Mr. President, the first large-scale

military use of deadly military weapons

occurred almost 100 years ago when

the Germans deployed chlorine gas during

World War I. During that war,

World War I, there were 1,200,000 casualties

from attacks with deadly toxins—

chlorine gas, mustard gas, and

other deathly and destructive chemical

agents. Great Britain, Austria, Hungary,

France, Germany, Italy, and the

United States all suffered losses.

‘‘This is a horrible weapon,’’ wrote

German Major Karl von Zinger, who reported

a firsthand battlefield account

of the carnage to his superior officers.

One hundred thousand soldiers died,

and most of the other casualties were

debilitated for life by the exposure to

these deadly toxins. The effects of

these killers were horrific. Those who

didn’t die suffered blindness, burns,

blisters, and labored breathing. For

those dying, it was as terrible as anyone

could imagine. The great World

War I era poet Wilfred Owen from

Great Britain wrote that gassed soldiers

cried out like men on fire as they

drowned in air thick with poison. The

world was horrified by the gruesomeness

of these new evil weapons of war,

and so, as a global community, we

agreed these weapons should be banished

from the battlefield forever.

Despite the success of global efforts

to eliminate their use, today the Syrian

Government is the second largest

holder of chemical weapons in the

world—only shortly behind North

Korea. The well-documented use of

these toxic and unsavory stockpiles by

President Bashar al-Asad’s regime is a

certain violation of the overwhelming

international consensus forged against

these weapons nearly 10 decades ago. It

is a clear violation of human decency.

This is not the first time Asad has used

chemical weapons against his own citizens.

We all heard in our classified

briefings that these weapons have been

used a number of times, but this is the

most gruesome and extensive.

This morning I watched some film in

my office. The film takes about 13 minutes.

It was pictures that were taken

following the dropping of those horrible

weapons. I will never get that out

of my mind. There were little baby

boys and girls dressed in colorful play

clothes. Some of the boys and girls

looked like teenagers. They were

retching and had spasms with their

arms. Of course there were older people

as well. These poisons kill the kids

first. Their little bodies cannot take

this as well as older folks. It kills the

older people also but more slowly.

The well-documented use of these unsavory

stockpiles by Asad is a certain

violation, I repeat, of the overwhelming

international consensus

forged against these weapons 10 decades

past. I have talked about human

decency. It is a clear violation of

human decency.

The August 21 attacks killed more

than 1,000 civilians—including hundreds

of these children. This week we

will further examine the evidence that

is growing which proves the viciousness

of these attacks and discuss their

brutal results.

The innocent civilians who were

killed by the Syrian Government during

those attacks died terrible deaths.

Their death was just as painful and

shocking as those suffered on the battlefields

of World War I. These deaths

were just as terrible as those that convinced

the global community to outlaw

the use of such brutal tactics against

soldiers, and, of course, against innocent

civilians such as those Asad murdered

last month.

The evidence of the Asad regime, and

their using outlawed nerve agents

against its own citizens, is clear and

very convincing. The Syrian Government

has worked to hide the gruesome

evidence. They have done it a number

of different ways. After the bodies had

been cleared away, they sent a barrage

of weaponry in there—artillery and

tanks—and blasted the ground and destroyed

the evidence. They couldn’t destroy

it; it is still there, but they did

try. They worked very hard to hide

these gruesome attacks by repeatedly

bombing the site of these grisly and

unforgettable occurrences. Without

question, this brutality demands a response.

The satellite imagery and amateur

video shot by eyewitnesses—and I

talked about that—paint a clear picture

of the brutality of this awful regime.

President Obama sought approval 2

weeks ago for targeted military action—

action that will hold President

Asad accountable for these heinous

acts. Congress has done its due diligence.

Since President Obama announced

he would seek congressional

approval for the limited military action

against Syria, the Senate has held

many committee hearings and briefings

as well as five classified all-Members

briefings. There are more briefings

and much debate to come this week—

including open debate here in the Senate.

