Mr. Speaker, today I find myself standing here on the floor of the House

with anguish in my heart. I have read and listened

to all sides, and I have struggled to understand

why our great nation would want to contemplate going to war.

When September 11th, 2001, happened, I

was in New York City, and as the enormity of

what terrorism could do to my City hit me, I

was stunned. Then I wept for all of those innocent

people who were simply doing their jobs

and living their lives, who in one moment of

hate lost their lives. There has, however, not

been any conclusive evidence that links al

Qaida, those responsible for the tragedy of

September 11th, with Iraq.

Some question whether those who oppose

this resolution are forgetting those who died

on September 11th; some question our patriotism.

Though I should not have to affirm my

patriotism, I say simply that I love my country,

I love my city of New York, and I am not afraid

to deal with those who attacked it. It is the

most basic of our purposes as a national government,

to defend our nation. But here we

speak of a different matter.

I am certainly pleased that the President

now recognizes that he must secure the approval

of the Congress before taking our nation

to war. This is progress and what our

Constitution requires. However, if our ultimate

goal is to disarm Iraq of all chemical and biological

weapons, how does giving our President

this right to go to war accomplish that

goal? Wouldn’t working with the United Nations

to implement a program of rigorous inspections

move us closer to our goal? I believe

that force should always be used as a

last resort, and never as the first way to accomplish a goal.

The new doctrine announced by the President,

that the United States has the right to

engage in a preemptive strike, which he seeks

to implement through this resolution, frightens

me and establishes a troubling precedent.

This is a doctrine better left unused. It contravenes

a half century of developed international

law, of which the United States has

been a champion. Taking this idea to its logical

conclusion means that India and Pakistan,

for instance, nations with nuclear weapons

and a history of conflict, may no longer feel

bound by the limitations on the use of force

that have been agreed to by the family of nations.

The United Nations will become irrelevant

and the checks and balances that membership

in the United Nations places on the

member states will no longer apply. Even if we

strike and successfully defeat Iraq militarily,

will this make our nation a safer place to live?

The Bush Administration often talks about

‘‘regime change’’ in Iraq and the need to remove

Saddam Hussein from power. In 1991

we decided against regime change because of

concern about the overall stability of the region.

What has happened since that time that

has changed the goals of a military action?

As a nation we need to plan and think beyond

what passage of this resolution and a

military victory would mean. The United States

would need to spend at least the next ten

years involved in an occupation, reconstruction,

and re-building effort. This will require a

serious commitment of American resources

and troops. Are we ready to commit to the rebuilding

that will follow military action?

As a nation have we carefully considered

what the impact of a unilateral attack by the

United States would be on Israel? If everything

that has been attributed to Hussein this

evening is true, are we prepared to guarantee

the stability of the entire region when Hussein

finds himself threatened and decides to strike

out at his neighbors?

Our State Department is actively involved in

trying to improve the image of the United

States in the Arab world and particularly

among young Arab men and women. We do

not want them to perceive the United States

as an enemy. When we engage as a nation in

a unilateral military action against an Arab nation,

an action that our allies are cautioning

against, how will the United States be viewed

in the Arab world? Perhaps the result will be

an increase in al Qaida’s membership and a

renewed hatred toward Americans.

The United States is founded on the principles

of justice and due process. If we disregard

these principles and adopt a unilateral,

macho and aggressive stance, we lose our

moral authority in the world. Seeking the consensus

of nations does not weaken us or expose

us to danger; instead, it fortifies us and

brings to our cause the strength of our allies.

We want nations to look at us with respect

and not fear, outrage, and scorn. It is time for

us to take the lead in removing all weapons

from Iraq, but in a way that embraces other

nations instead of isolating us from them.

I will vote against this resolution, which permits

a unilateral military attack, because I do

not believe that the President has made a

convincing case or provided sufficient evidence

to merit its passage. However, let me

also make it clear that my vote against this

resolution, which I do not believe will make

our nation any safer, should not in any way

imply that I think the men and women in our

armed services are anything less than heroes.

They are courageous and brave.

So I end this speech as I began it, with

great sadness. I cannot agree with the course

that our great nation is embarking on, one that

brings the threat of war closer and the goal of

peace further away.