



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 113th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 159

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2013

No. 117

Senate

The Senate met at 2:00 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TIM Kaine, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Shepherd of our souls, the center of our joy, we look to You today for strength and wisdom. Lord, we acknowledge that unless You guard our Nation, our efforts to find security are futile.

Today illuminate the minds of our Senators with the light of Your insights, enabling them to act decisively. As they anticipate the forces that threaten freedom in our world, lead them on the path that will bring life, liberty, and joy.

We pray in Your merciful Name.
Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter.

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, September 9, 2013.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable TIM Kaine, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. Kaine thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

THE CHAPLAIN

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I just had a brief conversation with the Chaplain, who came down to wish me well on my return. He indicated he was going to do a special prayer this afternoon for the Senate in this time of crisis. I am always aware of how he looks out for us spiritually. The prayer is for Democrats, Republicans—all of us. His prayers are very heart-warming. Not only is he our chaplain, but he is a retired admiral in the U.S. Navy. He has been all over the world in that capacity. We appreciate him very much. We don't acknowledge him as often as we should. I appreciate how he is always available and so kind and thoughtful to everyone.

AUTHORIZING THE LIMITED AND SPECIFIED USE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES AGAINST SYRIA—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move to consider S.J. Res. 21.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the joint resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:
Motion to proceed to S.J. Res. 21 to authorize limited and specified use of the United States Armed Forces against Syria.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this evening the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider a couple of would-be judges, Caproni and Broderick, both from the Southern District

of New York, at 5:30 p.m., and then there will be two rollcall votes on the confirmation of those nominations. We may only have one rollcall vote and one voice vote, but we will get both of them done today.

I just moved to proceed to the joint resolution reported last week by the Foreign Relations Committee to authorize the limited use of force against Syria. This matter demands the attention of the Senate and this country. It is this resolution the Senate will turn to. Regardless of where Senators stand on the merits of this issue, we should have this debate. I hope all Senators will support proceeding to this measure. That vote will occur sometime on Wednesday on the motion to proceed.

Under a previous order, at 11 tomorrow morning, the Senate is to have a motion to proceed to the energy efficiency bill. It is obvious we are not going to be able to do that. I will work with the Republican leader to reach a consent agreement to defer consideration of that bill to a later time.

On the Syria resolution, I intend that the Senate should have a full and open debate. I encourage Senators to come to the floor to begin that debate.

Also this week, President Obama will come to the Capitol to address the Democratic caucus. He has also extended his invitation to the Republicans. I have not heard back from the Republicans as to whether they wish to hear from the President.

President Obama will address the Nation tomorrow evening. Senior administration officials will brief all Senators in a classified session on Wednesday. There will be other meetings in the White House today with Democratic and Republican Senators. The Senate will give this matter the serious attention it deserves.

CHEMICAL WEAPONS

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,

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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World War I, there were 1,200,000 casualties from attacks with deadly toxins—chlorine gas, mustard gas, and other deadly 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 dur-

ing 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.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there is an order outstanding. I ask unanimous consent that the order until 5 o'clock today be modified on the motion to proceed, with the other aspects of the order remaining in place.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of debate on the motion to proceed to S.J. Res. 21 until 5 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak to the issues the majority leader just addressed. I don't anticipate speaking for more than 12 to 15 minutes. I know the minority leader is delayed in being able to be here. I would be happy to defer to him when he arrives or I would be happy to defer to someone coming back to speak on the business of the day.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, President Obama will finally make his case to the American people tomorrow, explaining why he wants to take military action against Syria. His explanation is long overdue.

I think I have a pretty good idea of what I expect he will say. First, he will explain that we have compelling evidence that it was Asad himself who used long-banned chemical weapons to murder his own people. This is not seri-

ously contested. Neither I nor perhaps I think any of my colleagues here dispute these sad facts. It has been well documented by our intelligence sources. As a member of that committee, I have had access to those sources, and I don't doubt the conclusion of the President and others that Asad is responsible for this attack.

The President will also most likely explain that such a horrendous violation of international norms deserves a worldwide response of condemnation. Who could possibly look at those standards and those rooms full of dead children and not agree that the perpetrators have to face consequences for their crimes?

The President will also surely discuss the issue of credibility. He is likely to maintain, as he did recently in Stockholm, that it is not his own credibility at stake, nor even American credibility, but the credibility of the international community that will be harmed by inaction.

I agree with those who say the President's credibility and our Nation's credibility are linked. They are. However, with his now notorious and, I believe, ill-considered “red line” comment, President Obama has forced us to debate a military attack in yet another Middle Eastern country. Unfortunately, it appears that the purpose of this military attack first and foremost is perhaps to defend his own credibility. I am certain that if the President had not drawn his red line, we would not be having this discussion. In that case, Asad's use of such weapons would be roundly condemned as yet another example of his horrendous brutality, but we would be no more eager to engage militarily in his civil war than we have been as the other 100,000 Syrian people were being slaughtered by more conventional means.

Make no mistake—it is the credibility issue that has brought us to this pass, and the credibility issue is of President Obama's own making—his and his alone.

So tomorrow evening the President will need to explain to the American public exactly what will be achieved by this limited, focused attack, as described by the administration, beyond simply a token punishment for a horrendous crime in defense of his credibility. The President has said the proposed limited attack is to be a “shot across the bow.” His Secretary of State, Secretary Kerry, has said it is going to be unbelievably small. We need to know what the plan is, and will be, should President Asad be undeterred by this unbelievably small, shot-across-the-bow attack. What if he isn't? What then? What do we do next? The President needs to explain that.

