Mr. President, we

come to this Chamber as we have many

times before—to make one of the most

difficult decisions we are tasked to

make: the authorization of the use of

American military power—this time in

Syria, to respond to the horrific attack,

including the use of chemical

weapons, of August 21 that took the

lives of 1,429 Syrians, including at least

426 children.

The world is watching, America is

waiting to see what we do in this

Chamber in response to the threat the

world faces from those who cross the

line of human decency and use chemical

weapons against anyone, anywhere

in the world.

The images of August 21 were sickening

and, in my view, the world cannot

ignore the inhumanity and horror

of what Bashar al-Asad did.

As I have had to say too many times

before as a Member of Congress: I do

not take the responsibility to authorize

military force lightly or make such

decisions easily. I voted against the

war in Iraq when it was popular, according

to the polls, to vote for the war

and strongly supported the withdrawal

of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. But

today I urge my colleagues to support

this tightly crafted, clearly focused

resolution to give the President authorization

to use military force in the

face of this horrific crime against humanity.

Yes, there are clearly risks to any action

we authorize, but the consequences

of inaction—the consequences

of standing down from fully

upholding the norms of international

behavior—are greater and graver still:

further humanitarian disaster in Syria,

regional instability, the loss of American

credibility around the world, an

emboldened Iran and North Korea, and

the disintegration of international law.

This vote will be among the most difficult

any of us will be asked to make.

But the American people expect us to

make the hard decisions and take the

hard votes. They expect us to put aside

political differences and personal

ideologies, forget partisanship and preconceptions,

forget the polls and personal

consequences.

This is a moment for a profile in

courage—a moment for each of us to do

what we know is right—based on what

we know is in the best interest of the

United States, regardless of the polls

or pontifications of political pundits.

To be clear, the authorization Senator

CORKER and I seek is for focused

action, with a clear understanding that

American troops will not be on the

ground in combat.

We have worked closely to put politics

aside, weigh the facts, search our

consciences, and pass a resolution in

committee that we believe is in the national

security interest of the American

people.

I have said before and will say again:

This is not a declaration of war but a

declaration of our values to the world.

I want to thank Senator CORKER for

being a close partner in helping to tailor

and focus the language of this resolution

so it reflects the will of the committee,

the interests of the American

people, and gives the President the authority

he needs to respond to Syria’s

use of chemical weapons against its

own people.

What we know. What we know is

clear, notwithstanding Asad’s interview

and his denials.

According to the declassified intelligence

assessment, we know—with

high confidence—that the Syrian Government

carried out a chemical weapons

attack in the Damascus suburbs on

August 21.

We know that the buck stops with

Asad—his interview-denials aside. We

know that he controls the regime’s

stockpiles of chemical agents, including

mustard, sarin, and VX gas, and

has thousands of munitions capable of

delivering them, again, under his control.

It is inconceivable—and defies all

logic—that he would not know about

the preparations and deployment of

these horrific weapons.

We know that personnel involved in

the program are carefully vetted to ensure

loyalty to the regime and the security

of the program.

We know that chemical weapons personnel

from the Syrian Scientific Studies

and Research Center, subordinate

to the regime’s Ministry of Defense,

were operating in the Damascus suburb

of ‘Adra from Sunday, August 18 until

early in the morning on Wednesday August

21 near an area the regime uses to

mix chemical weapons including sarin.

Human intelligence, as well as signal

and geospatial intelligence have shown

regime activity in the preparation of

chemicals prior to the attack, including

the distribution and use of gas

masks.

Some may still be skeptical about

Asad’s direct involvement, but clearly

the buck stops with Asad when it

comes to the use of these weapons.

Some may also be skeptical that we

have not done enough to allow diplomacy

to work, but the fact is we have

tried diplomacy. We have gone to the

UN on many occasions, and it has only

bought Asad more time.

Notwithstanding Russia’s belated

offer today to take action, which, by

the way, only be on the table today

specifically because of the threat of the

use of force, let us not forget it has

been their intransigence that brought

us to this point in the first place.

The fact is, on August 28, a week

after the attack, Russia blocked a UN

Security Council resolution that called

‘‘for all necessary measures’’ to be

taken, and simply called for any state

that used chemical weapons to be held

accountable.

On the day of the attack, August 21,

Russia blocked a Security Council

press statement simply expressing

‘‘concern’’ that chemical weapons

might have been used.

On August 6, Russia blocked another

press statement welcoming the news

that a UN investigations team would

investigate three sites, and calling for

their full and fettered access to those

sites.

Russia has also vetoed a Security

Council resolution enshrining the June

30 Geneva Communique brokered by

Kofi Annan, vetoed a resolution calling

for an end to violence in Syria, vetoed

a draft resolution endorsing the Arab

League’s plan of action that would

have condemned human rights violations.

They blocked a press statement calling

for humanitarian access to the besieged

city of Homs, and one calling for

Syrian authorities to provide the UN

with humanitarian access.

Over the course of the conflict in

Syria, the United States Government,

specifically the State Department, has

met consistently with its close allies

and partners, as well as with Syria’s

neighbors, to help prepare the region to

detect, prevent, and respond to potential

use or proliferation of chemical

weapons.

