Thank you all. Thank you for that very gracious

and warm Cincinnati welcome. I’m

honored to be here tonight. I appreciate you

all coming.

Tonight I want to take a few minutes to

discuss a grave threat to peace and America’s

determination to lead the world in confronting

that threat.

The threat comes from Iraq. It arises directly

from the Iraqi regime’s own actions—

its history of aggression and its drive toward

an arsenal of terror. Eleven years ago, as a

condition for ending the Persian Gulf war,

the Iraqi regime was required to destroy its

weapons of mass destruction, to cease all development

of such weapons, and to stop all

support for terrorist groups. The Iraqi regime

has violated all of those obligations. It possesses

and produces chemical and biological

weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons. It

has given shelter and support to terrorism

and practices terror against its own people.

The entire world has witnessed Iraq’s 11-year

history of defiance, deception, and bad faith.

We must also never forget the most vivid

events of recent history. On September the

11th, 2001, America felt its vulnerability,

even to threats that gather on the other side

of the Earth. We resolved then and we are

resolved today to confront every threat, from

any source, that could bring sudden terror

and suffering to America.

Members of Congress of both political parties

and members of the United Nations Security

Council agree that Saddam Hussein

is a threat to peace and must disarm. We

agree that the Iraqi dictator must not be permitted

to threaten America and the world

with horrible poisons and diseases and gases

and atomic weapons. Since we all agree on

this goal, the issue is: How can we best

achieve it?

Many Americans have raised legitimate

questions about the nature of the threat,

about the urgency of action—why be concerned

now—about the link between Iraq

developing weapons of terror and the wider

war on terror. These are all issues we’ve discussed

broadly and fully within my administration.

And tonight I want to share those

discussions with you.

First, some ask why Iraq is different from

other countries or regimes that also have terrible

weapons. While there are many dangers

in the world, the threat from Iraq stands

alone because it gathers the most serious

dangers of our age in one place. Iraq’s weapons

of mass destruction are controlled by a

murderous tyrant who has already used

chemical weapons to kill thousands of people.

This same tyrant has tried to dominate

the Middle East, has invaded and brutally

occupied a small neighbor, has struck other

nations without warning, and holds an unrelenting

hostility toward the United States.

By its past and present actions, by its technological

capabilities, by the merciless nature

of its regime, Iraq is unique. As a former

chief weapons inspector of the U.N. has said,

‘‘The fundamental problem with Iraq remains

the nature of the regime, itself. Saddam

Hussein is a homicidal dictator who is

addicted to weapons of mass destruction.’’

Some ask how urgent this danger is to

America and the world. The danger is already

significant, and it only grows worse with time.

If we know Saddam Hussein has dangerous

weapons today—and we do—does it make

any sense for the world to wait to confront

him as he grows even stronger and develops

even more dangerous weapons?

In 1995, after several years of deceit by

the Iraqi regime, the head of Iraq’s military

industries defected. It was then that the regime

was forced to admit that it had produced

more than 30,000 liters of anthrax and

other deadly biological agents. The inspectors,

however, concluded that Iraq had likely

produced 2 to 4 times that amount. This is

a massive stockpile of biological weapons that

has never been accounted for and is capable

of killing millions.

We know that the regime has produced

thousands of tons of chemical agents, including

mustard gas, sarin nerve gas, VX nerve

gas. Saddam Hussein also has experience in

using chemical weapons. He has ordered

chemical attacks on Iran and on more than

40 villages in his own country. These actions

killed or injured at least 20,000 people, more

than 6 times the number of people who died

in the attacks of September the 11th.

And surveillance photos reveal that the regime

is rebuilding facilities that it had used

to produce chemical and biological weapons.

Every chemical and biological weapon that

Iraq has or makes is a direct violation of the

truce that ended the Persian Gulf war in

1991. Yet, Saddam Hussein has chosen to

build and keep these weapons despite international

sanctions, U.N. demands, and isolation

from the civilized world.

Iraq possesses ballistic missiles with a likely

range of hundreds of miles—far enough

to strike Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, and

other nations—in a region where more than

135,000 American civilians and service members

live and work. We’ve also discovered

through intelligence that Iraq has a growing

fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles

that could be used to disperse chemical

or biological weapons across broad areas.

