

U.S.SENATOR

Debbie STABENOW

2006

Excerpts from Statement on Iraq Resolution **October 4, 2002**

Mr. President, I rise to address the issue of taking military action against Iraq.

As members of Congress, the most important vote that we have is one that will place American troops in harm's way. The issue of war and peace is a burden of responsibility that lies heavy upon me, as well as each and every one of my esteemed colleagues. This is a vote of conscience and also a vote with historic consequences, because what we debate and decide here will not only significantly affect this great nation but will immediately influence global events for years to come.

No matter how difficult the decision may be, it is one that we each must make for the sake of our country. We have an obligation and duty to carefully weigh the demands and the consequences of a preemptive attack. Before we engage in war, we must understand the results of war are irrevocable and peaceful solutions should always be our first choice.

The question before the Senate is not whether or not we support or trust the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein but how the United States will counter the threat of Saddam Hussein to our citizens and the citizens of his own country.

The questions that must be asked are: Does the United States Congress stand ready to alter the historic precedents that have guided our nation for over 200 years?

Is it in our national interest to change our policy of deterrence and arms control to a policy that accepts a preemptive attack on another country as a legitimate way to defend ourselves against regimes suspected of having weapons of mass destruction? And, under what circumstances should such a preemptive strike against another country be authorized?

I have grave concern that the Administration's resolution authorizes the use of preemptive, unilateral U.S. force without the participation of our partners in the war against terrorism. If we do authorize preemptive unilateral force, there could be grave consequences for our actions.

First, we could lose much if not all of the support of our partners in the war against terrorism.

We are also receiving military and intelligence support in the war on terrorism from other Muslim countries. Obviously, a unilateral attack on Iraq could sour if not ruin all of these relationships and undermine our efforts in the war on terrorism. Furthermore, such an attack would likely reenergize al Qaeda sympathizers across the globe. In more ways than one, a unilateral attack could weaken our chances to continue to dismantle al Qaeda's network and bring Osama bin-Laden to justice.

If we attacked unilaterally, who would help us keep the peace in Iraq while trying to set up a democratic government to replace Saddam Hussein?

I don't believe that the Administration has made the case for a preemptive, unilateral strike against Iraq that would justify the risks or such a historic change in American policy.

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Another serious question - Is the President going to ask Congress to support the same unilateral action against other countries like Iran that have ballistic missiles and close ties to terrorist groups? Why aren't they proposing action there where the threat is much more imminent and real?

Mr. President, we should not be reluctant to use military force when there is a serious threat to the American people. But we should only go to war as a last resort. Peace should always be our goal.

We also must remember that with any war comes a terrible price. In a war with Iraq, many of our own servicemen and women will be wounded or killed. Many innocent civilians will die. We should not have any illusion that this war will be easy. It will not be an antiseptic war and it will not be won through airpower alone. Military commanders have told Congress that this will be an urban war with thousands of troops engaged in vicious house-to-house fighting.

Mr. President, in closing I want to make sure that my view is not distorted. I believe that we, the American people, have the right to defend ourselves from an imminent attack. If we are seriously threatened, we do not need the permission of the United Nations or even our NATO allies to attack Iraq or any other nation for that matter.

I believe the President's approach takes us down the path that poses the most risk for the people of our country and the world. The President's approach is entirely too broad. This resolution says that the Congress authorizes force, including unilateral, preemptive strikes, for broad national security reasons and for the enforcement of a broad range of U.N. resolutions that may have nothing to do with weapons of mass destruction. For the reasons I have mentioned, I will oppose this resolution.

If we do this right, Mr. President, we will truly make the world safer for our families. If we choose the wrong approach, I am deeply concerned that we will start down a road that could ultimately create a more unstable and dangerous world for our children and our grandchildren. There is no doubt that we can defeat Saddam Hussein in battle. The test of our strength is not in our ability to marshal our military forces, but our willingness to adhere to that which has made us great.

We are a strong and powerful nation, made that way by our willingness to go the extra mile in the name of liberty and peace. The time is now for us to work together in the name of the American people and get it right.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.