Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of giving

the President the authority to go to war with

Iraq if it becomes necessary. I came to this

difficult decision only after considering the

threat to our national security that allowing

Saddam Hussein to acquire long range missiles and nuclear weapons represents. While

we should continue to seek a diplomatic solution, inaction is not an option. I feel that we

must give the president the option of using

force to remove this threat to our nation if diplomacy does not work.

No one in the United States wants another

war with Iraq if it can be avoided. However,

we know that Iraq has chemical and biological

weapons, and is frantically working to develop

nuclear weapons and a way to deliver them to

the United States. This presents a serious

threat to our national security and has the potential to destroy any chance for peace in the Middle East.

I believe our first step should be to develop

a new, tougher weapons inspection resolution

which would allow the U.N. inspectors unfettered access to all sights in Iraq, including the

presidential palaces. If it is implemented successfully, the resolution would serve to disarm

Iraq and would not require an armed confrontation. However, as President Bush has

noted, the track record of Iraq’s compliance

with U.N. resolutions is abysmal, and this time

we must give him the tools necessary to ensure that Iraq is truly disarmed.

In addition, I believe that before we use military force against Iraq that the administration

should work to reassemble the coalition that

was so successful during the Gulf War or like

the one we developed to combat terrorism.

While we could defeat Iraq without a coalition,

policing and rebuilding Iraq will take years,

and we will need allies to undertake this long and difficult task.

Those of us in this chamber who have worn

the military uniform of this great country, understand the ravages and consequences of

war, and do not take this vote lightly. All diplomatic options should be exhausted before the

use of military force, but I believe the option

of force must be available to the President as

a last resort. Giving the authority to use force

does not mean war, it only gives our commander-in-chief the maximum flexibility to protect our nation.

If it comes to war, many of our nation’s sons

and daughters will be put in harms way in

order to protect our freedoms from Saddam

Hussein’s reign of terror and to keep him from

acquiring nuclear weapons and the means of

delivering them to the United States. I would

never send our young men and women into

combat unless it was absolutely necessary;

and unless Iraq allows weapons inspectors

into the country with unfettered access it will

be necessary. Congress needs to give the

President the authority he needs to protect

America while encouraging the use of diplomacy and negotiations to try and arrive at a

peaceful solution to this problem before turning to military force and this is why

I will vote to give him the ability to eliminate this threat

to American security.