Mr. President, I commend

the Secretary of State for the

strong presentation to the United Nations

Security Council that he made

yesterday. He confirmed what many of

us already knew—that Saddam Hussein

is a threat who has, once again, failed

to live up to his commitments to the

international community.

And he did it at a place many of us

had been pressing him and the administration

to do it—at the United Nations.

I hope that President Bush will use

Secretary Powell’s presentation to

build a broad international coalition to

confront Iraq. Our national security is

better served if he does.

But, as the world’s attention was focused

on Secretary Powell and his presentation,

an even more ominous development

regarding weapons of mass destruction

was taking place in North

Korea.

Yesterday, North Korea announced

that it had flipped the switch and restarted

a power plant that can be used

to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons.

This is but the latest in a series of

aggressive steps North Korea has taken

to kick into gear its programs to develop

weapons of mass destruction and

the means to deliver them—steps that

our intelligence community believes

indicate that Iraq is months, if not

years, away from being able to take.

At the U.N., Colin Powell talked

about the potential that Iraq may

build a missile that could travel 1,200

kilometers. In 1998, North Korea fired a

multi-stage rocket over Japan, proving

they are capable of hitting one of

America’s closest allies—and soon,

America itself.

In November 2001, intelligence analysts

presented a report to senior administration

officials that concluded

North Korea had begun construction of

a plant to enrich uranium for use in

nuclear weapons.

In October 2002, North Korea informed

visiting U.S. officials that it

had a covert nuclear weapons program.

In December 2002, North Korea

turned off cameras that were being

used to ensure that 8,000 spent nuclear

fuel rods were not being converted into

weapons-grade material.

Days later, North Korea kicked out

an international team of weapons inspectors.

And, within the past week, the administration

confirmed that North

Korea has begun moving these fuel rods

to an undisclosed location.

On Tuesday, former Assistant Secretary

of Defense and Korea expert

Ashton Carter called these events ‘‘a

huge foreign policy defeat for the

United States and a setback for decades

of U.S. non-proliferation policy.’’

He is right. But it is potentially even

worse. North Korea could have six to

eight additional nuclear weapons before

autumn.

And we know, when it comes to nuclear

weapons—it only takes one. Remember,

everything North Korea

makes, North Korea sells.

Those scuds we intercepted on a ship

to Yemen—and then inexplicably returned—

weren’t a gift. They were an

example of business as usual from what

even this administration has acknowledged

is the world’s worst proliferator.

As alarming as this information is,

the administration’s reaction is even

more troubling. The President said in

the State of the Union:

As the chronology of events I detailed

above indicates, the administration

knew about North Korea’s plans

on enriching uranium as early as November

2001, and yet it has said little,

and done less, to stop these plans.

We have heard the administration—

through leaks in the press from

unnamed sources—suggest that we cannot

focus on North Korea because it

will distract attention from Iraq.

And we have even heard—and this is

on the record—that some in the administration

believe that North Korea’s expansion

of its nuclear arsenal is not

even necessarily a problem.

Proliferators with nuclear weapons

are a problem—a serious one. And our

attention should be focused on all the

threats we face. It is well past time

that the administration develop a clear

policy on North Korea.

Earlier this week, an administration

official testified before the Senate that

we will have to talk directly to the

North Koreans. But he went on to say

that the administration had not

reached out to the North Koreans to

schedule talks and did not know when

that might happen.

In the State of the Union, the President

stated that the United States is

‘‘working with the countries of the region

. . . to find a peaceful solution.’’

All indications, however, suggest that

the countries in the region appear to be

taking a course directly at odds with

the administration’s latest pronouncements.

North Korea is a grave threat that

seems to grow with each day that

passes without high-level U.S. engagement.

It is one the President must redouble

his efforts to confront.

The President should stop

downplaying this threat, start paying

more attention to it, and immediately

engage the North Koreans in direct

talks.

Secretary Powell was very effective

in outlining the threats Iraq poses. But

we need a comprehensive strategy to

effectively deal with ‘‘all’’ the threats

we face.

Given the stakes of this situation

and the ongoing confusion about the

President’s and the administration’s

policy, we should expect no less.