Mr. President, for decades,

the United States has engaged

the regime in Syria in the hope that

Damascus would play a constructive

role in bringing about Arab-Israeli

peace. The U.S.-Syria relationship has

been ongoing despite the fact that

Syria has been ruled by dictatorship

with an uninterrupted record of support

for terrorism, specifically directed

at Israel.

The results of U.S. engagement with

Syria have been anything but positive.

Throughout the years, Damascus has

continued to support international terrorism

directed at America and Israel,

occupy Lebanon, develop a weapons-of mass-

destruction program, acquire ballistic

missiles, and pursue policies

counter to U.S. interests.

Since the liberation of Iraq, Syria

has played a destabilizing role by allowing

terrorist fugitives to enter

Syria and by allowing mercenaries to

cross into Iraq—or at least not stopping

them—to engage U.S. troops.

Syria has been able to conduct its policies—

which are antithetical to U.S. interests—

with near impunity. They

have resulted in the loss of hundreds of

American lives—especially when you

consider the bombing of the U.S. Marine

Corps barracks in Beirut in 1983.

Although Syria is listed—and has

been since the 1970s—by the State Department

as a state sponsor of terrorism,

along with Iran, Libya, Iraq,

Cuba, and North Korea, it has not faced

the same degree of diplomatic and economic

isolation that has been directed

at other terrorist states. In fact, Washington

maintains full diplomatic relations

with Syria, making Syria the

only designated state sponsor of terrorism

to have such relations with the

United States.

Syria’s special treatment despite its

support for terrorism should be over.

The events of September 11, 2001 have

offered a window of opportunity to review

many U.S. bilateral relationships

and determine whether it is necessary

to change the dynamic—and often the

status quo—that has characterized

these relations. The administration

and Congress have done this most notably

with Saudi Arabia in seeking greater

cooperation in the elimination of

terrorist activities operating from

Saudi soil.

Now is also an ideal time to reassess

U.S. relations with Damascus and demand

accountability in our relationship.

Equally important, it is time for

the Syrian leadership to make a tough

choice: it is either with the United

States completely in the war on terrorism,

or it is not. Either way, shielding

Syria from the same economic and

political isolation directed at other

terrorist states is unmerited and runs

counter to U.S. principles in the war

against terrorism.

As Under Secretary of State John

Bolton stated in testimony before the

House International Relations Committee

on September 16, 2003, ‘‘Syria

remains a security concern on two important

counts: terrorism and weapons

of mass destruction.’’ Bolton added:

There is no graver threat to our country

today than states that both sponsor

terrorism and possess or aspire to possess

weapons of mass destruction.

Syria, which offers physical sanctuary

and political protection to groups such

as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian

Jihad, and whose terrorist operations

have killed hundreds of innocent people—

including Americans—falls into

this category of state of potential dual

threat.

Since the 1970s, the U.S. State Department

has listed Syria as a state

sponsor of terrorism. Specifically, in

its ‘‘Patterns of Global Terrorism,

2002’’ report, the State Department

found that the Syrian Government

‘‘has continued to provide political and

limited material support to a number

of Palestinian groups, including allowing

them to maintain headquarters or

offices in Damascus,’’ although the

Syrian Government insists that the

groups’ Damascus offices undertake

only political and informational activities,

not terrorist operations.

Syria maintains close relations with

Iran, another autocratic regime listed

by the State Department as a state

sponsor of terrorism and a prominent

financial, political, and military backer

of these Palestinian terrorist organizations.

Moreover, Syria remains the de facto

ruler of Lebanon, which it has forcibly

and illegally occupied since 1990. Lebanon,

the country in which more than

200 U.S. Marines died in 1983 following

a terrorist attack on their Beirut barracks,

remains a breeding ground and

training center for terrorist organizations.

Terrorism has spawned in Syria due

largely to Syria’s opposition to the existence

of Israel and its subsequent objection

to an Arab-Israeli peace process.

Although the United States has engaged

Syria—and given it a prominent

place in discussions—during the past

few decades, Damascus has long been

an unwilling and uncooperative partner

in bringing about Middle East peace. In

fact, Syria did not endorse President

Bush’s Middle East ‘‘roadmap.’’

Syria also appears to be in the terror

financing business. In April 2003, an

Italian government study found that

Syria functioned as a hub for an al-

Qaida network that moved Islamic extremists

and funds from Italy to northeastern

Iraq, where the recruits fought

alongside the recently defeated Ansar

al Islam terrorist group.

And, on October 21, it was reported

that U.S. Treasury Department investigators

have evidence that $3 billion

that belonged to Saddam Hussein’s

government is being held in Syria-controlled

banks in Syria and Lebanon.

The Syrian Government has not yet

granted Treasury officials access to

these accounts, nor has it been willing

to share any information about the account

holders.

Let’s review past U.S. policy toward

Damascus. Despite all of Syria’s irresponsible

and threatening policies, successive

U.S. administrations have been

willing to engage the Syrian Government.

For decades, the United States

has pursued a policy of engagement

with Syria, trying to win Damascus’

support for Middle East peace but to no

avail.

As part of this strategy, the United

States has maintained full diplomatic

relations with Damascus. It also has

allowed U.S. companies to invest in

Syria, something that cannot be done

in other terrorist-sponsor states such

as North Korea, Iran, Cuba, and Libya.

