Mr. President, in a few

moments we will make one of the most

fateful decisions for our country. We

will decide if we authorize the President

to take this Nation to war. As

with every momentous debate in this

Chamber, our deliberations will resonate

long into the future. Few decisions

will have greater consequences to

the people we represent and to the future

of our Nation.

Before I ask young men and women

to put themselves in harm’s way, I

must be convinced we have exhausted

every other possibility, pursued every

other avenue. For me, and I believe for

the people I represent, war must be the

last resort.

As we debate the course this Nation

will take, some facts are clear and unassailable.

Saddam Hussein is a menace

to the whole region of the Middle

East and a vicious tyrant who harms

and oppresses his own people. He has

waged war against neighboring nations,

and he has attacked the people

of his own country. He has acquired

chemical and biological weapons. He is

attempting to acquire nuclear weapons

and the means to deliver those weapons

using ballistic missiles.

There is no question that Saddam

Hussein is ignoring the will of the

United Nations and that he has not

honored the agreements he made following

the Gulf War. Saddam Hussein

is a dangerous force in the world.

I agree that we must take action.

The question is, What course do we

take? How do we best protect the national

security of our country?

A decade ago in the gulf war, Saddam

Hussein launched a surprise attack on

Kuwait and we rallied a powerful international

response to defeat him.

Today, we debate a much different scenario.

Saddam has not directly threatened

his neighbors since the gulf war.

In a recent threat assessment from the

Central Intelligence Agency, it concludes

that Iraq is not likely to initiate

a chemical or biological attack

on the United States. Yet the President

is contemplating a preemptive invasion

of Iraq with the goal of ousting

Saddam Hussein and installing a new

regime. Never before in the history of

this Nation has the Congress voted to

authorize a preemptive attack on a

country that has not first attacked us

or our allies.

Let me be clear. I do not oppose the

use of force against this lawless and

dangerous tyrant, but I cannot support

the resolution before us as it stands. It

is too broad and open-ended, and I do

not believe it is in the national security

interest of the United States. In

my judgment, an invasion of Iraq at

this time would make the United

States less secure rather than more secure.

It would make a dangerous world

even more dangerous.

First, we have unfinished business

with the terrorists of al-Qaida. For the

past year we have all agreed that combating

al-Qaida was our first priority.

News reports just this morning warned

us of the danger of renewed terrorist

attacks against our country, organized

and orchestrated by al-Qaida. I believe

defeating the terrorists who launched

the attacks on the United States last

September 11 must be our first priority

before we launch a new war on a new

front. Yet today the President asks us

to take action against Iraq as a first

priority. I believe that has the priority

wrong.

Second, a unilateral invasion could

prompt the very attack we seek to preempt.

In just the last few days, the CIA

has reported that there is a very low

probability Saddam Hussein would

launch a biological or chemical attack

against the United States or our interests

in the region. However, if we

launch a unilateral invasion, the risk

rises dramatically that a desperate

Saddam would use biological and

chemical weapons.

Brent Scowcroft, National Security

Adviser to former President Bush,

wrote that in the wake of an invasion:

Saddam would be likely to conclude he had

nothing left to lose, leading him to unleash

whatever weapons of mass destruction he

possesses.

Third, an invasion of Iraq for the purposes

of regime change would necessitate

a march on Baghdad. Such a

course would expose our forces on the

ground to serious risks in hand-tohand,

street-by-street urban warfare in

a foreign capital. We would lose much

of our advantage in superior airpower

and technology. The military and civilian

casualties could be substantial.

The former Commander in Chief of

the U.S. Central Command, retired Marine

Corps General Joseph Hoar, testified

before Congress:

Those are sobering words—battalions

a day at a time.

Fourth, a unilateral attack by the

United States could destabilize an already

volatile and dangerous region

and inflame anti-American interests

around the globe. An American invasion

could doubtless impact the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict. The backlash in

Arab nations could further energize

and deepen anti-American sentiment.

Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups

could gain more willing suicide bombers

and raise even greater financial resources

from the wealthy nations of

the region.

General Wesley Clark, the former Supreme

Allied Commander, Europe, put

it succinctly: ‘‘If we go in unilaterally

or without the full weight of the international

organizations behind us, if we

go in with a very sparse number of allies.

. . . we’re liable to super-charge

recruiting for al Qaeda.’’ Let me repeat

that. ‘‘We’re liable to super-charge recruiting

for al Qaeda.’’

Fifth, if this nation asserts that preemptive

military attacks are justified

in this conflict, what are the consequences

for other conflicts around

the globe? Would India or Pakistan

claim the same justification in Kashmir,

raising the prospect of nuclear

war in South Asia? Could China use

this precedent to attack Taiwan, potentially

drawing the U.S. into a major

war with China? Could Russia use this

justification to re-occupy parts of the

former Soviet Union?

And sixth, while the financial costs

of this effort should not drive this debate,

we cannot ignore them. The Congressional

Budget Office has just estimated

that an invasion of Iraq could

cost this nation $6 billion to $9 billion

a month. That is a significant financial

toll at any time, but particularly when

we are still engaged in conflict in Afghanistan.

The economic downturn

makes the expense even harder to bear.

CBO estimates that the costs of an

invasion plus a five-year occupation

would reach some $272 billion. How will

we pay for this? Does the White House

propose new taxes? Or are we to assume

that this will be paid for out of

the Social Security trust funds? Will

we go deeper and deeper into debt? Or

does the President suggest cuts in key

domestic programs, such as education,

highways, or healthcare.

