Mr. President, we

face no more serious decision in our democracy

than whether or not to go to

war. The American people deserve to

fully understand all of the implications

of such a decision.

The question of whether our Nation

should attack Iraq is playing out in the

context of a more fundamental debate

that is only just beginning—an all-important

debate about how, when and

where in the years ahead our country

will use its unsurpassed military

might.

On September 20, the administration

unveiled its new National Security

Strategy. This document addresses the

new realities of our age, particularly

the proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction and terrorist networks

armed with the agendas of fanatics.

The Strategy claims that these new

threats are so novel and so dangerous

that we should ‘‘not hesitate to act

alone, if necessary, to exercise our

right of self-defense by acting preemptively.’’

In the discussion over the past few

months about Iraq, the administration,

often uses the terms ‘‘pre-emptive’’ and

‘‘preventive’’ interchangeably. In the

realm of international relations, these

two terms have long had very different

meanings.

Traditionally, ‘‘pre-emptive’’ action

refers to times when states react to an

imminent threat of attack. For example,

when Egyptian and Syrian forces

mobilized on Israel’s borders in 1967,

the threat was obvious and immediate,

and Israel felt justified in preemptively

attacking those forces. The

global community is generally tolerant

of such actions, since no nation should

have to suffer a certain first strike before

it has the legitimacy to respond.

By contrast, ‘‘preventive’’ military

action refers to strikes that target a

country before it has developed a capability

that could someday become

threatening. Preventive attacks have

generally been condemned. For example,

the 1941 sneak attack on Pearl

Harbor was regarded as a preventive

strike by Japan, because the Japanese

were seeking to block a planned military

buildup by the United States in

the Pacific.

The coldly premeditated nature of

preventive attacks and preventive wars

makes them anathema to well-established

international principles against

aggression. Pearl Harbor has been

rightfully recorded in history as an act

of dishonorable treachery.

Historically, the United States has

condemned the idea of preventive war,

because it violates basic international

rules against aggression. But at times

in our history, preventive war has been

seriously advocated as a policy option.

In the early days of the cold war,

some U.S. military and civilian experts

advocated a preventive war against the

Soviet Union. They proposed a devastating

first strike to prevent the Soviet

Union from developing a threatening

nuclear capability. At the time,

they said the uniquely destructive

power of nuclear weapons required us

to rethink traditional international

rules.

The first round of that debate ended

in 1950, when President Truman ruled

out a preventive strike, stating that

such actions were not consistent with

our American tradition. He said, ‘‘You

don’t ‘prevent’ anything by war . . . except

peace.’’ Instead of a surprise first

strike, the nation dedicated itself to

the strategy of deterrence and containment,

which successfully kept the

peace during the long and frequently

difficult years of the Cold War.

Arguments for preventive war resurfaced

again when the Eisenhower administration

took power in 1953, but

President Eisenhower and Secretary of

State John Foster Dulles soon decided

firmly against it. President Eisenhower

emphasized that even if we were to win

such a war, we would face the vast burdens

of occupation and reconstruction

that would come with it.

The argument that the United States

should take preventive military action,

in the absence of an imminent attack,

resurfaced in 1962, when we learned

that the Soviet Union would soon have

the ability to launch missiles from

Cuba against our country. Many military

officers urged President Kennedy

to approve a preventive attack to destroy

this capability before it became

operational. Robert Kennedy, like

Harry Truman, felt that this kind of

first strike was not consistent with

American values. He said that a proposed

surprise first strike against Cuba

would be a ‘‘Pearl Harbor in reverse.’’

For 175 years, [he said] we have not

been that kind of country.

That view prevailed. A middle ground

was found and peace was preserved.

Yet another round of debate followed

the Cuban Missile Crisis when American

strategists and voices in and out

of the administration advocated preventive

war against China to forestall

its acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Many arguments heard today about

Iraq were made then about the Chinese

communist government: that its leadership

was irrational and that it was

therefore undeterrable. And once

again, those arguments were rejected.

As these earlier cases show, American

strategic thinkers have long debated

the relative merits of preventive

and pre-emptive war. Although nobody

would deny our right to pre-emptively

block an imminent attack on our territory,

there is disagreement about our

right to preventively engage in war.

In each of these cases a way was

found to deter other nations, without

waging war.

Now, the Bush Administration says

we must take pre-emptive action

against Iraq. But what the Administration

is really calling for is preventive

war, which flies in the face of international

rules of acceptable behavior.

There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein

is a despicable dictator and that

he must be disarmed. But the Administration

has not made a persuasive case

that the threat is so imminent that we

should risk going it alone. We should

resort to war only as a last resort. If

we work through the United Nations

for free, unfettered inspections, we

strengthen our hand with our allies,

our hand against Saddam Hussein and

our ability to disarm him.

The Administration’s new National

Security Strategy states ‘‘As a matter

of common sense and self-defense,

America will act against such emerging

threats before they are fully

formed.’’

The circumstances of today’s world

require us to rethink this concept. The

world changed on September 11, and all

of us have learned that it can be a drastically

more dangerous place. The Bush

administration’s new National Security

Strategy asserts that global realities

now legitimize preventive war and

make it a strategic necessity.

The document openly contemplates

preventive attacks against groups or

states, even absent the threat of imminent

attack. It legitimizes this kind of

first strike option, and it elevates it to

the status of a core security doctrine.

Disregarding norms of international

behavior, the Bush strategy asserts

that the United States should be exempt

from the rules we expect other

nations to obey.

I strongly oppose any such extreme

doctrine and I’m sure that many others

do as well. Earlier generations of

Americans rejected preventive war on

the grounds of both morality and practicality,

and our generation must do so

as well. We can deal with Iraq without

resorting to this extreme.

It is impossible to justify any such

double standard under international

law. Might does not make right. America

cannot write its own rules for the

modern world. To attempt to do so

would be unilateralism run amok. It

would antagonize our closest allies,

whose support we need to fight terrorism,

prevent global warming, and

deal with many other dangers that affect

all nations and require international

cooperation. It would deprive

America of the moral legitimacy necessary

to promote our values abroad.

And it would give other nations—from

Russia to India to Pakistan—an excuse

to violate fundamental principles of

civilized international behavior.

The administration’s doctrine is a

call for 21st century American imperialism

that no other nation can or

should accept. It is the antithesis of all

that America has worked so hard to

achieve in international relations since

the end of World War II.

This is not just an academic debate.

There are important real world consequences.

A shift in our policy toward

preventive war would reinforce the perception

of America as a ‘‘bully’ in the

Middle East and would fuel anti-American

sentiment throughout the Islamic

world and beyond.

It would also send a signal to governments

the world over that the rules of

aggression have changed for them too,

which could increase the risk of conflict

between countries such as Russia

and Georgia, India and Pakistan, and

China and Taiwan.

Obviously, this debate is only just beginning

on the administration’s new

strategy for national security. But the

debate is solidly grounded in American

values and history.

It will also be a debate among vast

numbers of well-meaning Americans

who have honest differences of opinion

about the best way to use United

States military might. The debate will

be contentious, but the stakes, in

terms of both our national security and

our allegiance to our core beliefs, are

too high to ignore.

I look forward to working closely

with my colleagues in Congress to develop

an effective, principled policy

that will enable us to protect our national

security, and respect the basic

principles that are essential for the

world to be at peace.

I yield the floor.