Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, on behalf

of the majority leader, I call up

the Syria Accountability Act.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, there

is before the Senate the so-called Syrian

Accountability Act, which imposes

sanctions on Syria. It recites a long

list of circumstances where the Syrians

have not taken sufficient action to

fight terrorism, and then it calls for

Syria to take corrective action, and in

the absence of that corrective action,

authorizes the imposition of economic

sanctions, and it leaves with the President

of the United States the authority

to waive those sanctions if it is in the

national interest.

Sanctions are imposed by Congress

with some frequency. At first blush,

this appears to be a straightforward affirmative

vote, but I believe the matter

is more complicated than that, and I

have come to that view after having

traveled to Syria almost every year

since 1984, and after having had considerable

contact with the Syrian Government.

After considering the matter at

some length, I have decided that I will

vote in favor of the Syrian Accountability

Act because the problems of

terrorism are so serious and because I

believe that Syria needs to do more.

The bill itself has a long recitation of

background circumstances, but the

events today in Iraq, where our fighting

men and women are being subjected

to terrorist attacks, casualties and fatalities,

and where the people of Iraq

are being subjected as victims of terrorism,

I believe it is a fair demand

that more be done. That would include

more by Syria.

There are, according to reliable reports,

official statements of the U.S.

Government that terrorists are infiltrating

into Syria, coming from Syria

into Iraq. More has to be done on that

subject.

It has to be noted that Syria has responded

with a number of affirmative

actions to be of assistance to the

United States in our war on terrorists.

The officials of the State Department

have acknowledged that after September

11, 2001, that information was

provided by Syria on al-Qaeda, which

saved U.S. lives.

It is also to be acknowledged there

has been some improvement on the

Syrian-Iraqi border, but clearly not

enough. There were reports just this

morning from the State Department

about the porous Syrian border and

terrorists coming into Iraq, again exposing

U.S. personnel and the Iraqis

themselves to terrorist attack.

It ought to be noted that Syria did

join in the unanimous resolution, U.N.

Resolution 1511, and that when Secretary

of State Powell traveled to

Syria in April of 2002, there was some

helpful action taken by the Syrian

Government on the southern border of

Lebanon. But when Secretary of State

Powell went to Syria in May of 2003

and urged the Syrian Government to

oust the terrorists from Damascus,

that request was not acted upon. Recently,

Israel moved against terrorist

training camps within a few miles of

Damascus.

While all of these matters are subjected

to controversy, and there are

disputes by the Syrian Government, I

believe the balance of the evidence supports

the conclusion that those were

training camps.

I believe it is important that the U.S.

Government continues in its efforts to

negotiate with Syria to try to improve

the situation, and that we ought to be

mindful that there are opportunities to

have frank discussions with the Syrian

officials which have led to some beneficial

results and which ought to be

pursued.

I urge my colleagues in the U.S. Congress,

pursuant to our duties, for example,

on the Foreign Operations Subcommittee

on which I serve, or on the

Foreign Relations Committee, to travel

to Syria to engage the Syrian leaders

because I think it can be productive.

I make reference to my own experience

in that regard.

I made my first trip to Syria in 1984.

As I have said, I have been to Syria almost

every year since. I first met

President Bashar al-Assad in January

of 1988 and found him to be willing to

listen and willing to have a dialog. My

conversation at that time with President

Assad lasted for some 4 hours and

35 minutes, talking about a wide range

of issues—the Israeli-Syrian relations,

the Iran-Iraq war, which was still in

progress at that time, U.S.-Syrian relations,

the situations with the Jews in

Syria. At that time, working with then

Congressman Solarz, I urged President

Assad to allow the Jews to have free

immigration out of Syria. There were

many Jewish women in Syria who

could not find husbands of the Jewish

faith. President Assad said to me, in

one of our meetings, he would release

any Jewish woman where somebody

came from the United States—there

were large Syrian-Jewish groupings in

the United States—to come to claim a

bride, and anyone who wanted to marry

a woman in Syria who was Jewish, if a

suitor came, the woman would be released.

I reported back to a number of Jewish-

Syrian enclaves in the United

States. Nothing much happened about

that. Finally, a few years later, President

Assad granted free rights for the

Jews to leave Syria at their choice,

something he had resisted, but something

which he finally was persuaded

to do.

During the course of the discussions I

had with President Assad, I urged him

to participate in discussions with

Israel. At first, he took the position he

would not be a party to any discussions

which were sponsored just by the

United States but only if they were

sponsored by all five of the permanent

members of the Security Council.

Finally, President Assad made a

change and sent representatives to Madrid

in 1991 to participate in those discussions.

When Prime Minister

Netanyahu was elected in 1996, Prime

Minister Netanyahu initially made

some statements that he was going to

hold Syria accountable for Hezbollah

on the southern Lebanon border. That

resulted in a very tense situation with

Syria realigning their troops along the

Syrian border.

Prime Minister Netanyahu knew I

was about to travel to Syria and asked

me to carry a message to President

Assad and Foreign Minister Shara,

that Prime Minister Netanyahu wanted

peace and was prepared to personally

engage in discussions and would urge

President Assad to engage personally,

but that was not a condition.

I relayed that message to President

Assad. While he was not willing to engage

in negotiations with Prime Minister

Netanyahu, it was later reported

there was an easing of those tensions.