We’re concerned that Iraq is exploring ways

of using these UAVs for missions targeting

the United States. And of course, sophisticated

delivery systems aren’t required for a

chemical or biological attack; all that might

be required are a small container and one

terrorist or Iraqi intelligence operative to deliver

it.

And that is the source of our urgent concern

about Saddam Hussein’s links to international

terrorist groups. Over the years, Iraq

has provided safe haven to terrorists such as

Abu Nidal, whose terror organization carried

out more than 90 terrorist attacks in 20 countries

that killed or injured nearly 900 people,

including 12 Americans. Iraq has also provided

safe haven to Abu Abbas, who was responsible

for seizing the Achille Lauro and

killing an American passenger. And we know

that Iraq is continuing to finance terror and

gives assistance to groups that use terrorism

to undermine Middle East peace.

We know that Iraq and the Al Qaida terrorist

network share a common enemy—the

United States of America. We know that Iraq

and Al Qaida have had high-level contacts

that go back a decade. Some Al Qaida leaders

who fled Afghanistan went to Iraq. These include

one very senior Al Qaida leader who

received medical treatment in Baghdad this

year, and who has been associated with planning

for chemical and biological attacks.

We’ve learned that Iraq has trained Al Qaida

members in bomb-making and poisons and

deadly gases. And we know that after September

the 11th, Saddam Hussein’s regime

gleefully celebrated the terrorist attacks on

America.

Iraq could decide on any given day to provide

a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist

group or individual terrorists. Alliance

with terrorists could allow the Iraqi regime

to attack America without leaving any fingerprints.

Some have argued that confronting the

threat from Iraq could detract from the war

against terror. To the contrary, confronting

the threat posed by Iraq is crucial to winning

the war on terror. When I spoke to Congress

more than a year ago, I said that those who

harbor terrorists are as guilty as the terrorists

themselves. Saddam Hussein is harboring

terrorists and the instruments of terror, the

instruments of mass death and destruction.

And he cannot be trusted. The risk is simply

too great that he will use them or provide

them to a terror network.

Terror cells and outlaw regimes building

weapons of mass destruction are different

faces of the same evil. Our security requires

that we confront both. And the United States

military is capable of confronting both.

Many people have asked how close Saddam

Hussein is to developing a nuclear

weapon. Well, we don’t know exactly, and

that’s the problem. Before the Gulf war, the

best intelligence indicated that Iraq was 8

to 10 years away from developing a nuclear

weapon. After the war, international inspectors

learned that the regime had been much

closer—the regime in Iraq would likely have

possessed a nuclear weapon no later than

1993. The inspectors discovered that Iraq

had an advanced nuclear weapons development

program, had a design for a workable

nuclear weapon, and was pursuing several

different methods of enriching uranium for

a bomb.

Before being barred from Iraq in 1998, the

International Atomic Energy Agency dismantled

extensive nuclear weapons-related facilities,

including three uranium enrichment

sites. That same year, information from a

high-ranking Iraqi nuclear engineer who had

defected revealed that despite his public

promises, Saddam Hussein had ordered his

nuclear program to continue.

The evidence indicates that Iraq is reconstituting

its nuclear weapons program. Saddam

Hussein has held numerous meetings

with Iraqi nuclear scientists, a group he calls

his ‘‘nuclear mujahideen,’’ his nuclear holy

warriors. Satellite photographs reveal that

Iraq is rebuilding facilities at sites that have

been part of its nuclear program in the past.

Iraq has attempted to purchase high-strength

aluminum tubes and other equipment needed

for gas centrifuges, which are used to enrich

uranium for nuclear weapons.

If the Iraqi regime is able to produce, buy,

or steal an amount of highly enriched uranium

a little larger than a single softball, it

could have a nuclear weapon in less than a

year. And if we allow that to happen, a terrible

line would be crossed. Saddam Hussein

would be in a position to blackmail anyone

who opposes his aggression. He would be in

a position to dominate the Middle East. He

would be in a position to threaten America.

And Saddam Hussein would be in a position

to pass nuclear technology to terrorists.