According to the Congressional Research

Service, in 1999—the last year

there was reliable data available—direct

investment of U.S. companies into

Syria was $6 million, with 13 U.S. businesses

having offices in Syria. While

this may seem miniscule in terms of

the dollar amount, it is notable because

it is tolerated at all.

With the death of Syrian President

Hafez Assad in 2000 and the ascendancy

of his son Bashar to the presidency,

there were high expectations that

Syria would depart from its anti-Israeli

policies and pro-terrorist support of

the past and enact political and economic

reforms, as well as become a

positive influence and player in achieving

Middle East peace. Three years into

Bashar’s term, such developments have

not materialized—and without a catalyst

to encourage such reform, it appears

unlikely that Bashar will

proactively change Syria’s course.

We need a new approach toward Damascus.

Continuation of the current

U.S. policy toward Syria must end. For

too long, it has been too ineffective and

has allowed Syria to pursue with near

impunity policies counter to U.S. interests.

Moreover, it is unproductive

and antithetical to the principles associated

with the President’s war on terrorism.

The U.S. must pressure Syria to play

by the rules. Given that the government

of Syrian President Bashar al-

Assad is relatively weak, and recognizing

that Bashar deemed it necessary,

or least desirable, to provide

some assistance to the United States in

apprehending al-Qaida, it should be

possible to pressure Damascus into

changing its policies. That said, Washington

must demonstrate that it is serious

about having Damascus drop its

support of terrorism and its pursuit of

policies that endanger peace and stability

in the Middle East.

Therefore, to demonstrate American

commitment, the United States should

adopt the following measures in pressuring

Syria: Enact the Syria Accountability

Act now. Among the numerous

provisions contained in the bill, the

most notable include the calls for

Syria to immediately and unconditionally

halt support for terrorism; withdraw

from Lebanon and provide for

Lebanon’s full restoration of sovereignty;

halt development of certain

weapons; and enter into serious unconditional

bilateral peace negotiations

with Israel.

This bill also states that Syria

‘‘should bear responsibility for attacks

committed by Hezbollah and other terrorist

groups with offices, training

camps, or other facilities’’ in Syria or

Lebanon. Further, the bill states, that

being in violation of key United Nations

Security Council resolutions and

pursuing policies which undermine

international peace and security,

‘‘Syria should not have been permitted

to join the United Nations Security

Council or serve as the Security Council’s

President, and should be removed

from the Security Council.

Pursuant to the legislation, the

United States is empowered to ‘‘will

work to deny Syria the ability to support

acts of terrorism and efforts to acquire

weapons of mass destruction,

WMD.’’ In addition, the United States

will not provide any assistance to

Syria and will oppose all forms of multilateral

assistance to Syria until Damascus

withdraws from Lebanon and

halts its pursuit of WMD and ballistic

missile accumulation.

Until Syria enacts these measures,

the President is required to prohibit:

the sale of defense articles to Syria

that require the issuance of an export

license—dual-use items; U.S. businesses

from investing in Syria; and export

of any goods other than food and

medicine to Syria. Diplomatic relations

also must be reduced but the degree

of that is not defined. The President

is given waiver authority for 6-

month periods for all of these categories,

except the export of dual-use

items if it is determined that ‘‘it is in

the vital national security interest’’ to

do so.

The Bush administration should

apply uniformity in its policies toward

terrorist-sponsoring states. Therefore,

the administration should not allow

U.S. companies to invest in Syria because

it sends the signal that Syria is

receiving special treatment from Washington.

A fairly dramatic reduction of

U.S. diplomatic representation would

perhaps strongly suggest to Syria that

it is not an American ally and will not

be one until it starts acting like one.

Sending a strong message is key.

The United States should apply the

proliferation security initiative, PSI,

and sanction WMD suppliers. The administration

has successfully developed

and employed a plan, known as

the proliferation security initiative,

PSI, to interdict illicit weapons shipments

and contraband. PSI was announced

by President Bush on May 31,

2003. It involves robust cargo inspections

and possible interdiction of WMD

materials and illegal arms, based on

pooled intelligence among participating

countries. To date, 11 nations

form the core PSI group: Britain,

France, Germany, Australia, Japan,

Italy, Spain, Portugal, Poland, the

Netherlands, and the United States.

While most of the initial PSI activities

have focused on North Korea, attention

should be paid to Syria—and Iran—

with the goal of halting the flow of

weapons technology both in and out of

Syria.

A critical complementary strategy to

PSI is using sanctions on countries

that supply Syria with weapons and

WMD technology. The People’s Republic

of China, Pakistan, Russia, Iran,

and North Korea are known

proliferators of these materials, with

Russia and North Korea being key suppliers

to Syria.

As part of a wider U.S. policy, the administration

should attempt to convince

its PSI allies to also use sanctions

against WMD suppliers.

In conclusion, Syria’s actions in the

Middle East—and in Iraq, specifically

pose a clear, near-term threat to regional

stability and to the safety and

security of American forces serving in

the region.

With the removal of Saddam Hussein’s

regime in Iraq and the defeat of

the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the

United States has made clear that

state support for terrorism will no

longer be tolerated.

It is overdue for the United States

and like-minded nations to hold Syria

accountable for its actions. Syria’s new

head of state has had ample time to

make the choice whether Damascus is

with the United States as a partner or

not in fighting the war on terrorism.

If Syria is not, then it should face

the diplomatic and economic consequences

as set out in the Syria Accountability

Act. As a sponsor of the

Senate version, S. 982, I respectfully

urge my colleagues to vote for this important

measure in the form of H.R.

1828, as amended.