On many occasions, I would urge

President Assad to have discussions

with the Israeli Prime Minister. I soon

developed a relationship where I was

able to take it in a somewhat lighter

vein and said to him when our pictures—

he met with me in his office,

with the large traditional chairs and a

small stand in between to hold the tea

or coffee—I said tomorrow there would

be a picture in the Damascus newspaper

of our discussion, but that if he

would meet with Prime Minister

Shamir, which I urged in the early

1990s, the picture would appear on the

front pages of the New York Times and

the London Times and across the

world.

When the Nobel Peace awards were

given to Prime Minister Rabin and

Foreign Minister Perez and Chairman

Arafat, I urged President Assad to engage

in negotiations with Prime Minister

Rabin. I said he would be honored

at Oslo, and he responded in a light

vein that he might be honored at Oslo

but he would not be allowed back in

Damascus. I told him I did not think

that was true, and he commented notwithstanding

what some might think,

the public opinion in Syria was a matter

of some substantial concern to him.

I attended the funeral of President

Assad in the year 2000, accompanying

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

On that occasion, I had a chance to

meet his successor, President Bashar

Assad. I visited Syria on two occasions,

in 2002 and last year in 2003, and have

had lengthy conversations with President

Bashar Assad. They are conversations

which are candid and sometimes

critical.

For example, at the Arab summit,

when President Bashar Assad made a

comment that Zionism was the same as

nazism, I said I thought there ought to

be a change in his attitude on that because

there was no comparison between

the brutality of nazism, their destruction,

their attacking neighboring countries,

their Holocaust, murdering 6 million

Jews, and the aspirations of the

Zionists to have a homeland in Israel.

He listened and talked. To what extent

there is an imprint, who knows. It is

better to have it said than to have him

thinking he can simply equate nazism

and Zionism without an objection.

President Bashar Assad also made a

comment at the Arab summit that it

was fair to target civilians in the

Golan Heights, and I disagreed with

him. He said, well, the civilians are

armed. I said, they have to be armed

because there are attacks on the borders.

I urged him that the right response

was to engage in diplomatic

talks with the United States.

The essential conclusions which I

have reached are there is some substantial

opportunity to deal with

Syria. In Bashar Assad there is a new

leader, a man in his late 30s, English

educated, willing to meet with the

House of Representatives or the Senate,

willing to listen. Notwithstanding

my many exhortations of President

Hafez al-Assad and President Bashar

Assad, they continue to harbor terrorists

in Damascus. Both the father and

the son respond that the people live

there have been exiled from what was

formerly Palestine, they cannot be in

Israel so they live in Damascus. I responded

I thought that was an insufficient

answer.

Although some progress has been

made, I do believe Syria needs to do

much more. Syria is the de facto controller

of Lebanon, and Syria needs to

do more to stop Hezbollah and their

rocket attacks on Israel, with the tremendous

armaments which Syria has.

There are reliable reports about Syria

developing bacteriological warfare, a

lot of chemical warfare, and extending

the range of their missiles, and some

incipient efforts at nuclear weapons, so

they would have to submit to international

arms control regimes.

Most of all, I believe Syria has to do

much more in the fight against terrorism.

President Bush has said, and I

think accurately, he who harbors a terrorist

is a terrorist himself; he who

harbors a terrorist in the eyes of the

law is an accessory before the fact.

Today, the problem of terrorism is so

acute there cannot be any halfway

measures. Syria needs to do a great

deal more on the border to stop terrorists

from coming into Iraq.

There are reports about al-Qaida

being in Iraq. I am not vouching for

any of those reports. I think we have to

be very careful what we say about terrorism

and who the terrorists are and

where they come from, but there is no

doubt Iraq has been a magnet for

young men and young women who do

not like the United States, who do not

like U.S. support of Israel, who do not

like what we have done in Iraq, and

they are coming into Iraq. There are

daily attacks on our men and women.

There are daily attacks on the Iraqis

themselves.

There is a state of tremendous violence.

Every day, when we look to the

news media, we wonder if there is going

to be another report about a helicopter

being shot down or about United States

soldiers being attacked or about Iraqi

civilians being attacked. That means

the effort against that kind of terrorism

has to be absolute. That is why

I believe the Syria Accountability Act

is one which ought to be passed by the

Senate.

When the Syria Accountability Act

was gaining in cosponsors, I wrote to

President Bashar al Assad on September

17 of this year. I ask unanimous

consent that the letter be printed in

the RECORD at the conclusion of my

statement.

Mr. SPECTER. President Assad then

asked his representative in the United

States, in Washington, his charge d’affaires—

they didn’t have an ambassador—

to come and talk to me, and we

had a discussion as to what was going

on. It seems to me, after considering

the matter and the gravity of the risks

which our fighting men and women are

undertaking in Iraq, and the risks to

the Iraqi people themselves, that it is

an appropriate time to make a formal

demand on the Government of Syria to

do more.

If they do more and if they join in

the fight against terrorism, there is

ample opportunity for the President of

the United States to take the appropriate

action pursuant to this resolution

and to lift the sanctions.

I thank my colleague from Alabama

for sitting overtime into the lunch period.

I yield the floor and note we will

now go into a noontime recess, to reconvene

at 2:15.