanon, where its forces destabilize

the Middle East by supporting

Hezbollah and undermining Lebanese

sovereignty.

Syria acts as the safe haven for a

broad array of terrorist organizations

and Palestinian groups committed to

the destruction of Israel. Hezbollah,

Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the

Popular Front for the Liberation of

Palestine, and the Popular Front for

the Liberation of Palestine-General

Command are all active in Damascus.

The Syrian government has not only

refused to sever ties with these organizations;

it has defended their use of

Syrian territory to disseminate propaganda

that attacks Israel, thereby undermining

efforts to bring peace to the

region. Worse, the offices maintained

by these groups provide operational

support for terrorist activities, notwithstanding

the Syrian government’s

claims that they are engaged only in

political and informational activities.

These activities include the deadly and

despicable suicide bombings, conducted

by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic

Jihad, against civilians in Israel.

Syria is also a supporter of

Hezbollah, which is responsible for the

killing of hundreds of Americans and is

one of the biggest obstacles to our efforts

to combat global terrorism.

Throughout much of southern Lebanon,

occupying Syrian forces support

and protect Hezbollah, allowing it to

deploy thousands of rockets that

threaten Israel and destabilize the region,

and to launch attacks against civilian

targets in Israel civilian areas.

Syria also permits Hezbollah to receive

assistance from Iran.

The Syrian occupation of Lebanon

represents a long-standing threat to

stability in the Middle East. While

Syria has reduced its forces in recent

years, it still maintains as many as

20,000 troops and security personnel in

Lebanon. In addition to harboring

Hezbollah, those forces exert undue influence

in Lebanon and prevent the

Lebanese government from deploying

its own troops to southern Lebanon, as

required by U.N. Security Council Resolution

520. It is long past time for Syrian

forces to withdraw from Lebanon

and for Lebanon to cease to be a refuge

for terrorist organizations, including

Hezbollah.

Syria has not moderated its unrelenting

hostility to Israel, nor has it

demonstrated a commitment to negotiations.

Moreover, it has used its position

on the world stage and within the

Arab world to undermine efforts to

bring peace and stability to the region.

As a frequent sponsor of U.N. resolutions

related to the conflict in the Middle

East, Syria has consistently promoted

a perspective that castigates

Israeli security measures without condemning

the terrorist threat faced by

Israel.

While I have long supported this act

and welcome its passage, I believe that

our ability to influence Syria’s behavior

and deter its support for terrorism

also requires a multilateral strategy.

The effect of this act will unfortunately

be limited by the lack of support

for sanctions against Syria among

our friends and allies. It is critical that

the administration demonstrate global

leadership on this issue as well as other

aspects of the war on terrorism. By

reaching out to the international community

and by appealing to our common

interest in curtailing global terrorism

and achieving peace in the Middle

East, we can ensure that the sanctions

we are imposing today are truly

effective.

I yield the floor.