Some citizens wonder, after 11 years of living

with this problem, why do we need to

confront it now? And there’s a reason. We’ve

experienced the horror of September the

11th. We have seen that those who hate

America are willing to crash airplanes into

buildings full of innocent people. Our enemies

would be no less willing—in fact, they

would be eager—to use biological or chemical

or a nuclear weapon.

Knowing these realities, America must not

ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing

clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for

the final proof, the smoking gun, that could

come in the form of a mushroom cloud. As

President Kennedy said in October of 1962,

‘‘Neither the United States of America nor

the world community of nations can tolerate

deliberate deception and offensive threats on

the part of any nation, large or small. We

no longer live in a world,’’ he said, ‘‘where

only the actual firing of weapons represents

a sufficient challenge to a nation’s security

to constitute maximum peril.’’

Understanding the threats of our time,

knowing the designs and deceptions of the

Iraqi regime, we have every reason to assume

the worst, and we have an urgent duty to

prevent the worst from occurring.

Some believe we can address this danger

by simply resuming the old approach to inspections

and applying diplomatic and economic

pressure. Yet this is precisely what the

world has tried to do since 1991. The U.N.

inspections program was met with systematic

deception. The Iraqi regime bugged hotel

rooms and offices of inspectors to find where

they were going next. They forged documents,

destroyed evidence, and developed

mobile weapons facilities to keep a step

ahead of inspectors. Eight so-called Presidential

palaces were declared off-limits to

unfettered inspections. These sites actually

encompass 12 square miles, with hundreds

of structures, both above and below the

ground, where sensitive materials could be

hidden.

The world has also tried economic sanctions

and watched Iraq use billions of dollars

in illegal oil revenues to fund more weapons

purchases, rather than providing for the

needs of the Iraqi people.

The world has tried limited military strikes

to destroy Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction

capabilities, only to see them openly rebuilt,

while the regime again denies they even

exist.

The world has tried no-fly zones to keep

Saddam from terrorizing his own people, and

in the last year alone, the Iraqi military has

fired upon American and British pilots more

than 750 times.

After 11 years during which we have tried

containment, sanctions, inspections, even selected

military action, the end result is that

Saddam Hussein still has chemical and biological

weapons and is increasing his capabilities

to make more. And he is moving ever

closer to developing a nuclear weapon.

Clearly, to actually work, any new inspections,

sanctions, or enforcement mechanisms

will have to be very different. America wants

the U.N. to be an effective organization that

helps keep the peace. And that is why we

are urging the Security Council to adopt a

new resolution setting out tough, immediate

requirements. Among those requirements,

the Iraqi regime must reveal and destroy,

under U.N. supervision, all existing weapons

of mass destruction. To ensure that we learn

the truth, the regime must allow witnesses

to its illegal activities to be interviewed outside

the country, and these witnesses must

be free to bring their families with them so

they are all beyond the reach of Saddam

Hussein’s terror and murder. And inspectors

must have access to any site, at any time,

without preclearance, without delay, without

exceptions.

The time for denying, deceiving, and delaying

has come to an end. Saddam Hussein

must disarm himself, or for the sake of peace,

we will lead a coalition to disarm him.

Many nations are joining us in insisting

that Saddam Hussein’s regime be held accountable.

They are committed to defending

the international security that protects the

lives of both our citizens and theirs. And

that’s why America is challenging all nations

to take the resolutions of the U.N. Security

Council seriously.

And these resolutions are very clear. In addition

to declaring and destroying all of its

weapons of mass destruction, Iraq must end

its support for terrorism. It must cease the

persecution of its civilian population. It must

stop all illicit trade outside the oil-for-food

program. It must release or account for all

Gulf war personnel, including an American

pilot whose fate is still unknown.

By taking these steps and by only taking

these steps, the Iraqi regime has an opportunity

to avoid conflict. Taking these steps

would also change the nature of the Iraqi

regime, itself. America hopes the regime will

make that choice. Unfortunately, at least so

far, we have little reason to expect it. And

that’s why two administrations, mine and

President Clinton’s, have stated that regime

change in Iraq is the only certain means of

removing a great danger to our Nation.

