Mr. President, it is

to that ominous resolution that I

would like to speak.

Within a few days the Senate will be

called upon to vote on whether to give

the President of the United States limited

authority to use military action in

response to Syrian President Asad’s

use of chemical weapons against his

own people. It is an enormous and

grave decision. It is the most serious

vote I can take.

When a U.S. Senator is called upon to

authorize America’s use of military action

or military might, it calls for the

most sober reflection, the most due

diligence analysis of the facts and the

compelling need because once you vote

to authorize the use of military might,

you cannot take it back. It is one of

the few votes you can’t take back. We

can vote on our budget this year, but

there will be another vote next year.

You can vote to confirm a member of

the Cabinet, but they serve at the

pleasure of the President. But once you

vote to use military might or military

action, it is irrevocable, so I take it

very seriously.

I say to the men and women of our

military that we owe them a tremendous

debt of gratitude. I think that

should not only be with yellow ribbons,

but we also owe it to them to do the

due diligence to choose the wisest,

most prudent course.

This is what I have done as I have

contemplated my vote on the Syria

resolution. I went to numerous briefings

before Asad used chemical weapons,

and I have gone to all of the briefings

since then. I participated as a

member of the Intelligence Committee

in a variety of meetings. I went to a

classified House and Senate briefing. I

have listened carefully to the President,

to the Secretary of State, to the

Secretary of Defense, and even had the

opportunity to sit with the Vice President

of the United States in the Situation

Room at the White House to go

over this situation and what options

are available to the United States of

America.

In addition to listening here in Washington,

I have also listened to my

Marylanders, whether at events or

meetings going around the State,

whether it has been grocery shopping

or just being out in the Maryland community.

I have also gotten thousands

of e-mails and calls from Maryland

constituents, and I want to thank them

for their civic engagement. They overwhelmingly

oppose military action in

Syria. My constituents have spoken

loudly and clearly. They don’t want a

war. They don’t want boots on the

ground. They don’t want an all-in effort.

They don’t want to use or expend

America’s talent and treasure on another

military expedition. They don’t

want war, and neither do I.

Yet the use of chemical weapons—a

weapon of mass destruction—grim and

ghoulish, mandates a response. The use

of chemical weapons flies against all

international law and international

norms. It is an act that should have

consequences or I believe it surely will

happen again—in Syria, possibly in

Korea, possibly used by Iran.

Since the attack, I have been waiting

and hoping for a worldwide reaction because

if it is serious enough for the

world to be aghast, then it is serious

enough for them to respond.

I have been waiting to hear from the

189 countries that are signatories to

the Chemical Weapons Convention. I

believe if you sign a treaty or a convention,

you sign up for the responsibility

that comes with that, which

means stop proliferation of the weapons

you signed against; stop the proliferation

of chemical weapons; also, if

necessary, to take action if mandated.

I am waiting to hear from the Arab

League. I wanted to hear from the Arab

League, beyond: Yes, we want Asad to

be accountable. I don’t know what that

means—hold him accountable. What

does that mean? Does it mean if we use

missiles they will send in Arab men to

defend Arab women and children? I

have not quite heard that.

I have waited to hear from our allies,

and there are a hearty, reliable few

who have supported us. Are they going

to help support the chemical weapons

treaty? Are they going to help support

the moderates in the opposition? Have

they called for a donor conference on

refugees? Hello out there.

Then there is the U.N. Security

Council. By the way, I applaud the

work of the U.N. weapons inspectors

and the U.N.’s work on refugees, but

where is the Security Council? People

will say: Oh, we can’t act unless the

Security Council acts. Three times

Asad enablers at the U.N., Russia and

China, have vetoed every effort to

move to a political solution—vetoed

three times efforts to move to a political

solution. The U.N. seems paralyzed

in this effort.

In deciding my vote, I had to be sure

that chemical weapons were used by

the Asad regime. I was 1 of 19 Senators

who voted against going to war in Iraq.