We need to know how this escalation is likely to influence extremist radical fighters now active in Syria—extremist radical fighters. There is not a line between good guys and bad guys here. There is the infiltration of Al Qaeda, al-Nusra, and other terrorist organiza-

tions and individuals with those seeking to overturn Asad. So it is not clear just how Syria will turn out should Asad be deposed. I don't think these extremist fighters will be overly concerned with an “unbelievably small, shot across the bow” response by the United States.

What will Hezbollah and Hamas and Al Qaeda affiliate fighters do when this “show of force” is over? What is the President's plan of action if the chemical weapons fall into the hands of these anti-American jihadists? And how about the always-threatened spillover of the Syria conflict into Lebanon or Turkey or Jordan? Will an attack intended to slap Asad's wrist while defending President Obama's credibility make expansion of the conflict more likely or less likely? Most importantly, the President needs to explain to the American people more thoroughly exactly how America's national security and best interests will be served by this response.

The President, in my opinion, must also address additional concerns that are widely—almost universally—shared by the American people. We all know that taking America to war without support from the people is the surest path to disaster. I suggest this must be avoided, and the President is going to have to make his case as to how to avoid that.

Over this last week I visited with Hoosiers from across Indiana to gather their input. Through these visits, as well as calls and e-mails by the thousands, the vast majority—shockingly, the majority of Hoosiers I have heard from are opposed to U.S. military engagement in Syria. As all conscientious lawmakers, I know I have to balance the views of my constituents with my own judgment on how best to represent their interests and the interests of our country.

In this case, I must first ask myself, what do the people back home in my State know that many of the rest of us here in Washington perhaps do not, or at least have expressed?

First, the people back home know that America has been at war in far-off lands for more than a decade—12 years on. They have seen long repeated deployments of their loved ones, and they have seen the body bags come home. They are aware of sacrifices that have been made in the name of protecting our interests, but they are less aware of positive results of those sacrifices.

They see Iraq descending again into conflict as its own citizens continue to slaughter one another because of different interpretations of the Koran or different political motivations or just pure outright quests for power. They see a corrupt government there that authorizes overflights of Russian aircraft bringing modern weapons to Syria to fuel a similar conflict.

Hoosiers see an Afghanistan so deeply corrupt and ungrateful to the United States that the current regime tries to extort huge ransom payments simply

to permit us to remove equipment and personnel from that sorry country. They do not see meaningful progress toward a democratic, stable, and humane government that was to be the objective of American sacrifice of blood and treasure. They do not see how our 12 years of effort have contributed to our own national security interests.

Hoosiers look at the spiraling disaster in Egypt, where the choices have been an extremist, deeply anti-American Islamic radicalism or a brutal and undemocratic military dictatorship, both benefiting from billions of American taxpayer dollars spent on weapons or lining uniform pockets. In the meantime, fellow Christians are being killed in their churches.

Simply put, the people of Indiana do not see that American policy and action have attained meaningful results in the Middle East. Instead, they see a region of continuing and increasing violence, chaos, and disintegration. They are war weary and they are discouraged after more than a decade of wars that have not produced the desired outcomes.

What they do not see is an articulate response. They do not know what our regional strategy is in the Middle East because no one is explaining it, much less pursuing it. They cannot measure progress because they do not know the destination. And they cannot evaluate this latest proposal for a fourth military engagement in the Middle East because they cannot see how it contributes to our own security here at home.

More importantly, they worry that a focused, limited attack on Syria will end up being something else entirely because so little thought has been devoted to potential unintended consequences. Yes, they are war weary, but the American people are also war wise.

In addition to the above unanswered questions, for me, one of the most important questions is how this proposed limited strike will affect Iran's perception of our resolve and our ability to prevent that country from acquiring nuclear weapons capability. It is not so much what we do or how we do it but how Iran perceives the action we take. This may be the most significant question of all because, unlike Syria, Iran poses threats to our core national security interests.

Part of the administration's argument is that to do nothing would embolden the Iranian regime as they pursue their own weapons-of-mass-destruction programs. But I think we have to raise the question, is that really so, or is it, perhaps, the reverse? Will a limited punitive attack discourage the mullahs in Iran because of some degree of destruction—remember, unbelievably small—or will it actually encourage the Iranians because there is no followup option or broader strategic context informing our policy? If an attack is ineffective in altering Asad's behavior or fortune, will it not actually encourage Iran in pursuing its own

weapons program? I have not heard the administration address this question.

Also, will a fourth military engagement in the Middle East make it harder to assemble popular and political support for action should Iran's behavior make that necessary? My constant fear here during the past several years, as I have been engaged on the Iranian issue of the pursuit of nuclear weapons, has been that our country will be too militarily, politically, and economically exhausted to confront the real strategic enemy when our core interests require it. I fear a Syria attack will make this problem even more difficult. To my knowledge, no one has yet to address this question within the administration, which President Obama, like the previous three Presidents, has declared a nuclear-weapons-capable Iran to be "unacceptable."

I think this is a critical question we must have to ask ourselves. For all of those who are saying: We will change the perception of Iran to the point where they will change their behavior in the pursuit of nuclear weapons by a, quote, unbelievably small shot across the bow or a military response that could lead us into further conflict in the Middle East—I think this undermines our credibility. I think the question has to be asked: Is the reverse going to happen as a consequence of all of this?

This is a deeply historic and profound moment for our Nation. It carries an importance that goes well beyond Syria or even the Middle East. This debate carries important consequences for the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of our government.

To refuse the Commander in Chief war-making authorities when he has asked for them is not a decision any of us can take lightly.