Which brings me to my final point. If

our goal is to topple Saddam, what is

our responsibility for the regime that

follows:

Forming a new government in Iraq is

far from simple. There is no clear successor

to Saddam Hussein. Iraq is a

country filled with competing ethnic

groups and religious and tribal factions

with no history of democracy.

I do not want to see our forces mired

in a long occupation, in dangerous territory,

in a destabilized region, subject

to violence within Iraq. I do not want

to see the United States responsible for

the stability of Iraq, the economy of

Iraq, and the political future of that

nation.

I began by saying that while I do not

oppose the use of force against this dictator,

war must be our last resort. I believe

history has important lessons for

us.

Many other dangerous dictators have

acquired weapons of mass destruction,

or tried to. Yet we successfully contained

the Soviet Union, Communist

China, and North Korea and others

without resorting to a pre-emptive

first strike. Again and again, we have

seen the scenario. A vicious dictator

amasses weapons of mass destruction,

threatens his neighbors, and threatens

the United States.

Always in the past, we have chosen

containment and deterence—not invasion.

In the past, we have contained

the dictator, rallied international support

to isolate him, and together with

our allies carried out a disciplined,

forceful and effective strategy of deterrence.

We did not launch an invasion.

Even when the Soviet Union placed

nuclear missiles just 90 miles off our

coastline, we did not invade. Rather,

President John F. Kennedy issued an

ultimatum—a successful ultimatum.

We demanded the removal of those

missiles. We succeeded, and we brought

the world back from the brink of a nuclear

conflict that might have engulfed

the world.

Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., recently

asked: ‘‘Why not . . . try the

combination of containment and deterrence

that won us the Cold War? Saddam

is not likely to attack other countries.

He knows that he would be playing

into Bush’s hands. Retaliation

would be prompt and overwhelming,

and Saddam has no interest in suicide.

The one situation that might induce

him to use his weaponry is a U.S. attack

on Iraq.’’

The historical lesson is clear. There

are disciplined and forceful actions we

can take against dictators and aggressors

short of invasion, actions that can

succeed.

Clearly, if Saddam Hussein were to

attack this country—or if we had

strong evidence that an attack on this

country were imminent—we would

have every right to defend ourselves. In

that case, Saddam should have no

doubt that the United States would obliterate

him.

If the President has new knowledge

on an imminent threat from Iraq that

contradicts the statement of his CIA

Director just this week that an attack

is unlikely, he should reveal it to this

Congress. I believe in protecting our

people and our allies from imminent

danger. But I believe the President

must present stronger evidence to the

Congress and the American public before

he reverses a strategy that has

worked well against dictators around

the world. Before this nation strikes

first, strikes unilaterally, strikes preemptively,

we must know how this

threat is different from those that have

come before.

Inaction and appeasement are not options.

We must be prepared to use force

to defend out national security interests,

with or without the support of the

UN. And I support the use of force

against Iraq in the following circumstances.

We need no one’s permission to fight

back when attacked, and force would

be fully justified in the case of an Iraqi

attack against this country or our allies.

Force would also be justified if we

were presented with clear and compelling

evidence Saddam was preparing an

imminent attack on this nation, or on

our allies.

Additionally, the use of force would

be justified if we were provided with

credible evidence that Saddam was

linked to the September 11th attacks

on this nation or if Saddam were to

provide weapons of mass destruction to

terrorists.

Finally, I believe we must be prepared

to use force in concert with our

allies to destroy, Iraq’s weapons of

mass destruction if Saddam refuses to

comply with UN resolutions ordering

him to disarm.

I support the use of force when it is

in our national security interest. I

voted for the Levin amendment to authorize

the use of force to disarm Saddam

Hussein and affirm our right to

self defense. I also voted for the Durbin

amendment to authorize the use of

force to destroy Iraq’s weapons of mass

destruction.

For all the reasons I have cited, I believe

an invasion of Iraq must be a last

resort, not a first response. Instead, I

believe we can and should take a

phased approach.

First, we should exhaust every option

available to us at the United Nations.

Saddam has defied the U.N. in the past,

but the growing U.S. and international

pressure, and the imminent threat of

military action may give the process

new life. Further, our allies will be

more willing to join with us if we exhaust

every option at the U.N.

Next, we should make every attempt

to forge the same strong coalition of

nations that brought Saddam to his

knees during the Gulf War. The knowledge

that he is an outlaw in the eyes of

the world community will send a powerful

message to Saddam to comply

with the U.N. resolutions he agreed to

after the Gulf War.

I believe we should issue an ultimatum

to Saddam to allow weapons inspections

and immediately disarm. If

he does not comply we can then take

swift military action to force his compliance

and deprive him of his weapons.

But I do not believe we should authorize

an invasion of Iraq tonight.

I know this vote will place me with a

small minority of colleagues here, but

I must vote my conscience.

I say to the President and to my colleagues

that while I do not support this

resolution, I know it will pass. And if

the President exercises the authority it

grants him to launch a unilateral invasion

of Iraq, I will stand with him. I

will do everything in my power to support

our troops and ask for the support

of our allies. Like every American on

that day, I will pray for the safety of

our soldiers in battle, the wisdom of

our leaders, a swift victory, and the

lasting peace that has so far eluded the

troubled peoples of the region.