I did vote after 9/11 to use lethal action

against the Taliban, but when it came

to the Iraq war, as a member of the Intelligence

Committee I had reviewed

these briefs and I did not believe Saddam

Hussein had nuclear weapons so I

voted no. I was right.

This time is different because, after

extensive briefings and the evidence

that has been outlined to members of

the Intelligence Committee, I am satisfied

that, indeed, chemical weapons

were used in Syria and I am satisfied

the Asad regime gave the order to do

so.

There are those who say to me: Senator

BARB, aren’t you concerned about

the risks and the retaliations if we

take action? You bet I am. I worry

about that. I worry about my own

country. I worry about our own military.

I worry about treasured allies

such as Jordan, Israel, Turkey. But I

also worry about the risk of doing

nothing because, as I weigh this, I believe

the risk and retaliatory possibilities

are the same even if we do not act

because if they do not use them in retaliation

against us there is a very

good chance that if we leave it

unresponded to, they will use them

anyway. There is no guarantee that by

doing nothing the bad guys, who have

chemical weapons, will do nothing. In

fact, I fear that Asad, Iran, and North

Korea will be further emboldened.

Last, I had to review the President’s

resolution that is pending before us,

that came out of the Foreign Relations

Committee, modified, and the President’s

plan. The President’s plan is

very straightforward, his proposal is

very straightforward, a targeted limited

attack. His purpose is to deter and

to degrade; to deter Asad from using

those weapons again and to degrade

Asad’s capability and capacity to use

them.

I also listened to the President’s

promise—and I take him at his word—

that any action would not be boots on

the ground; that it is not an extended

air campaign; that it is not another

Iraq or Afghanistan; that we are not in

it to try to do regime change. That

must come from the Syrian opposition

themselves, and I hope others help do

that. It is meant to deter the use of

chemical weapons and to degrade

Asad’s capability.

I believe the President’s plan is the

best response to protect U.S. security

interests in the region and to show

commitment to our common security

interests with allies such as Turkey,

Jordan, and Israel. Therefore, after

great reflection and as much due diligence

as I could do, I want to announce

today to my colleagues, and most of all

to the people of Maryland who supported

me, that I will support the

President’s request for a targeted, limited

military action against the Syrian

President Bashar Asad’s regime in response

to the horrific, grim, and ghoulish

use of chemical weapons.

Let me be clear: I have no grand

hopes or illusions about what this

strike will do. I do not believe this

strike will stop Syria’s brutal civil

war. I do not believe this strike will

stop Asad from being a ruthless, brutal

dictator. I do not believe a strike will

eliminate all of his chemical weapons.

But I do believe it will deter and degrade

his capability to strike again,

and I do believe when you sign up for a

convention to ban the use of chemical

weapons, the United States of America

acts in accordance with its responsibility.

Syria is one of the toughest foreign

policy issues on which we have focused;

there are not many good options. Yet I

believe the President’s plan is the best

way and, as of this moment, the only

way forward. He has my support.

In today’s late-breaking news, I understand

Russia has now said: Oh, let’s

put these weapons under international

control. Where were the Russians during

the U.N. Security Council meetings

on those three other occasions? Is this

another tactic for delay? Is this just

another tactic to enable Asad to have

more time to focus?

I remain skeptical, but I will leave

that to the President to analyze the

Russians’ intent about what their follow through

is on that. Today is not to

mandate the strike. My vote does not

mandate a strike. But my vote is to

say: Mr. President, you are the Commander

in Chief. We can only have one

at a time. You analyze the situation

and if you think it is necessary to protect

the security of the United States

of America and to fulfill our responsibilities

under the conventions we

have signed on chemical weapons, you

have my support to act in what you

think is the best way and in our best

interests.

I look forward to additional debate

with my colleagues and also further in

this debate, in coming to closure, hopefully

this week.

I yield the floor.

I note the absence of a quorum.