We must all balance the views of the people we represent—even when they have been nearly unanimous—with other elements, such as the abstract, unknowable geostrategic factors that could carry profound consequences not just for this year or next year, for this generation, but for many generations; and such as the compelling moral arguments that resonate with special strength in our unique Nation guided from birth by moral principles; and now even the constitutional challenges that could affect the delicate balance we have maintained for two centuries.

I will weigh all I have said before I announce how I intend to vote on the resolution before us. I will defer to the President's request to address the Nation. In my opinion, consequential actions proposed by the President need to be clarified and numerous questions need to be answered before we grant the authority to the President to engage America in yet another Middle East conflict.

With that, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I wish to address the subject of Syria.

First of all, I wish to commend to anyone who is listening to my voice to view the videos the intelligence community has released. They came from social media. There are 13 videos that came from a body of in excess of 100 videos, but they show the horror of what happens to the human body with an attack by a weapon of mass destruction—in this case, chemical weapons, a gas called sarin.

It is my hope the President, when he speaks to the Nation on Tuesday, will show clips of those videos because I think very few Americans have seen the extent of those videos, even though they have been shown on some cable shows in some limited amounts. They could see the range of why, almost a century ago, in 1925, the nations of the world came together in a treaty after the use of chemical weapons in World War I. This treaty banned the use of chemical weapons anywhere, any time, including in war, because of the horrific nature their use causes. In the 1990s this was subsequently reaffirmed in a convention or some kind of conclave which the nations of the world—I believe in excess of 180 nations—signed banning the use of chemical weapons.

If you watch the videos, you will see why. You will see what happens to innocent human beings as they struggle for life before the throes of death overtake them. You will see this on the videos. Of course, parents may wish to use discretion because it is going to make a lasting impression. You will see how the body starts to shut down by the nerves being attacked.

Interestingly, for the first time in a CBS interview today, President Asad of Syria has said, has admitted, today, that Syria has chemical weapons. Up to this point that was denied. No wonder he would want to deny, because when you see what happens in the use of them and what it does to the human nervous system—and I don't wish to be graphic, because I want anybody listening to what I am saying to watch them. I hope the President will show them Tuesday night, to see how the human body convulses when it attacks the nervous system—the convulsions, the twitching, what happens to the face, the respiratory system, and all of the evidence that comes from that.

The American people need to know what we are dealing with, not only in Syria but in other nations that possess chemical weapons. This is not only sarin, which was the gas used here, but also mustard gas and a toxin called VX that directly attacks the nervous system. It does not have to be inhaled,

like mustard gas or sarin, to do its evil deed. Instead, VX can be absorbed through the skin.

If the American people understand the consequences of the use of this, they will understand why it is classified as a weapon of mass destruction, along with biological weapons of mass destruction introducing some plague among a community of innocents and, of course, the weapon of mass destruction that most everybody recognizes, the nuclear weapon.

There are three weapons of mass destruction: chemical, biological, and nuclear. This is why, in the family of civilized nations, we have said their use is so abhorrent that civilized humans say they should be banned. But they weren't. They were used extensively on August 21.

Before I give the unclassified evidence, I wish to point out that maybe there is a little opening on the occasion of the Russian Foreign Minister today, since our Secretary of State, almost in an offhanded comment a few days ago, said it would certainly be a game changer if he, Asad, would allow the international community to come in and take control of his Syrian chemical weapons. The Russian Foreign Minister today picked that up. Supposedly there is a comment by an official out of Syria who says that is worth looking into. I can't speak to the authenticity of that comment. I have heard it was said.

Whatever it is, of course, Asad is the decisionmaker and it is ultimately going to come down on him. But in the meantime, what the United States ought to do—and the Congress of the United States ought to authorize what the President of the United States has requested, that the Congress back him in giving him the authority to use a limited, short duration retaliation in degrading Asad's capability of utilizing these weapons in the future.

If Congress will give the President that authority, it may well be the additional incentive for the ultimate decisionmaker, President Asad, to do what the Russian Foreign Minister has suggested. That would be a good thing.

In the meantime, they are going to be debating this and we are going to be put to the question: Do we support the President in this time of peril?

Let us look at the facts. I think when you see the videos, clearly, most every reasonable human being is going to conclude chemical weapons were used on innocents in the Damascus suburbs on the night of August 21.

The question then, of course, is, is there a chain of custody to show in fact they came from the Syrian army? There is an unclassified body of evidence that clearly shows, to put it in the speak of the intelligence community, we have high confidence. That means it happened.

How did that happen? The assessment is the Syrian chemical weapons personnel, who are associated with the chemical weapons part of the Syrian

command, were preparing chemical munitions prior to the attack. This is all unclassified. There were streams of data of human signals and geospatial intelligence that revealed regime activities that were associated with the preparations for that chemical weapons attack. Syria chemical weapons personnel, we know, were operating in the Damascus suburb from August 18 all the way through August 21. That was the suburb that was attacked. Multiple streams of intelligence indicate the Syrian army executed the rocket and artillery attack against those suburbs in the early morning hours of August 21. We have satellite detections that corroborate those attacks from a regime-controlled neighborhood to where the attacks landed. At the same time, social media reports started exploding about a chemical attack in the Damascus suburbs. Those social media reports started coming at 2:30 in the morning. Three hospitals in Damascus received approximately 3,600 patients displaying the symptoms of a nerve agent exposure, and they received them in less than 3 hours on the morning of August 21.

