Madam

President, like many others, I am deeply

disturbed by the current situation in

Syria, the appalling atrocities, the

tragic loss of life, the reported use of

chemical weapons. This deserves the

clear condemnation of the international

community.

I am also concerned by the push for

intervention in this war, by the rush to

judgment for the United States to yet

again become entangled in a civil war.

The President has decided to send arms

to the rebels to fight the government

of the Bashar al-Asad. The full scope of

this intervention is not yet clear, but

this path is dangerous and unnecessary.

The Asad regime is cruel and corrupt.

We can all agree on that point. Many of

the groups fighting against him do not

share our values and could be worse.

They may pose long-term risks to us

and our allies. Asad’s enemies may

very well be America’s enemies. The

fact is that we do not know. A number

of experts, including our military

brass, have sounded alarms warning

that the options to intervene in Syria

range from bad to worse and could

prove damaging to America’s strategic

interests. By flooding Syria with weapons,

we risk arming those who ultimately

may seek to do us harm.

We have been down this road before.

Recent history tells a cautionary tale.

In the 1980s the United States supported

a rebel insurgency to repel the

Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Back then as now, many Members of

Congress pushed for arming these

rebels. The United States supplied

weapons, intelligence, and training,

with the goal to defeat the Soviets in

Afghanistan.

Our short-term victory had tragic

consequences for the future. Radical

members of the insurgency formed the

Taliban regime, giving safe haven to

terrorist training camps, providing material

support to Osama bin Laden and

his fledgling al-Qaida movement.

Through state-sponsored terrorism in

Afghanistan, al-Qaida thrived and perpetrated

attacks on the USS *Cole* and

the World Trade Center on 9/11. The

aftermath has been more than a decade

of war, with tragic loss of American

lives and treasure.

This is history to learn from, not repeat,

and yet many who advocated for

previously disastrous Middle East

interventions are leading the charge to

arm groups we know little about and to

declare war through air strikes on another

Middle Eastern country.

What little we do know about the

Syrian rebels is extremely disturbing.

The opposition is fractured. Some are

sympathetic to the enemies of the

United States and our allies, including

Israel and Turkey. There are reliable

reports that some of the rebels even include

Iraqi Sunni insurgents—the same

groups who killed many U.S. troops

and still target the current Iraqi Army

and Government.

We know American law currently

considers some of the rebel elements to

be terrorist groups. The United States

has designated one of the key opposition

factions, the Nursa Front, as a terrorist

organization for being an al-

Qaida-affiliated group.

The Syrian opposition is very unorganized.

They lack a chain of command,

they are subject to deadly infighting,

and if they are able to defeat

Asad, they may turn on each other or

worse the United States or our allies.

Simply put, once we have introduced

arms, neither we nor their fighters

may be able to guarantee control over

them. Such weapons could end up in

the hands of groups and people who do

not represent our interests, possibly including

terrorists who target the

United States, our allies, such as Israel

and Turkey, and the Iraqi Army and

Government—an Iraq that we spent billions

of dollars and thousands of American

lives to establish.

Given this reality, those who are

pushing for military intervention

should answer three basic questions:

Can arms be reasonably accounted for

and kept out of the hands of terrorists

and extremist groups? Can they assure

us those arms will not become a threat

to our regional allies and friends, including

Israel, Turkey, and the Government

of Iraq? And if the answer to the

two previous questions is no, can they

then explain why transferring our

weapons to the rebels, whose members

may themselves be affiliated with terrorist

and extremist groups, is a sensible

option for the American people?

What national interest does this serve?

I do not believe those questions have

been answered. I think the majority of

the American people agree. They do

not see the justification of our intervention

in this civil war. We need to

slow down this clamor for more weapons

to Syria and war and take a step

back from this plunge into very muddy

and dangerous waters.

Stopping radicalism and protecting

our allies is of vital importance; however,

we come to the ultimate question,

one that has not been adequately

answered: Will this hasty march to intervene

in another Middle East conflict

achieve these goals or will it ultimately

harm the interests of the

United States, leading to yet another

bloody, costly, overseas conflict and,

ironically, worsening the terrorist

threat?

We should listen to the lessons of history.

After over a decade of war overseas,

now is not the time to arm an unorganized,

unfamiliar, and unpredictable

group of rebels. Now is not the

time to rush headlong into another

Middle Eastern civil war. The winds of

war are blowing yet again, and we

should be ever vigilant before we venture

into another storm.

Madam President, I yield the floor.