I hope this will not require military action,

but it may. And military conflict could be

difficult. An Iraqi regime faced with its own

demise may attempt cruel and desperate

measures. If Saddam Hussein orders such

measures, his generals would be well advised

to refuse those orders. If they do not refuse,

they must understand that all war criminals

will be pursued and punished. If we have

to act, we will take every precaution that is

possible. We will plan carefully. We will act

with the full power of the United States military.

We will act with allies at our side, and

we will prevail.

There is no easy or risk-free course of action.

Some have argued we should wait, and

that’s an option. In my view, it’s the riskiest

of all options, because the longer we wait,

the stronger and bolder Saddam Hussein will

become. We could wait and hope that Saddam

does not give weapons to terrorists or

develop a nuclear weapon to blackmail the

world. But I’m convinced that is a hope

against all evidence. As Americans, we want

peace; we work and sacrifice for peace. But

there can be no peace if our security depends

on the will and whims of a ruthless and aggressive

dictator. I’m not willing to stake one

American life on trusting Saddam Hussein.

Failure to act would embolden other tyrants,

allow terrorists access to new weapons

and new resources, and make blackmail a

permanent feature of world events. The

United Nations would betray the purpose of

its founding and prove irrelevant to the problems

of our time. And through its inaction,

the United States would resign itself to a future

of fear.

That is not the America I know. That is

not the America I serve. We refuse to live

in fear. This Nation, in World War and in

cold war, has never permitted the brutal and

lawless to set history’s course. Now as before,

we will secure our Nation, protect our freedom,

and help others to find freedom of their

own.

Some worry that a change of leadership

in Iraq could create instability and make the

situation worse. The situation could hardly

get worse, for world security and for the people

of Iraq. The lives of Iraqi citizens would

improve dramatically if Saddam Hussein

were no longer in power, just as the lives

of Afghanistan’s citizens improved after the

Taliban. The dictator of Iraq is a student of

Stalin, using murder as a tool of terror and

control, within his own cabinet, within his

own army, and even within his own family.

On Saddam Hussein’s orders, opponents

have been decapitated, wives and mothers

of political opponents have been systematically

raped as a method of intimidation, and

political prisoners have been forced to watch

their own children being tortured.

America believes that all people are entitled

to hope and human rights, to the nonnegotiable

demands of human dignity. People

everywhere prefer freedom to slavery,

prosperity to squalor, self-government to the

rule of terror and torture. America is a friend

to the people of Iraq. Our demands are directed

only at the regime that enslaves them

and threatens us. When these demands are

met, the first and greatest benefit will come

to Iraqi men, women, and children. The oppression

of Kurds, Assyrians, Turkomans,

Shi’a, Sunnis, and others will be lifted. The

long captivity of Iraq will end, and an era

of new hope will begin.

Iraq is a land rich in culture and resources

and talent. Freed from the weight of oppression,

Iraq’s people will be able to share in

the progress and prosperity of our time. If

military action is necessary, the United States

and our allies will help the Iraqi people rebuild

their economy and create the institutions

of liberty in a unified Iraq at peace with

its neighbors.

Later this week, the United States Congress

will vote on this matter. I have asked

Congress to authorize the use of America’s

military, if it proves necessary, to enforce

U.N. Security Council demands. Approving

this resolution does not mean that military

action is imminent or unavoidable. The resolution

will tell the United Nations and all nations

that America speaks with one voice and

is determined to make the demands of the

civilized world mean something. Congress

will also be sending a message to the dictator

in Iraq that his only chance—his only choice

is full compliance, and the time remaining

for that choice is limited. Members of Congress

are nearing an historic vote. I’m confident

they will fully consider the facts and

their duties.

The attacks of September the 11th showed

our country that vast oceans no longer protect

us from danger. Before that tragic date,

we had only hints of Al Qaida’s plans and

designs. Today in Iraq, we see a threat whose

outlines are far more clearly defined and

whose consequences could be far more deadly.

Saddam Hussein’s actions have put us on

notice, and there is no refuge from our responsibilities.

We did not ask for this present challenge,

but we accept it. Like other generations of

Americans, we will meet the responsibility

of defending human liberty against violence

and aggression. By our resolve, we will give

strength to others. By our courage, we will

give hope to others. And by our actions, we

will secure the peace and lead the world to

a better day.

May God bless America.