As I said earlier, there have been over 100 videos attributed to the attack. This has been distilled down into 13 videos, many of them showing large numbers of bodies exhibiting the physical signs of nerve agent exposure. Any Member of the Senate will have access to the classified information that shows the Syrian opposition does not have the capability to fabricate those videos or the physical symptoms verified by the medical personnel.

So when we put all of this together, with past Syrian practice and some of the small-scale attacks they have done previously, the conclusion is obvious: The Syrian regime of Bashar Asad was willing and directed the attack on August 21.

To this Senator, who has had the privilege of seeing and hearing classified information—and I have visited with President Asad three times, the last time being 6 years ago where the two of us had a sharp exchange over what was happening in Lebanon and the fact he was harboring Hamas and Hezbollah, which of course he denied—the conclusion is obvious: There is a substantial body of information that corroborates that the Syrian Government was responsible for the chemical weapons attack on August 21.

There is additional information for the Senators to see, but the question is, Are we going to agree to the President's request that we authorize him to attack? If we don't, where does that leave the President on any kind of negotiations in the future? If the President decides to go ahead and attack, we automatically give to the opponents in these countries—especially President Asad and North Korea and Iran—the obvious scenario that the American people are so divided that they won't support the President. So if he were to decide to attack—knowing it is his re-

sponsibility to provide for the national security, and he has sworn to provide for that national security—we will look so divided at that point, whatever the scenario is for the future.

What about the mindset of other people who want to do harm to the United States? Does it give additional license to North Korea if we were to do nothing? North Korea is sitting on a huge stockpile of chemical weapons, not to mention their nuclear weapons. What about Iran? We are very concerned as they continue to energize weapons material and march down the road perhaps to building a nuclear weapon. What kind of message does it send to Iran? Just game that out. If Iran had a nuclear weapon or felt free to use chemical weapons, what would that do to the interests of the United States in that region of the world, not to mention our allies in the region, of which there are many.

So it is clear to this Senator. I will admit I don't know why the President did not keep his own counsel and make the decision without saying he wanted to come to Congress, but he made that decision, and now it is up to us.

Hopefully, there may be some validity to this report coming from the Russian Foreign Minister, but we won't know that for a long while, until, as we say, the proof is in the pudding with Asad turning over control of all the chemical weapons to an international body. In the meantime, are we going to support the President? Clearly, in the interest of the national security of this country and our allies, I think that is a position we must take. I will vote yes on the resolution.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, what is the pending business before the Senate?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senate is on the motion to proceed to S.J. Res. 21.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Which is?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Syria resolution.

Ms. MIKULSKI. 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 Presi-

dent'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 followthrough 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.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the situation in Syria and the historic choice facing this Congress and America. I have been deeply concerned about the situation in Syria since March of 2011, when thousands of Syrians from all backgrounds peacefully protested for a change in the politics and the economy of their country. I think many of us believed these peaceful protests would lead to the end of an autocratic Asad regime, just as other despots have fallen in other parts of the Arab world.

Yet President Bashar al-Asad, like his father before him, Hafez al-Asad, instead responded with horrific violence to suppress the aspirations of his own people. With the disturbing help of Russia, Hezbollah, and Iran, Asad has managed to hang on to power and turn his country into a humanitarian nightmare.

I met with the Russian Ambassador to the United States here in my office in Washington on this issue. I visited the refugee camps along the Turkish border. I talked with the moderate Syrian opposition in Istanbul. I discussed this situation with the Turkish President, Mr. Gul, and their Foreign Minister, Davutoglu, and met with many Chicago-area Syrian Americans.

I hoped diplomatic and economic pressure would bring an end to the mayhem and human suffering in Syria. I know the American people feel a responsibility for those overseas in need and those who are struggling to find freedom. But I also know something else about the people of my State of Illinois, and I believe of this country: They are weary of war.

Then came the August 21 chemical attack in the suburbs of Damascus in the middle of the night. At that moment an important challenge was thrown down to the international community. That is not in any way to diminish the violence that has taken place in Syria over the last several years. Over 100,000 died in that violence.

But when it comes to the use of chemical weapons, the world made a decision almost 100 years ago about their use—even in war. How did we reach this international consensus on

this horrible weapon? We saw firsthand what it could do. The large-scale use of chemical weapons in World War I killed many and left many wounded and disabled.

Those who have some memory of this war—either from a history class or having spoken to someone who served there—understand what it meant. These photos can't do justice to the devastation of chemical weapons and poison gas, but this is a German gas attack on the Eastern Front in World War I. We can see that as the gas billowed, the victims were anyone who happened to be in its wake.

This is also a photograph of British troops from World War I who were subjected to the poison gas, the chemical weapon of the day, and blinded during the battle of Estaire in 1918. These photos show just a snapshot of the use of poison gases which don't reach the level of virulence of those used today. Yet maybe even more poignant are the audio recordings of the actual former World War I British soldiers maintained by the BBC for generations so the experience would not be forgotten.

This is one excerpt of British troops struggling to cope with the effects of chemical warfare:

Propped up against a wall was a dozen men—all gassed—their colours were black, green and blue, tongues hanging out and eyes staring—one or two were dead and others beyond human aid, some were coughing up green froth from their lungs—as we advanced we passed many more men lying in the ditches and gutterways—shells were bursting all around.

This BBC report went on to say:

My Respirator fell to pieces with the continual removal and readjustment—the gas closed my eyes and filled them with matter and I could not see. I was left lying in the trench with one other gassed man and various wounded beings and corpses and forced to lie and spit, cough and gasp the whole of the day in that trench.

Another soldier recorded by the BBC said:

... the faces of our lads who lay in the open changed colour and presented a gruesome spectacle. Their faces and hands gradually assumed a blue and green color and their buttons and metal fittings on their uniform were all discoloured. Many lay there with their legs drawn up and clutching their throats.

