Madam President, I ask my colleagues on the floor just to

think this through. I have been watching this debate about the threat

of Iraq, frankly, since the early 1990s. I have been privileged to

serve in this body since 1977, which means I have been here long enough

to see the evolving trends in terrorism, from the Iranian revolution to

the perversion of the Islamic faith and advent of fundamentalism. I

also have been here through all the stages of relations with Iraq since

the rise of Saddam Hussein.

I recall the debate prior to the first gulf war. While certainly not

absolutely partisan, that debate in 1990 was the last time we had a

very partisan debate on foreign policy. Through the 1990s, while I had

many disputes with the Clinton administration over various aspects of

foreign policy, I seemed to recall that partisanship on the question of

Iraq had diminished. In fact, the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 was

passed in this body unanimously and in the House overwhelmingly and was

signed into law by President Clinton.

I think my colleagues would have to agree with this. I would like to

ask my colleagues if they agree with the following assessment: Since

the fall of 2002, the debate over Iraq policy has become more and more

partisan and more and more bitter. While the authorization to use force

was passed by a large majority--I believe it was 77 to 23--and with the

support of many of my Democratic colleagues, including some not present

today, the debate since then has been troubling to me.

You would think that Congress could maintain our proper role of

oversight without descending into partisan attacks. You would think

that with our military in the midst of a historic mission and over 500

American families grieving because their loved ones paid the ultimate

sacrifice, that legitimate criticism could be expressed without

partisan rancor or misleading rhetoric. You would think so.

One of the most troubling aspects of the criticism of our President

and his policy was the suggestion, deceivingly made, that the threat of

Saddam Hussein was not imminent. I believe these criticisms beginning

last year deliberately tried to confuse the American public. The threat

was not imminent, the critics said, implying the response to go to war

was not required.

Yet I have reviewed most of the President's rhetoric, and I have

concluded that he made numerous honest statements that declared that

after the historic attacks of September 11, we would not be defining

our response by outdated measures of imminence. I went back and read a

key quote from the President's State of the Union Address in 2003 in

which he declared to us, the American people, and to the world:

That is what he said, and it was right then, and it is right today.

So will my colleagues recall this extremely clear statement? Do they

think his words were casually stated? Give me a break.

I have given a lot of thought to the concept of imminence since

September 11, and as we debated our response to Iraq, I recognized that

the definition of ``imminence'' is necessary to support a doctrine of

preemption. I wonder what our various Senators' views about this are

since the definition of ``imminence'' is different in the 21st century

than it was in the 19th or the 20th centuries.

During the debate over authorization of the use of force last year, I

made the following points:

Osama bin Laden launched an attack that changed the way America sees

the world. We had to recognize that the concept of imminence was not an

abstract idea as we contemplated preemptive use of force. Preemption is

not a new concept in international law, despite what many of the

President's critics suggest. It is as old as Grotius, the founder of

modern international law.

Contrary to critics' misinformed assertions, the U.S. has never

foresworn the use of preemption, not since the U.N. charter and not

under either Democratic or Republican administrations.

Preemption has always been conditioned on the idea of imminent

threat. In the prenuclear era, we could see conventional armies

amassing on a border and base imminence on that measure. But in the

nuclear era, the idea of imminence grew quite a bit murkier.

Was it the fueling of an enemy ICBM? Was it the glare on the rocket

as it left the launch pad? Was it the warheads' return through the

atmosphere? Because we raised these questions, by the way, was the

reason the U.S. rejected a ``no first use'' policy during the era of

strategic competition with the Soviet Union. Was that the reason we did

that? You bet your life.

Imminence becomes even murkier in an era of terrorism and weapons of

mass destruction. When did the threat of al-Qaida become imminent? I

know when it became manifest. Not, by the way, on September 11. Osama

bin Laden had struck many times before then. On September 11, the

threat became catastrophic. It was well beyond manifest. It was well

beyond imminent.

Today, most people agree the threat of Bin Laden should have been

considered imminent well back into the 1990s. I first started speaking

of this threat in 1996, but I now believe this threat could have been

considered imminent even before that.

