Mr. President, as I

understood the President in his State

of the Union speech earlier this week,

it is his intention to begin military action

against Iraq sometime in the near

future. That stated intention of the

President causes me some grave concern,

and I wanted to come to the Senate

floor today and express that concern.

Let me begin by stating the propositions

with which we all agree. First,

I think we all agree Saddam Hussein is

a brutal despot who has terrorized his

own people and has threatened his

neighboring States for many years.

Second, whether or not Saddam Hussein

has weapons of mass destruction

in a readily usable form at this time,

we must assume that given the opportunity

he will obtain those weapons.

Third, it is very much in our interest

as a Nation, and in the interest of our

allies, that Saddam Hussein be prevented

from acquiring or maintaining

those weapons.

But the question before the country

today is narrower than these propositions.

The question before the country

is whether we should cut short the

inspection process that is currently underway.

The U.N. inspection process is

a process that we rightly insisted upon

in our earlier deliberations with the

Security Council. So the question is

whether we should cut short that inspection

process and begin a military

action to remove Saddam Hussein and

his regime from power.

The President has moved aggressively

to prepare this Nation for war.

The total number of personnel who

have been either ordered to deploy, or

who have been put on alert to do so, is

roughly 148,000. There are roughly

23,000 marines en route to the Persian

Gulf aboard three major task forces.

There are roughly 25,000 sailors and

aviators attached to the various carrier

battle groups and amphibious task

forces that are either en route to the

region, on standby, or are on surge status.

These forces include some 175 aircraft

of all types and over 1,000 VLS

launch tubes carrying nearly 500 cruise

missiles.

So steps have been taken to prepare

us militarily for war. Today, we are,

simply put, on the brink of war. But

while these military preparations have

occurred, there has also been a parallel

effort going on through the U.N. to ascertain

what weapons of mass destruction

Saddam Hussein holds, where

those weapons are located, and what

threat those weapons pose to his neighbors

and to other free nations.

We have come to a difficult decision

point. The Pentagon is advising the

President that military preparations

are nearly complete. The President

must decide whether this country

should proceed militarily in the next

few weeks or whether we should continue

to support the efforts of U.N. inspectors

to carry out the instructions

that were given them by the U.N. Security

Council, on which we sit.

In my view, the President should

allow the U.N. inspectors to continue

their work. If they are denied access to

sites they wish to inspect, then the use

of military force will be justified. If

they find substantial evidence of a

weapons program that threatens Iraq’s

neighbors, then we should join with

those neighbors in eliminating that

threat. But up until this date, up until

today, neither of these circumstances

prevails. The inspectors themselves

have so stated, and they have asked for

additional time to complete their

work.

The decision the President makes on

going to war with Iraq will be the first

test of the new National Security

Strategy that was issued by the White

House in September of last year. In

that document, the President acknowledges

that the legitimacy of preemptive

military action depends ‘‘on the

existence of an imminent threat.’’

Right after that statement appears

in this document, however, the document

speaks of ‘‘adapting the concept

of imminent threat.’’ How much adaptation

of that concept is wise? How

much adaptation of that concept

makes sense for ourselves and our allies

as a precedent for the future?

This National Security Strategy document

that the administration issued

in September of last year goes on to

talk about our willingness as a nation

to take military action to preempt

emerging threats. Here the President is

contemplating, in the circumstance before

us today, military action not to

meet a specific identified military

threat but to depose a hostile government,

even though no imminent military

threat has been identified.

In his State of the Union Address, the

President framed the issue as being

whether ‘‘war is forced upon us.’’ He

stated that,

I, and I am sure most Americans,

agree with that statement. But in

my view, as of this date, war has not

been forced upon us. It is not credible

for us to assert as a nation that war

has been forced upon us.

The U.N. inspection process proceeds.

If there is evidence of an imminent

threat that requires us to take preemptive

military action, I have not seen

that evidence. Many Americans and

many of our allies also have been

unpersuaded by the evidence they have

seen.

The more willing we are to assert the

right to start a war to change the government

of a sovereign state, the more

we risk encouraging preemptive action

by other nations against governments

they wish to depose. And the less we

need to identify an imminent threat

before beginning a war, the more we

undermine efforts to avoid unprovoked

conflict in the future.

The President was right to go to the

United Nations and to insist that U.N.

inspectors return to Iraq. His latest decision

to send Secretary Powell to the

Security Council to present evidence of

the threat posed by Iraq is also proper,

and I look forward to hearing what

that evidence is. But unless that evidence

demonstrates a threat that requires

military action now, the wise

course is for us to hold off on that military

action and allow the U.N. inspectors

to do their work.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.