As a result of the horrors of World War I, in 1925 the Geneva Protocol prohibited the use of chemical and biological weapons in war. It was drawn up and signed at a conference held in Geneva under the auspices of the League of Nations, the precursor of the United Nations. This happened in June of 1925, and it became a force of law in February of 1928. Syria was a signatory to this agreement.

Let me read the opening of this protocol. It is even relevant today.

Whereas the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of all analogous liquids, materials or devices, has been justly condemned by the general opinion of the civilized world; and

Whereas the prohibition of such use has been declared in Treaties to which the majority of Powers of the world are Parties; and

To the end that this prohibition shall be universally accepted as a part of International Law, binding alike the conscience and the practice of nations.

What the world was saying in 1925 was clear: These chemical weapons would never, ever be accepted in the civilized world. This message was reaffirmed by the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling, and Use of Chemical Weapons, which went into effect in 1997 and to which almost every country in the world has signed—almost every country. Those who have not signed: Angola, Egypt, North Korea, South Sudan, and Syria.

While not completely taken off the world's battlefields—notably in the case of Iraq, which used poison gas against Iran and its own Kurdish people in the 1980s—the global prohibition against using chemical weapons has been largely upheld for almost a century, that is, until last month in Damascus, Syria. Syria has one of the largest stockpiles of chemical weapons in the world.

At our hearing last week, I asked General Dempsey whether the reports which we have from the French were accurate. They reported the Syrians now have almost 1,000 tons of chemical agents and hundreds of tons of the deadly gas sarin, which has been detected in the pathological investigation of those who were victims on August 21 in Damascus, Syria.

Despite all international warnings not to do so—the Syrian Government is literally a superpower when it comes to chemical weapons and has an arsenal on such a large scale—on August 21, in the desperation of war, Bashar Asad unleashed these chemical weapons in his own city on his own people.

These are horrible pictures of what happened as a result of that attack. I have seen worse. One room of children stacked like cordwood—victims of these chemical weapons. We don't believe it was the first time he has used them, and his father used them before him. But it is the largest scale we have ever seen of the use of chemical weapons by Asad in Syria.

Syria has crossed the line the civilized world said must never be crossed. Not only has the community of nations agreed that such weapons are never to be used but other regimes with weapons of mass destruction or plans for such weapons—including North Korea and Iran—are undoubtedly watching to see what the world will do now.

Now that Bashar Asad has used chemical weapons in Syria, now that the world has reported it, now that the photos are there for the world to see, and now that the pathological investigations are completed, what will the world do? Ideally there is a place to resolve it—the U.N. Security Council. But, sadly, both Russia and China have said they will veto not only any effort

to hold Asad to account, they have literally vetoed efforts to even pass resolutions condemning the use of chemical weapons without specificity in Syria.

Russia's behavior is incredible and particularly perverse given the thousands of Russian soldiers who were victims of chemical weapon attacks in World War I. In May 1915 alone, Russian soldiers on the Eastern Front suffered 9,000 casualties—1,000 of them fatalities—as a result of German chemical weapons.

Today I was in the airport in Chicago, and the news was flashing about an overture made by President Putin to try to put an end to this controversy. I, of course, salute and applaud any effort to resolve this the right way and verifiable way, and to do it with dispatch.

What I understand this proposal to be is that the Syrians will somehow destroy their cache of chemical weapons and, of course, forswear never to use them. That would be a good opportunity, but it will be a difficult outcome because investigating with a third party, such as the United Nations, verifying where these weapons are, removing them from Syria in the midst of a civil war, is particularly challenging. If there is a way to do this diplomatically, safely, and to do it in a fashion where we can be certain this type of atrocity will not occur again, we absolutely have a responsibility to pursue it.

I don't understand how Russia and China can be signatories to the 1925 Geneva Protocols and the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and then turn around and protect Syria in the Security Council of the United Nations. If there is one international agency that should be involved in any major diplomatic effort to resolve this peacefully, it should be the United Nations.

We should call on Mr. Putin to step forward with the leaders in China and say they will work with the Security Council to execute any diplomatic policy that can avoid further military confrontation. Until then, make no mistake, President Putin's proposal today, and the activities we are seeing and hearing from Syria, are a direct result of President Obama's leadership. He has stepped up—even though it is an unpopular position with some in this country—and said we cannot ignore this redline created by the world when it came to chemical weapons. It is time for others to stand and join us in stopping the advancement and use of chemical weapons once and for all.

I have been listening to this Syria debate, and I cannot say how many times I have harkened back to that time 12 years ago when we debated entering the war in Iraq. It was another one of those votes that come along in the course of a congressional career that keeps you awake at night.

I was serving on the Intelligence Committee in the Senate. I sat through

hour after hour of hearings about the suspected weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but it never came together in a credible way as far as I was concerned. There was such a rush to war 12 years ago. Twenty-three of us voted no—22 Democrats and 1 Republican. I can recall the scene. It was late at night, after midnight, right here in the well of the Senate when three of us were left. It was Kent Conrad of North Dakota and, of course, from Minnesota our friend, the late Senator who served with so much distinction and spoke out so many times on issues of morals and ethics. We cast the vote no and waited in this empty Chamber.