As Ambassador Power acknowledged

in her remarks at the Center for American

Progress on September 6, the

United States has regularly engaged

with the Russians and Iranians to attempt

to get them to use their influence

to stop the Asad regime from

using chemical weapons.

The same day, September 6, the

United States and 10 other countries

issued a joint statement condemning

the Asad regime’s use of chemical

weapons. They were: Australia, Canada,

France, Italy, Japan, the Republic

of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey,

and Great Britain. Since then 14 other

nations have also signed onto that

statement: Albania, Croatia, Denmark,

Estonia, Germany, Honduras, Hungary,

Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Morocco,

Qatar, Romania, and the United Arab

Emirates.

It is only the threat by the President,

and this resolution, that would drive

both Russia and Syria to the negotiating

table.

The facts are clear. We have tried diplomacy.

Let us understand that this action is

not a choice of force or diplomacy. It is

about both.

It is about enforcing international

norms that will, at the end of the day,

leverage necessary UN action and help

bring about a political solution.

For those who want to see UN Security

Council action, those who want to

push Syria to sign a chemical weapons

agreement and give up their weapons,

this resolution is the best path to getting

there.

Let me say to my colleagues who believe

that the authorization of the use

of military force will be nothing more

than a pin-pick. This resolution will

have clear and verifiable consequences.

It will help keep these weapons in

check, degrade Asad’s ability to deploy

them, and prevent the proliferation of

chemical weapons and their use by

anyone, anywhere in the world.

The resolution will have clear consequences,

but it is also not openended.

It appropriately narrows the scope,

duration, and breadth of the authority

granted to meet Congressional concerns,

and the concerns of the American

people.

It is tightly tailored to give the

President ‘‘necessary and appropriate’’

authority to use military force to respond

to the use of weapons of mass destruction

by the Syrian government;

protect the national security interests

of the United States and our allies and

partners; and degrade Syria’s capacity

to use such weapons in the future.

It has a requirement for determination

that the use of military force is

necessary, that appropriate diplomatic

and other peaceful means to prevent

the deployment and use of chemical

weapons by Syria have been used, and

that the United States has both a specific

military plan to achieve the goal

of responding to the use of weapons of

mass destruction by the Syrian government

and that the use of military force

is consistent with the broader goals of

U.S. strategy toward Syria, including

achieving a negotiated settlement to

the conflict, and a limitation that

specifies that the resolution ‘‘does not

authorize the use of United States

Armed Forces on the ground in Syria

for the purposes of combat operations’’

assuring there will be no ‘‘boots on the

ground.’’

The authorization would end after 60

days, with the President having the

ability to request and certify for another

30 days, and with Congress having

an opportunity to pass a resolution

of disapproval. It provides for an integrated

United States Government

strategy for Syria, including a comprehensive

review of current and

planned U.S. diplomatic, political, economic

and military policy towards

Syria, and requires a Report to Congress

on the status of the military operations.

I know my colleagues on both

sides will want to offer a range of

amendments.

Let me say in conclusion, history has

taught us harsh lessons when it comes

to the use of chemical weapons.

The images we saw of children lined

on the floor on August 21 were not the

first images the world has ever seen of

the horrors of chemical attacks.

We saw them almost 100 years ago in

World War I.

If we do not learn from and live by

the lessons of the past, if we fail the

test of history then we are destined

and doomed to repeat it.

If we allow the use and proliferation

of chemical weapons despite the

world’s horror at the gruesome and

horrific use of mustard gas, phosgene,

and chlorine at the beginning of last

century, then we risk the same horrors

again in this century.

Let us not fail the test of history.

Let us say to the world that we cannot

allow anyone to use chemical

weapons again, and that we can never

allow such weapons to fall into the

hands of stateless-actors and terrorists

who would unleash them against America

or American interests around the

world.

I repeat what I said earlier: Let us

understand that this action is not

about force or diplomacy. It is about

both. It is about enforcing international

norms that will, at the end of

the day, leverage necessary UN action

and help bring about a political solution.

For those who want to see UN Security

Council action, those who want to

push Syria to sign a chemical weapons

agreement and give up their weapons,

this is the best path to getting there.

Make no mistake, the use of chemical

weapons by the Syrian regime ultimately

represents a national security

threat to the United States, a global

security threat we cannot ignore.

Let me read what our former colleague

and respected Chairman of the

Foreign Relations Committee, Senator

Lugar, recently said in the press: ‘‘We

are talking about weapons of mass destruction.

We are talking about chemical

weapons in particular which may

be the greatest threat to our country of

any security risk we have—much more

than any other government, or another

nation—because they can be used by

terrorists, by very small groups.

The use of those weapons has got to

concern us to the point that we take

action whenever any country crosses

that line and use these weapons as we

have seen in Syria.’’

Senator Lugar is right. We must be

concerned—deeply concerned—and that

is why we must act. The danger of proliferation

is too great—too much of a

risk—for us to stand silent and stand

down.

I urge my colleagues to put aside politics,

polls, and preconceptions and do

what we know, at the end of the day, is

in the national security of the American

people.

Again, I want to thank Senator

CORKER and members of the committee

for working quickly together to respond

to this crisis with a well-crafted

resolution that is a declaration of our

values and will send a clear message

that we—and the world—cannot and

will not tolerate the use of chemical

weapons anywhere—by anyone.