

Remarks on Signing the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002

October 16, 2002

Thank you all. Please be seated. Good morning. Welcome to the White House. I want to thank the members of my Cabinet who have joined us. I want to thank the Members of Congress who are here on the stage. I want to thank the Members of Congress who are here in the audience. I'm honored to have you here.

The resolution I'm about to sign symbolizes the united purpose of our Nation, expresses the considered judgment of the Congress, and marks an important event in the life of America.

The 107th Congress is one of the few called by history to authorize military action to defend our country and the cause of peace. This is among the most serious and difficult decisions a legislator can face. Members of both Houses, both political parties, have deliberated with care, and they have spoken with clarity on behalf of the American people. We will face our dangers squarely, and we will face them unafraid.

With this resolution, Congress has now authorized the use of force. I have not ordered the use of force. I hope the use of force will not become necessary. Yet, confronting the threat posed by Iraq is necessary, by whatever means that requires. Either the Iraqi regime will give up its weapons of mass destruction, or for the sake of peace, the United States will lead a global coalition to disarm that regime. If any doubt our Nation's resolve, our determination, they would be unwise to test it.

The Iraqi regime is a serious and growing threat to peace. On the commands of a dictator, the regime is armed with biological and chemical weapons, possesses ballistic missiles, promotes international terror, and seeks nuclear weapons. The same dictator has a history of mass murder, of

striking other nations without warning, of intense hatred for America, and of contempt for the demands of the civilized world.

If Iraq gains even greater destructive power, nations in the Middle East would face blackmail, intimidation, or attack. Chaos in that region would be felt in Europe and beyond. And Iraq's combination of weapons of mass destruction and ties to terrorist groups and ballistic missiles would threaten the peace and security of many nations. Those who choose to live in denial may eventually be forced to live in fear.

Every nation that shares in the benefits of peace also shares in the duty of defending the peace. The time has arrived once again for the United Nations to live up to the purposes of its founding, to protect our common security. The time has arrived once again for free nations to face up to our global responsibilities and confront a gathering danger.

In 1991, Iraq was given 15 days to fully disclose all weapons of mass destruction. The dictator has successfully defied that obligation for 4,199 days. The dictator has—and during this 11-year period of his dictatorship, the regime has become highly skilled in the techniques of deception. It has blocked effective inspections of so-called Presidential sites—actually 12 square miles with hundreds of structures where sensitive materials could be hidden. The regime has forged documents, disabled surveillance cameras, and developed mobile weapons facilities to keep ahead of any inspector.

The Iraqi regime has frustrated the work of international inspectors by firing warning shots, by tapping their telephones, confiscating their documents, blocking aerial inspection flights, and barring access to sites

for hours while evidence is carried away. At one location, inspectors actually witnessed Iraqi guards moving files, burning documents, and then dumping the ashes in a river. Aboard U.N. helicopters, Iraqi escorts have physically struggled with inspectors to keep them from approaching certain areas.

For Iraq, the old weapons inspection process was little more than a game in which cheating was never punished. And that game is over. The ploys and promises of the Iraqi regime no longer matter. The regime is free to continue saying whatever it chooses. Its fate depends entirely on what it actually does.

Our goal is not merely to limit Iraq's violations of Security Council resolutions or to slow down its weapons program. Our goal is to fully and finally remove a real threat to world peace and to America. Hopefully, this can be done peacefully. Hopefully, we can do this without any military action. Yet, if Iraq is to avoid military action by the international community, it has the obligation to prove compliance with all the world's demands. It's the obligation of Iraq.

Compliance will begin with an accurate and full and complete accounting for all chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons materials, as well as missiles and other means of delivery anywhere in Iraq. Failure to make such an accounting would be a further indication of the regime's bad faith and aggressive intent. Inspectors must have access to any site in Iraq at any time, without preclearance, without delay, without exceptions. Inspectors must be permitted to operate under new, effective rules. And the Iraqi regime must accept those rules without qualification or negotiation.