I thought about that vote so many times. I think it was the right vote to vote no, but there comes a moment in history when we have to stand as civilized nations and say to those who are willing to ignore the rules and to break the rules that a line cannot be crossed. I hope we can get that done, and not just for the memory of Senator Wellstone and Senator Conrad, but in memory of so many who served here and faced these challenges in the past in our history. I hope we can find a diplomatic solution that will avoid any military use, but I know the reason we have reached this point in diplomacy with this Putin overture has more to do with the President being determined to stand for a matter of principle than almost anything else. We have to continue to make it clear that we find it unacceptable to use these chemical weapons. We paid a bitter price for the war in Iraq as a nation when we were misled as to weapons of mass destruction.

I have seen the evidence in briefings of this deadly attack in Damascus. I think the evidence is overwhelming and convincing. I think at this point many Americans are reluctant to even consider the use of military force. So we sat down and drew up a resolution in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last week. There are strict limitations within this resolution about the President's authority and power. He has 60 days to execute a military strategy—if nothing else intervenes, 60 days. He can extend it 30 days, but even Congress can object to that if it wishes. He can use military weapons but only for the purposes specified. No troops on the ground. No troops in combat operations. As Senator MCCAIN said yesterday, that will be part of the law. The President has already said that is his standard as well. So for those who are worried about mission creep and where this might lead us, if, God forbid, we are faced with that possibility, this resolution strictly limits what the President can do.

It was about 8 days ago that I got a phone call I will never forget at my home in Springfield late on a Sunday night from the President himself. We talked for about half an hour. We talked about a lot of things because we go back a long way. He talked to me about his thought process and what he

is taking under consideration in trying to lead the world in this response to chemical weapons.

I was one of the early supporters of this President. I believe in him. I believe in his values. I believe he has been honest with me and with the American people about the situation we face. I know the options are not good. They never are under these circumstances. But I also know that if we turn our backs on this situation, there will be some dictator in Iran or North Korea who will be emboldened to do even more—to perhaps use not just chemical weapons but even nuclear weapons. There comes a point when we have to take a stand.

I understand when the people I represent across Illinois have said to me so many times in the last week: Why is it always the United States? Why is it that we have to be involved in this so many times? Why do we have to be the policemen to the world?

Well, there is a basic answer to that. I would like to believe we have values the rest of the world looks up to. Oh, we have stumbled in our own history, and we will continue to do so, but we continue to fight for those basic values all around the world.

Secondly, if someone is in trouble in their country somewhere in the world and they have one 9-1-1 call to make, they pray to God the United States will answer because we have the best military in the world. We have responded to challenges around the world throughout history, and seldom do we leave a residual power base behind. We go in, we do the job, we come home. That is something we can't say for a lot of nations. It is an awesome responsibility.

I think the President is doing the right thing. I think his appeal to the leaders around the world and his appeal to the American people is consistent with our values as a nation.

The President doesn't come quickly to war. He is a person who understands, as I do, the heavy price that has to be paid, and he understands there are moments when a leader—a commander in chief, a person with the responsibility of protecting his nation in a dangerous world—has to step forth and lead. If the United States did not take this onerous leadership role, I doubt anyone else would have.

I take very seriously the President's promise that he won't be putting boots on the ground in Syria. I have been to too many funerals and visited too many disabled veterans to ever want to see us do that again, except when it is absolutely necessary for America's survival.

I think what we are doing this week in the Senate is a step in the right direction, and I believe it is a step that can move us toward a safer world. If we can find, because of the President's leadership, a diplomatic response that avoids further military conflict but keeps us safe from these deadly chemical weapons, we should pursue it.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, almost all of this week on the floor of the Senate will be dedicated to one of the most serious, if not the most serious, matters this body ever considers—that of war and peace and the question of whether we engage American military assets in conflicts across the globe. I am sure I will be back to the floor later this week to speak on that weighty matter. I appreciate the very passionate remarks of the Senator from Illinois on this subject.

Almost every week over the last several months when the Senate has been in session, I have come to the floor to talk about another subject of life-and-death consequence; that is, the growing number of individuals across this country who have been killed by guns. We are going to debate life and death on the Senate floor this week as we try to figure out what the course of American intervention may or may not be in a place on the other side of the Earth in which far too many innocent people, little babies and adults alike, are being killed. We also need to debate what we are going to do to prevent the fact that babies and teenagers and adults right here in the United States of America are being killed. So I have brought this poster down—or a variant of it—a couple of times a month every single month since about April of this year, and it shows a number. The number is a pretty simple number. It represents the number of people in the United States who have been killed by guns since December 14.

As we get further away from that date, maybe people forget what it is, but in Connecticut we will never, ever forget what that date means. December 14 is the date on which 20 little 6- and 7-year-old boys and girls were killed inside Sandy Hook Elementary School, along with 6 teachers and professionals who protected them, as well as the gunman and his mother. Twenty-eight people in all were killed that day. It has lit a spark under the American consciousness about this issue, which has frankly been lingering for far too long.

Twenty-eight people died in Newtown on December 14, but every day across this country, on average, 30 people die

due to homicide from guns. So I am back here today to try to tell the stories of just a handful of the 7,907 people who have been killed at the hands of gun violence since December 14. When I started back in April, I think this number was somewhere around 4,000. It has marched upward and almost doubled since then.

This has been a really bad summer in Connecticut. For instance, in places such as New Haven and Hartford and Bridgeport, we thought we were making some real progress when it came to the number of homicides by guns. This summer, unfortunately, we saw far too many, people such as Devaante Jackson, 18 years old, who was killed on August 15 of this year in New Haven. He was killed in a driveby shooting while simply standing on a sidewalk just after 8 o'clock on the evening of August 15. A friend of Devaante's said:

I don't understand why somebody would do this to him. He's real good. I never knew he had any problems with anybody because he always (got) along with everybody.

