Mr. Speaker, I rise

this evening to state that unilateral

military action by the United States

against Iraq at this time is not in our

best national interest.

Certainly Saddam Hussein must be

disarmed and Iraq must be rid of weapons

of mass destruction. Equally clear

is our power to act unilaterally and

successfully against Iraq, or any other

country for that matter. I am proud we

have that power, and we must sustain

it. But the question is not whether we

will prevail against Iraq. We will, with

or without help. The real question is

whether it is in our best national interest

to unilaterally use our awesome

power against Iraq. I believe it is not.

We may not need help to win a war,

but we will need help the day after the

war is won, and that help must come

from a multinational or a United Nations

effort. We need our friends to

help with peacekeeping, with rebuilding

and with international credibility,

and that support will be absent if we

take unilateral action.

This is not about winning United Nations

permission to protect ourselves.

We do not need that permission. This is

about winning United Nations support

to protect all civilized countries from

the Iraqi threat. President Bush must

forge a strong coalition through continued

diplomacy before using American

military power. If he does not, we

will be isolated and less secure, and

that is not in our national interest.

President Bush very skillfully won

unanimous Security Council support

last fall to restart the arms inspections,

and he deserves great credit for

that. After the initial success, however,

the administration has not been

able to maintain that unity and cannot

even muster unity today among the

five permanent nations of the Security

Council.

What is the problem here? We are

talking about an isolated country with

a fourth-rate military and a leader who

is a murderous tyrant that has no support

and no friends in the United Nations.

Yet the Security Council is split.

Why is that? I believe it is because of

the inept, bungled, cowboy diplomacy

of the President of the United States

and his senior advisers.

Six months ago, after a great deal of

soul searching, I voted to give the

President military authority to use

force to rid Iraq of the weapons of mass

destruction. The President asked for

that authority and said he would exhaust

all diplomatic options before

using it. And his strategy worked. The

inspections were restarted.

I am convinced that while those inspections

have not been met with

enough cooperation, the inspectors’

presence in Iraq has made Saddam Hussein

less dangerous for the time being.

The administration has had much

less success since then, and the root

cause is simple: cowboy diplomacy

from this administration. Every diplomatic

thrust has been met with rhetoric

that belies and often contradicts

the diplomatic efforts. Administration

spokesmen speak nearly every day

with rhetoric that implies we are bent

on war, with or without U.N. support,

with or without our traditional and

closest allies. The implication is that

diplomacy is just something to take up

time and distract attention until all of

our troops are in place.

The Bush administration spent much

of its pre-9–11 days acting unilaterally

on a variety of fronts, the environment,

the ABM Treaty and many other

ways, even though promising a new foreign

policy run with humility during

the 2002 election campaign.

In that broader sense, it comes as no

surprise that so many of our allies are

not joining us now.

Then last week, in the middle of this

diplomatic standoff, the administration

released its plans for a post-Saddam

Iraq, which included the possibility

of a civilian American government.

I think that is a great mistake.

It will certainly be necessary, if we invade

Iraq, for there to be military occupation

to keep people from murdering

each other for a time. That occupation

will be essential; but we

should not impose an American civil

government.

We should be looking for a multinational

or a United Nations program

to provide an interim civil government,

and certainly our goal has to be

to establish a representative and stable

Iraqi government itself. The Bush plan

smacks of colonialism, and could give

ammunition to those who question our

motives in seeking to disarm Hussein

in the first place.

It is dangerous to conduct a unilateral

invasion of Iraq. It will undermine

our credibility and legitimacy that this

country has built up over decades of

global leadership. We must realize that

when we question the motives of countries

like Germany and France, they

question ours. We must work with

them.

I call on the Bush administration to

renew its efforts to secure a broad multinational

coalition or U.N. mandate to

disarm Iraq.