Mr. Speaker, I thank

my friend, the ranking member of the

Committee on International Relations,

for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, today and

tomorrow the Members of this House

consider our most solemn constitutional

obligation, a resolution that authorizes

our Commander in Chief to use

our Nation’s Armed Forces. We do not

savor this awesome responsibility, but

we will not shrink from it either. The

seriousness of this occasion dictates

that we debate today not as Democrats,

not as Republicans, but as Americans,

Americans of conscience and

principle who love their country and

who are committed to the security of

this Nation and its people.

This resolution in my view does not

sound the drumbeat of war. Rather, it

provides Saddam Hussein with his last

chance for peace. I will support it. The

resolution reflects the concerns and

judgment of Members of this House

from both sides of the aisle. It supports

our diplomatic efforts, limits and defines

the scope of authorization and requires

the President to notify Congress

before using force and to consult with

Congress throughout the process.

Saddam Hussein’s malevolence and

expansionist designs are not in dispute.

He used mustard gas and attacked civilians

during his 8-year war with Iran.

He attacked Kurdish villages in northern

Iraq with chemical weapons. He invaded

Kuwait before an international

coalition repulsed him. He fired missiles

at Saudi Arabia and Israel. He attempted

to assassinate our own President,

former President George Bush.

And he has and continues to savage and

enslave his own people.

Saddam Hussein is a vanquished tyrant

who owes his existence to the fact

that the international community did

not effect his ouster in 1991. In hindsight,

the cause of peace and regional

stability, as well as the well-being of

the Iraqi people who toil under his

boot, dictated that result. Yet, like the

long line of aggressors who pockmark

history, Hussein has preyed on international

irresolution. He disdains and

refuses to submit to weapons inspections.

He continues his efforts to develop

and acquire weapons of mass destruction,

and he sponsors international terrorism.

Saddam Hussein continues to

be an unacceptable threat whose duplicity

requires action, action now. Reverting

to a failed inspection regime

would permit hope to ignore history.

Hussein is in no position to negotiate.

He must provide unrestricted access to

all Iraqi sites with no single compensation

acceptable. And if he refuses, he

must realize the consequences and realize

as well that he is solely responsible

for those consequences.

The United States must continue to

seek the widest support for a tough inspection

regime that ensures Hussein is

disarmed. Unilateral action carries tremendous

risk. Yet we know that international

vacillation has often

emboldened tyrants and compounded

bloodshed and instability. In just the

last decade, a halting, indecisive

United Nations bore witness to genocide

in the former Yugoslavia and tragically

did little to stop it.

The reign of terror perpetuated by

Slobodan Milosovic blazed until NATO

extinguished it. Thus, in the face of

tyranny, we must not allow our commitment

to secure the imprimatur and

participation of the international community

to become the sine qua non of

American policy.

The risk of inaction today in my

opinion poses previously unfathomed

dangers for tomorrow. The proliferation

of weapons of mass destruction

and the most virulent strain of terrorism

which targets innocents and

glories in suicidal mass murder could

render national inaction a virtual

death sentence to far too many.

Let there be no mistake, the United

States must continue to be a leading

proponent of multilateral institutions

and the peaceful resolutions of disputes.

However, in the absence of international

unity in confronting Hussein

and his criminal regime, we must not

be frozen into inaction in the face of a

clear and present danger.

Let me add, with all due respect to

my colleagues who have expressed

their sincere concern that this resolution

authorizes the President to use

Armed Forces preemptively, that I see

a clear distinction here. We have had

an ongoing engagement in Iraq since

that nation agreed to terminate its

hostility towards its neighbors in 1991.

Our pilots who have been fired on by

Iraqi military can attest that our engagement

continues. Thus, I do not

agree that we are setting a possibly

dangerous precedent.

Mr. Speaker, we have given and

should continue to give diplomacy and

international coalition-building efforts

every opportunity. Saddam Hussein

has chosen to ignore his obligations

and to continue his dangerous designs.

If he fails to seize this last chance for

peace, then he will bear sole responsibility

for his own destruction.

Mr. Speaker, we have no quarrel with

the Iraqi people. Our purpose is not territorial

acquisition. Our purpose is the

protection and security of our people,

and the promotion of peace, stability

and the rule of law in Iraq, the Middle

East and the international community.

We must not shrink from this responsibility.