To ensure that we learn the truth, the regime must allow witnesses to its illegal activities to be interviewed outside of the country. These witnesses must be free to bring their entire families with them, so they're beyond the reach of Saddam

Hussein's terror, Saddam Hussein's torture, Saddam Hussein's murder.

In addition to declaring and destroying all of its weapons of mass destruction, Iraq, in accordance with U.N. Security Council demands, must end its support for terrorism. As the U.N. demands, Iraq must cease the persecution of its civilian population. As the U.N. demands, Iraq must stop all illicit trade outside the oil-for-food program. Iraq must also release or account for all Gulf war personnel, including an American pilot whose fate is still unknown.

The United States takes the resolutions of the Security Council seriously. We urge other nations to do the same. We're working to build the broadest possible coalition to enforce the demands of the world on the Iraqi regime. I've told all the members of the United Nations, America will play its historic role in defeating aggressive tyranny.

I hope the good people of Iraq will remember our history and not pay attention to the hateful propaganda of their Government. America has never sought to dominate, has never sought to conquer. We've always sought to liberate and to free. Our desire is to help Iraqi citizens find the blessings of liberty within their own culture and their own traditions. The Iraqi people cannot flourish under a dictator that oppresses them and threatens them. Gifted people of Iraq will flourish if and when oppression is lifted.

When Iraq has a government committed to the freedom and well-being of its people, America, along with many other nations, will share a responsibility to help Iraq reform and prosper. And we will meet our responsibilities. That's our pledge to the Iraqi people.

Like the Members of Congress here today, I've carefully weighed the human cost of every option before us. If we go into battle, as a last resort, we will confront an enemy capable of irrational miscalculations, capable of terrible deeds. As the Commander in Chief, I know the risks to

our country. I'm fully responsible to the young men and women in uniform who may face these risks. Yet those risks only increase with time, and the costs could be immeasurably higher in years to come. To shrink from this threat would bring a false sense of temporary peace, leading to a future in which millions live or die at the discretion of a brutal dictator. That's not true peace, and we won't accept it.

The terrorist attacks of last year put our country on notice. We're not immune from the dangers and hatreds of the world. In the events of September the 11th, we resolved as a nation to oppose every threat from any source that could bring sudden tragedy to the American people. This Nation will not live at the mercy of any foreign power or plot. Confronting grave dan-

gers is the surest path to peace and security. This is the expectation of the American people and the decision of their elected representatives.

I thank the Congress for a thorough debate and an overwhelming statement of support. The broad resolve of our Government is now clear to all, clear to everyone to see: We will defend our Nation and lead others in defending the peace.

May God bless your work.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:17 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and missing American pilot Lt. Comdr. Michael S. Speicher, USN. H.J. Res. 114, approved October 16, was assigned Public Law No. 107-243.

Statement on Signing the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002

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Today I have signed into law H.J. Res. 114, a resolution "To authorize the use of United States Armed Forces against Iraq." By passing H.J. Res. 114, the Congress has demonstrated that the United States speaks with one voice on the threat to international peace and security posed by Iraq. It has also clearly communicated to the international community, to the United Nations Security Council, and, above all, to Iraq's tyrannical regime a powerful and important message: the days of Iraq flouting the will of the world, brutalizing its own people, and terrorizing its neighbors must—and will—end. Iraq will either comply with all U.N. resolutions, rid itself of weapons of mass destruction, and in its support for terrorists, or it will be compelled to do so. I hope that Iraq will choose compliance and peace, and I believe passage of this resolution makes that choice more likely.

The debate over this resolution in the Congress was in the finest traditions of American democracy. There is no social or political force greater than a free people united in a common and compelling objective. It is for that reason that I sought an additional resolution of support from the Congress to use force against Iraq, should force become necessary. While I appreciate receiving that support, my request for it did not, and my signing this resolution does not, constitute any change in the long-standing positions of the executive branch on either the President's constitutional authority to use force to deter, prevent, or respond to aggression or other threats to U.S. interests or on the constitutionality of the War Powers Resolution. On the important question of the threat posed by Iraq, however, the views and goals of the Congress, as expressed in H.J. Res. 114 and