Mr. President, today

the Senate is voting on H.R. 1828, the

Syria Accountability Act. I would like

to explain to my colleagues why I will

be voting against this legislation.

As chairman of the Foreign Relations

Committee’s Near East Subcommittee,

I have come to appreciate the great importance

of U.S. leadership in working

to restart the Middle East peace process.

In recent visits to the region—the

West Bank, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and

Afghanistan—I heard a uniform chorus

in these Arab and Muslim nations that

active United States involvement was

urgently needed to halt the continuing

violence between Israel and the Palestinians.

I regret that this administration

has not actively responded to

these pleas for peace.

I have also learned that our disinterest

in becoming involved in Middle

East peace has contributed to the

sharply declining image of the United

States in the Arab/Muslim world. Indeed,

according to the recently released

report of the Advisory Group on

Public Diplomacy for the Arab and

Muslim World—‘‘the Djerejian report’’—

hostility toward America has

reached shocking levels, and the bottom

has fallen out of Arab and Muslim

support for the United States. The report

also documents that ‘‘large majorities

in the Arab and Muslim world

view United States policy through the

prism of the Arab-Israeli conflict.’’

I am troubled by these developments

and fear that the administration’s

emerging hard line toward Syria, in addition

to passage of this bill, will only

add fuel to this fire. It is true that the

Syrian Government can do more to

work with the United States in combating

terrorism in the region, and the

administration has made some very

clear requests of the Syrian Government.

But if Syria does not respond to

our requests, most, if not all, of the

sanctions contemplated by the Syrian

Accountability Act can already be imposed

by the administration. This

means that a bill that is widely perceived

as a crackdown against Syria

has little substantive effect. Indeed,

Patrick Clawson of CSIS testified to

our committee last week, ‘‘Some might

say that the act is largely symbolic,

but do not underestimate the importance

of symbols.’’ And that concerns

me, because the symbol of the United

States as cracking down on an Arab

nation ultimately harms our interests

in many very important parts of the

world.

So in reality I would describe this

bill as a ‘‘lose-lose’’ for the United

States: We’re getting little additional

muscles against Syria while further antagonizing

the Arab world. I urge my

colleagues to vote ‘‘no’’ on this bill.