Another friend said:

He wasn't a bad kid; he was just in the wrong spot at the wrong time . . . everybody should know . . . stop the violence, put the guns down.

A few days later in Hartford, at the same nightclub, in two separate incidents, two young men—Miguel Delgado, age 21, and Brian Simpe, age 19—were killed. Disputes started in the nightclub and spilled out onto the streets of Hartford—two different disputes, two different incidents, and both of these boys were killed.

Brian was 19 years old. He graduated from Manchester High School and attended Manchester Community College. He worked at ShopRite in order to make enough money to go to community college. He wanted to start his own business. He was a kid who wanted to do something great with his life. Before he headed out that night, he tweeted, "Just another summer night out." Unfortunately, in places such as Hartford and New Haven and Bridgeport and Baltimore and Chicago and Los Angeles, this is just another summer night out. Too many people are being killed simply as a result of common disputes, this time happening in a nightclub in Hartford.

Domestic violence, as we know, unfortunately, often leads to tragic homicidal incidents. Janice Lesco, from Coventry, CT, died on August 24—just a few weeks ago—from a gunshot wound to the chest. Her husband, who shot her, then committed suicide. Her husband had a well-documented and decade-long history of threats and abuse. Ms. Lesco was a mother and a grandmother. She had lived in Coventry for most of her life.

Luckily, in Connecticut we have an agreement that people who have a history of domestic violence shouldn't get their hands on a gun, but they can if they walk into a gun show or if they buy their gun on the Internet. We can't simply make the decision here that if a

person buys a gun online or a person buys a gun at a gun show, they should be stopped from doing so if they have a history of domestic violence.

Frankly, I was struck by this one newspaper article describing one night in New Haven. This is even earlier—on August 11, 2013. It starts by talking about Torrance Dawkins, a 22-year-old Waterbury man who was celebrating his birthday in a New Haven nightclub when he was shot and killed at about 1:30 on August 11.

The article goes on and sort of casually says that later that day New Haven police responded to more gun violence. A local rapper was putting up sheets on an upcoming concert he was going to be holding in town, and he suffered a single gunshot wound to his neck. Davon Goodwin, who was 18 years old, was later that day shot in the thigh on Hamilton Street. And just before 5 p.m. that day, police were called to an area near Dixwell Avenue and found out that Jermaine Adams, 41, had received a gunshot wound to his face. Those last three people miraculously survived. But we can see how casual gun violence can be on a summer Sunday in New Haven, CT. One young man died as a consequence of a dispute at a nightclub, and three other people luckily survived who were shot later in the day.

Every single day in this country—in the United States of America—30 people are dying due to gun violence. Almost 8,000 people have died since the tragedy in Sandy Hook, and this body has done nothing to stop it. We have had commonsense legislation before this Senate that would just say: You know what. If you have a criminal history, you should not be able to buy a gun, no matter where you buy it—at a gun show, from a gun dealer, online.

We have had commonsense bipartisan legislation on the floor saying: You know what. It should be a crime to buy a whole mess-load of guns from a gun store and then go out and intentionally sell them to criminals. We cannot get that passed either.

We even tried to just say: Let's beef up our mental health system to make sure people who have serious mental illnesses get the treatment they need so they do not resort to violence—the very few who do. That was part of the bill we could not get passed.

So I am going to continue to come down to the floor to give voices to these victims, to talk about the real people, the stories behind the dozens of people who are killed every day by guns and the 8,000 people who have been killed since Sandy Hook. We are going to make an important decision this week about whether we are going to commit military assets to the Middle East, and maybe that debate will stretch into next week and the week after. But we should not forget that while people are dying overseas, people are dying due to gun violence right here in the United States, and before it is too late—before another 8,000 people

die from guns in this country—we should do something about it.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MENENDEZ. 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 Communiqué 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 Assad'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 open-ended.

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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, I would like to thank the chairman for his comments for a historical analysis of

what has occurred and his comments regarding our ability to work together. I do wish to reiterate a point that the chairman made partially through his comments. I do not think any of us know at this time whether the offers that today have been made from Russia and responses that have been given from Syria, I do not think we have any idea whether there is credibility at present.

What I do know is there would be absolutely zero conversation about that had our committee not passed an authorization out on a 10-to-7 vote and if we were not taking this up this week. So I wish to commend the chairman for his leadership on this issue. I have enjoyed working with him. I have enjoyed working with him on all the issues relative to Syria and all the other things we have done in a bipartisan way.

I think it has been the tradition—I know it has been the tradition of this body, when it comes to issues beyond our shorelines, to set aside partisanship, as was mentioned a moment ago, and do things that are in the best interests of our Nation. There is nothing more important that each Member of this body will take up than the authorization for the use of military force. I sensed it the other day in our committee. I have sensed it with those whom I have talked to since. Each Member is looking at this with a sense of humility and soberness. I truly believe it is up to each Member to make this decision.

I will say the issues of Syria are something I am familiar with. I have traveled to the region, as I know the chairman and many others have. I have traveled three times this year. I wrote an op-ed in the New York Times in April regarding what our response to Syria should be. Our committee thankfully passed, on a 15-to-3 vote on May 21, with the chairman's leadership, the Syria Transition Support Act.

This was to support the vetted moderate opposition and require the administration to develop a comprehensive strategy. I know Members of this body know I support this authorization. I helped write it with the chairman. I am very comfortable with my position in supporting this and believe what we have done with this authorization we have done in the right and correct way.

