Mr. Speaker, this is an

important—no, a critical debate. It is right that

we have it. I stand here as one who enlisted

in the Marine Corps in 1994, voted for Desert

Storm, and has always believed that the first

federal dollar spent each year should go to the

military. These men and women provide for

our ultimately security.

However, I am prepared to vote against this

particular resolution. It will not be a happy

vote. I will be in the minority. I sadly will not

stand with my President, a man I admire so

much. Yet as with literally the thousands of

votes cast in this chamber, I’ve found that following

one’s instinct is the most honest, if not

always the most politically popular, approach.

What we’re discussing is all unknown territory.

We’re talking about the future—and that

talk, out of necessity, means guesses, estimates,

and personal interpretation. The one

thing we do know is that since September 11,

2001, we are living in a new world. It’s an unsettling

world requiring different defenses—secrecy,

stealth operations, armies without uniforms—

but maybe of greatest importance, an

adhesive-like working relationship with our

friends.

Following 9/11 we were told that the enemy

was terrorism in all its forms. The al Qaeda,

Osama bin Laden would be hunted down, Afghanistan

was to be stabilized and rebuilt, and

we were to work closely with our allies and

near-allies. We could not go it alone.

Now we hear that priorities have changed.

Iraq is the prime target. Saddam Hussein is a

heinous criminal, with frightening weapons.

And I believe all that. But the question remains:

what does this have to do with terrorism,

our original objective? There is little

evidence that Iraq had anything to do with 9/

11.

I happen to be a hawk on Iraq. Saddam

Hussein is a disturbed, dangerous leader. We

should deal with him. But absent any immediate

threat, our eye ought to be on the security

of the American people. The fight is

against terrorism in all the emerging subtle

forms and that has little to do with Saddam

Hussein. So without finishing what we started

and with no sure knowledge that he is near

producing nuclear weapons, why is it that

within the last few months we recalibrate our

objectives? War would be hugely costly. We

already are in deep deficit. We are not backed

by the essential allies, and we could easily unleash

additional terrorism.

Last weekend I spent a whole day with Jewish

and Palestinian representatives. One Arab

comment was, ‘‘The Iraqis hate Saddam Hussein,

but remember they hate the United

States more.’’

Iraq is one of the few secular countries in

the Middle East. Unleashing, without careful

ground work, the hatred of two mortal internal

enemies—the Sunnis and the Shi’ites—could

produce another angry fundamentalist state.

The bill in front of us says,

I have the greatest respect for the President.

And you know what? He may be right.

But I am given the opportunity to express my

opinion and to cast my vote. I feel uncertain

at this time, in this place, sanctioning that authority.

Unilateralism scares me. We haven’t shown

a lot of patience since the President’s speech

to the U.N. Our historic rule of thumb has

been to bring people together, not divide

them. This war will not be a cake walk. People

fight differently in defense of their homeland,

their families. I worry about the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict, and our lack of attention to it.

I think we’ve got the cart before the horse.

Let the U.N. first work its will.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, a right decision at the

wrong time is a wrong decision. Why don’t we

win the war against terrorism before we start

another fight?