Do my colleagues agree we had to reconsider the definition of

``imminence'' after September 11, that the threat of terrorism forces

us to redefine threats to our national security, that it would have

been irresponsible for any administration entrusted with national

security to avoid doing so? Does anybody disagree with that?

Would my colleagues allow me just a few more questions which I would

like to ask everybody in this body, please? I wonder if my colleagues

would agree with this assessment about the threat that Iraq poses.

I had to make, for my own conscience and to present to my

constituents, my own assessment of the threat posed by Iraq. The

threats Saddam Hussein posed to his own people were clear. Free Iraqis

today will be undertaking the grim task of exhuming mass graves for a

long time. Saddam's threat to his neighbors and our friends in the gulf

and Middle East are also well established. But all of us had to

determine what threat was posed to the United States.

I feared a nexus between weapons of mass destruction and a terrorism-

sponsoring state, and we feared they had weapons of mass destruction.

The U.N. confirmed they had had weapons of mass destruction. They used

weapons of mass destruction against their own people and threatened the

use of them against others. They used them against others, as well, in

the Iranian war.

On weapons of mass destruction, we know that we have not discovered

any weapons of mass destruction so far. This debate has been joined on

a number of levels. I fully support the chairman of the Senate Select

Committee

on Intelligence in his determined efforts to learn about the failures

of our intelligence, if there were, in fact, failures.

We still have not even looked at the vast majority of sites in Iraq

where weapons of mass destruction may still lie. I know that every

intelligence community professional agrees with our need to learn from

many errors because all of us know the value of accurate intelligence,

while all of us recognize the limits to perfectibility.

On another level, both in the Intelligence Committee and in the

public arena, the debate has become more partisan, acrimonious and,

once again, deceptive.

Will my colleagues agree with me that the cost of making intelligence

oversight partisan is not worth the devaluation of a tool that we need

more than at any other time in our history?

I would like to know if my colleagues would agree with the following

conclusion about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. We faced

a weapons of mass destruction gap.

This gap was the difference between the chemical and biological

stockpiles we had confirmed existed until the late 1990s and the lack

of evidence regarding their status or destruction in 2002--their

status, their destruction, or their removal someplace else. The gap was

significant. No other Western government or intelligence government

could explain it, nor could the United States verify that the gap had

been closed by the cooperation of the Iraqi regime in proving the

destruction of these weapons.

This was a requirement, by the way, under international law, made to

the international community, a requirement that was the result of the

cessation of hostilities at the end of the first gulf war; a

requirement that unmet left that war unresolved, unconcluded, and

therefore without a promise of peace.

The attempts at denial and deception by the Iraqi regime were

blatant. The refusal to cooperate with the international community was

obstinate. The potential threat posed by a regime violently hostile to

the United States was grave. I hope my colleagues will agree that it

would have been irresponsible for any administration entrusted with the

national security to avoid reaching similar conclusions.

There was the threat of terrorism. For well over a decade, Iraq was

on our list of state sponsors of terrorism. Every Member in this body

had ample opportunities to review the evidence supporting this claim--

this verified knowledge, by the way.

To my knowledge, no Member on either side of the aisle questioned the

President's determination, or this determination.

Now, of course, we have not proven a link to September 11, and

ultimately there will likely not be a causal link. Perhaps Saddam was

directly involved. Perhaps we will learn more.

Association is not causation, as every logic professor would say.

Caution in leaping to conclusions is in order. Associating with

terrorist groups, as we know Saddam Hussein has done and had done,

training them, giving them moral and financial support, is different

than directing them. Nevertheless, his links to terrorism had been

evident for a long time.

The President has made it clear, since his first speech before the

Congress days after September 11, that associating with terrorist

groups would no longer be responded to with apathy. The previous

administration did so, there is no question about that, and America's

security was gravely compromised.

Do my colleagues remember the President's speech to the Congress

after September 11, 2001? Do they recall, as I do, the public's

overwhelming support for what the President said that day?

Certainly the evidence of Al-Zurqawi whose documents were captured

and released a few weeks ago, as well as the reports in the press

suggesting links with the Ansar-al-Islam indicated a troubling link

between Iraq and al-Qaida.