I will say I have been very dismayed at the administration's lack of response after stating publicly that they were going to support the vetted moderate opposition in certain ways. I have been very frustrated at the response and the lack of support in that way. As I mentioned, I was just in the area 3 weeks ago. I visited the same refugee camp in Turkey on the Syrian border and in Jordan on the Syrian border. I saw some of the same refugees whom I saw there less than 1 year ago.

Candidly, I am dismayed we have not supported the vetted opposition in a better way. I know we have urged out of our committee that we have a much

more comprehensive strategy. I wish that bill had come to the floor. I wish the Senate had taken action. But, candidly, I also am dismayed this administration has not taken action to do something in a more comprehensive way.

No question the introduction of chemical weapons has changed the dynamic tremendously. I think the chairman was very articulate in explaining why this is important. I wish to say to everybody in this body, to me an equally important issue for our Nation is the credibility of the United States of America. I believe our President, whether you support him, whether you like him, I believe the President spoke for our Nation when he established a red line some months ago regarding the use of chemical weapons.

I believe it is very important for our Nation's credibility in the region and in the world that we have an appropriate response when we have a dictator such as Asad take the actions he has taken against international norms the way he has but especially when the Commander in Chief of our Nation has spoken the way he has about this issue. To me this is twofold. Certainly, it is about the international norms that have been spoken to eloquently by many, but to me it is also an issue of this Nation's credibility of the response as people are looking on to what we are going to do.

That is why I support this authorization. I do wish to go back over a couple points the chairman referred to relative to the substance of the authorization. I think most people know the White House sent over an authorization that to me was very broad. It did not define what we were going to do in a specific way.

I know the chairman just talked about the fact that this authorization is tailored. It is specific. Let me go over again specifically what this authorization does. It is specific purposes only: to respond to the use of weapons of mass destruction to dissuade future use, degrade ability, and to prevent transfer, no boots on the ground for combat operations.

I know there have been some discussions about that in our committee. Very emphatically, this authorization eliminates and keeps any boots on the ground for combat operations from occurring.

This has a time limit of 60 days with a 30-day extension which Congress can disapprove. It is geographically limited to Syria only, which the original authorization was not. It is against legitimate military targets only, which again the original authorization was not.

There are a series of determinations the President has to make prior to taking action with this authorization, including that it is in the core national interests of the United States and that he has a military plan to achieve the objectives.

In addition, this authorization requires a comprehensive strategy for a negotiated end to this conflict.

I wish to refer to something else the chairman mentioned; that is, the type of activity. I know there have been a number of editorial comments in papers and publications around the country referring to this as a pinprick. There have been other concerns by Members of this body as to the duration of this effort, as to how long it will be.

I have had the privilege, because of the position I serve in on the Foreign Relations Committee, to be involved in multiple phone calls and personal meetings. There was one last night that lasted at great length with the President and Vice President.

I wish to say to every person in this body, I have no belief whatsoever that if military action is taken, it is going to be a pinprick—none. The American military has incredible ability to deal with issues in a forceful way but also do so in a very short timeframe.

I do believe, based on the many meetings we have had, both with military and civilian leadership, that to characterize what is proposed as a pinprick or to characterize what is proposed as inserting ourselves into a long-term civil war, I think both of those characterizations are wrong.

Obviously, one of the dilemmas people here deal with is that we write policy and then it is up to the administration to carry that out—and no question, none of us will be involved in the direct carrying out. But it is my firm belief that there is not a thread of thinking by the administration that what they are considering is a pinprick.

On the other hand, I have not a thread of thought that they are also considering doing something that is going to involve us in a long-term civil war. Obviously, conflicts such as this are complex.

In closing, let me say this. Each Senator has to make their own decision. This is one of those things where lobbying is not something that is going to make up the minds of Senators. I think each Senator has to make up their own hearts and minds.

What I can say is we are going to have an open process. I know we have talked about the process going forward. I hope Senators will keep their amendments germane. I hope we have a sober debate about an issue that is the most important type of decision any Senator will make.

I am thrilled the President decided to come to Congress for an authorization. I know a lot of people have made many comments regarding this. Candidly, I am pleased the President has come to us for a debate. It is my hope the Senate, after hearing the facts and after having a thoughtful debate, will approve the authorization for the use of military force.

I couldn't agree more with the chairman that if people wish to see a diplo-

matic solution—which is the only way we are going to end this conflict—I do not think this conflict ends militarily. I believe we have learned a lot from the last two episodes we have been through.

I believe it is important for us to have this authorization because I believe it is the only thing at this point, the fact that we passed it out of committee, the fact that it is on the floor, that might possibly lead to a diplomatic settlement.

I also believe it is time for the President to lead. I know there have been a lot of statements over the last week, and the President had multiple audiences in which to speak. I understand this, and I understand reports out of these meetings can come in many ways not to be accurate.

The President is coming to the Hill tomorrow. He will be making a major speech to the United States, the citizens of our country, tomorrow night. I know many of them have lives, where all of them, most of them, get up in the mornings, go to work, they raise their families, and they haven't had the opportunity to spend as much time on these issues. That is why we are elected to do this.

I will say this. It is very important for the President of the United States to come to Congress and for the President of the United States to make his case to the American people.

He is asking for this authorization. I believe it is important for us to give him this authorization.

Again, I wish to thank the chairman for working with us to make sure we have narrowed this authorization in such a way that I think it meets the test of what the American people and what all of us wish to see happen. But I do believe now it is up to the President, over the next several days and this week, to make his case to the American people as to why the Senate should give him this authorization for the use of military force, which I hope we will do.

I thank you for the time, and I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF VALERIE E. CAPRONI TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

NOMINATION OF VERNON S. BRODERICK TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KING). Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Valerie E. Caproni,