As we contend with Korea, we also

must deal with Iraq. The administration

was mistaken to suggest North

Korea could be put on the back burner.

But so are those who suggest Iraq is

not a major problem. It is, and we must

continue to deal with it on its own

merits, but on our own timetable.

It’s no secret that the State Department,

the Defense Department, and the

Joint Chiefs of are at odds on the best

course of action in Iraq.

We have Hans Blix and the IAEA saying

that the inspectors need more time

to accomplish their mission—that they

will have to stay in Iraq much longer

to get the job done.

Secretary Rumsfeld is saying, if we

get ourselves locked in for four more

months we will lose our weather window

and be forced to wait until the fall.

Secretary Powell is saying, look, we

must make it a priority to maintain

the support of the French and the Germans

and everyone else, not to mention

the American people. The President

was right to make Iraq the

world’s problem, not just our own.

Let’s keep it that way.

In my view, the President has shown

restraint on Iraq. He has gone to the

United Nations. He has allowed inspectors

to begin. Now he must allow them

to take their course. I would say to the

President, keep it going. In the eyes of

the world, you’re doing it right.

Inspectors are not a permanent solution

and neither is our massive troop

presence. But so long as the inspectors

are doing their work in Iraq, backed up

by the threat of our forces, it is highly

unlikely Iraq could pursue a nuclear

program undetected or would run the

risk of selling chemical or biological

weapons to terrorists. And we will sustain

international support. Meanwhile,

the pressure will build on Saddam. Unlike

in North Korea, times is on our

side, not his.

Of course, this massive deployment is

costly and hard on our men and women

in uniform. But going to war would be

far more costly in terms of troops and

treasure. It must remain a last resort.

If we do go to war, we better be absolutely

certain that our friends and allies

are all in the game at the outset.

Not because we cannot prevail

against Saddam Hussein without them.

We can—though it certainly makes

sense to spread the risk and share the

cost. But because without the support

of other nations, we will be left with a

political, financial, and, potentially, a

regionally destabilizing burden after

we take down Saddam. We will have to

deal with the ‘‘day after’’ Saddam—or

more accurately the decade after—on

our own.

In the weeks ahead, if we move to

war, I hope the President will tell the

American people what he has not yet

told them: How much will the war

cost? How will the balance his guns and

butter rhetoric with the bottom-line

budget realities we face? How many

troops will have to stay in Iraq after

Saddam and for how long? How much

will it cost to rebuild Iraq? Who will

help us foot the bill? The American

people deserve answers to these and

other key questions?