On a bipartisan basis the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee passed a resolution

that restricts the use of military

force to 60 days, with a single 30-

day extension. The resolution reflects

President Obama’s proposal for limited

military action—including strikes of

limited duration and limited scope.

The resolution plainly states there

may be no U.S. military boots on the

ground. America’s intention, as specified

in the resolution, is not to engage

in an open-ended conflict or invasion.

Nor is it the Commander in Chief’s intention

to commit ground troops to

this conflict or to effect regime

change. Rather, the Senate will be voting

to uphold the century-long international

consensus that chemical

weapons have no place on the battlefield

and certainly no place in attacking

innocent civilians. This standard

demands any government—a dictator

or any other government—that has

used chemical weapons to be held accountable.

Some may disagree with my conclusions.

I don’t expect everyone to agree

with the statement I am giving here

today, as is anyone’s right, but this is

my firm conviction.

Today, many Americans say that

these atrocities are none of our business,

that they are not our concern. I

disagree. Anytime the powerful turn

such weapons of terror and destruction

against the powerless it is our business.

The weapons in question are categorically

different. Chemical weapons,

we know, can kill not just dozens or

hundreds of people but tens of thousands

of innocents in a single attack—

tens of thousands. These weapons don’t

just pose a threat to the Syrian people

or to our allies in the region; they pose

a threat to every one of us, every

American, and, in particular, every

member of the U.S. Armed Forces.

If we allow Asad’s use of chemical

weapons to go unchecked and unanswered,

hostile forces around the world

will also assume that these terrible

tactics of demons such as Asad are permissible,

that they are OK. That America

cannot allow. That is why the massacres

in Syria are our business and

our concern, both as humans and as

Americans. America’s willingness to

stand for what is right should not end

at its borders.

Our intervention on behalf of those

in danger hasn’t always been popular.

Look back at history. There has always

been part of our society that prefers

isolation. Look prior to World War

I. Look prior to World War II. Some

prefer isolation. That is the easy thing

to do. But sitting on the sidelines isn’t

what made the United States of America

the greatest Nation in the world in

years past and, yes, today, and sitting

on the sidelines won’t make us a better

Nation tomorrow.

As America faces yet another crisis

of conscience, another opportunity to

intervene on behalf of humanity, my

mind returns to that turning point in

the world’s history when the United

States of America faced down an evil

regime that murdered millions of innocent

citizens. Millions of civilians and

prisoners of war were murdered by gas

in Nazi death camps—Belsen, Treblinka,

Auschwitz. Never again, swore

the world. Never again would we permit

the use of these poisonous weapons

of war.

Fourteen blocks from here, down

Constitution Avenue, is the Holocaust

Museum. We walk in there and see a

quote on the wall from Dante’s famous

‘‘Inferno.’’ Here is what it says: ‘‘The

hottest places in hell are reserved for

those who, in times of great moral crisis,

maintain their neutrality.’’ I repeat:

‘‘The hottest places in hell are reserved

for those who, in times of great

moral crisis, maintain their neutrality.’’

I have thought about those

words very often—and very often lately—

as I have considered whether America

should take action to avert further

atrocities in Syria.

In Europe, in World War II, far too

many were neutral. Far too many

around the world were neutral. Far too

many in America were neutral, and in

Europe, in World War II. Six million

Jews and tens of thousands of gypsies,

disabled people, gay people, and political

dissidents were murdered. Never

again.

Now we are faced with that choice

again. Some say it is not our fight.

Some say Syria is too far away. Some

say it is not in our security interest.

Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany,

Italy, and the United States—we

should all remember our history. There

were 1.2 million casualties in World

War I from these poisons.

We should remember our history.

Rabbi Hillel, a respected and famous

scholar, said more than 2,000 years ago:

‘‘If I care only for myself, what am I?

If not now, when?’’

I, HARRY REID, say: If not now, when?

I believe America must set the example

for the rest of the world. If America

must once again lead—as we have before

and we will again—to set an example

for the world, so be it. This is

America. It is who we are as a country.

That is what we do as a country. That

is where we stand as a country. That is

the American tradition of which I am

proud and a tradition which I have

faith will continue.

We are the United States of America.