Mr. Speaker, I thank

the gentleman from New Jersey for

yielding me the time.

I rise this evening as Congress considers

one of the most difficult decisions

a nation must make. President

Bush and leaders from the House negotiated

a resolution to authorize the use

of force against Iraq. However, this

new resolution still allows the President

to launch a unilateral, preemptive

attack without providing any evidence

to Congress that the U.S. is under imminent threat.

The President says that he is willing

to go it alone against Iraq as a last resort,

but there is no mechanism in this

resolution to ensure that it is just

that, a last resort.

Let one thing be clear. A vote for

this resolution is more than an authorization

for use of force. It is a declaration

of war, and I will oppose it.

We all agree that it is critical for the

United States and the world community

to ensure that Saddam Hussein is

not developing weapons of mass destruction.

I believe we can accomplish

this goal by working with the U.N. Security

Council to gain consensus on a

tough and effective plan to gain unfettered

access to inspect Iraq facilities.

A powerful multinational force created

by the U.N. would carry legitimacy and

strong support in the United States

and abroad. If the U.N. does not heed

our call to action, then other options

should be explored.

As of today, it is clear that the administration

has yet to exhaust diplomatic

options.

Many generals, military strategists

and Republican policy-makers have expressed

reservations with President

Bush’s approach to Iraq. Iraq does not

exist in a vacuum. The decisions our

government makes relative to Iraq will

have consequences that will extend to

all corners of the world, as well as potentially

destabilize the Middle East.

Will the concentration of our Armed

Forces in Iraq limit our resources for a

war against al Qaeda?

Additionally, experts agree that a

war against Iraq will be much different

than the Gulf War. Intensive, urban

combat against an entrenched force is

likely. How many thousands of American

lives is the administration willing

to imperil? What are the long-term

plans for the stabilization of Iraq, and

how many billions of dollars will this

cost American taxpayers?

After September 11, the United

States made great strides with the

international community in our war

against terror. A unilateral effort by

the United States would not only

weaken our relationship with our allies

but also will increase resentment in

the volatile Middle East and further

embolden anti-American opinion

throughout the world.

We must rid Saddam Hussein of any

weapons of mass destruction. However,

I urge the administration to continue

to work with the U.N. to gain support

for a tough resolution with an accompanying

national multinational force,

if necessary. Diplomatic efforts must

continue. This war can still be avoided;

and, as such, I cannot vote to put

American lives and innocent civilians

in harm’s way, straight from our war

against terror, or create uncertainty

that could further hamper our struggling

economy.

I will not support this resolution.