I am waiting for some of the administration's critics to suggest that

these two terrorist elements were caused by our intervention in

Afghanistan and that had we supported the status quo there we would not

be facing the terrorists of the jihadists and Ansar-al-Islam. That

would have been another very specious analysis.

It is true that Al-Zarqawi and Ansar became more active as a result

of our intervention in Afghanistan, when we deposed the Taliban and al-

Qaida and fled from that country to hide in Pakistan or to get safe

passage from Iran to travel to Iraq. In my estimation, if Saddam

Hussein was not involved in September 11, his regime certainly became

more dangerous to us as a result of our attack on the Taliban in

Afghanistan.

I hope my colleagues can imagine that this President or any President

would not have had to respond similarly to the way President Bush

responded to the Taliban's protection of al-Qaida after September 11,

2001. That is, of course, unless a President had judged the threat of

al-Qaida imminent before that fateful day.

Finally, I would like my colleagues to allow me a question or two on

the responses we have heard from David Kay's testimonies. The response

to the Kay testimonies has also been very troubling to me because the

testimonies of an honest and substantive man have been subject to

partisan rancor over the President's difficult decision to go to war.

Listening to some commentators, one would think Kay's honest

assessment that weapons of mass destruction will not be found, an

assessment that I believe may still be premature, could be interpreted

into a challenge to the sincerity of the administration's estimate of

the Iraqi threat.

As I have said, I believe we need to investigate any flaws in our

intelligence that David Kay or any other serious professional exposes.

Yet this is what David Kay told us. In an interview earlier this month,

he said: I certainly believe that Iraq was a gathering threat. In fact,

in many ways, it will probably turn out that Saddam and that regime

were more dangerous than we anticipated because, in fact, it was

falling apart into unbelievable depravity and corruption.

Where is that quote among all of our liberal commentators in this

country today? Where is that quote? That was one of the most important

quotes he made.

The week before, Kay told the public, in responding to a question of

whether the decision to go to war was prudent: I think it was

absolutely prudent. He said: I think it was absolutely prudent. In

fact, I think at the end of the inspection process we will paint a

picture of Iraq that was far more dangerous than even we thought it was

before the war. It was of a system collapsing. It was a country that

had the capability and weapons of mass destruction areas and in which

terrorists, like ants to honey, were going after it.

The fact is, it took guts for the President to do what he did. He was

right, and history will prove him to be right.

When I hear these testimonies of David Kay, I become concerned of yet

another intelligence failure: We did not adequately assess the

political degradation of the Saddam Hussein regime, the political

degradation of a regime that killed 300,000-plus of its own citizens,

men, women, and children, and buried them in mass graves, and helped to

kill a million others in its war with Iran. We did not adequately

assess the political depravity and degradation of Saddam Hussein's

regime. Iraq had become a gangster state.

It was, according to David Kay, and all the reports we are now

getting from free Iraq, more dangerous than we thought. Yet some

criticize the President's decision? Give me a break. They ought to be

criticized. The critics know these facts as well as I do, and ignoring

them is a terrible thing.

I would just like to ask my colleagues whether the assessment by

David Kay should not support the President's brave decision to address

the threat of the Hussein regime by implementing a policy of regime

change--a policy that had been nearly unanimously supported in our

Government for 4 years?

Was Iraq a grave and gathering threat, as the President said? I ask

my colleagues, especially those who have been so critical of the

President, would it have been responsible for any administration

entrusted with the national security to avoid reaching similar

conclusions? I think Senator Kerry was right when he said this:

The ranking member of the Senate Intelligence Committee said, back in

2002:

That was said in the Congressional Record. Why the difference today?

Let's go back to my friend, Senator Kerry, the Senator from

Massachusetts, again. Back in 1990 he said:

My gosh, that was said in the Congressional Record on October 2,

1990.

On November 9, 1990, the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts

said this:

All I can say is why did he say that then, and why, as a candidate,

is he saying the things he is saying today?

The distinguished Senator from Massachusetts said:

That is in the Congressional Record on November 9, 1997.

I think the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts deserves credit

for those statements. He was warning America during the Clinton years

of how terrible the Saddam Hussein regime really was. He deserves

credit for that.

On November 9, 1997, the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts was

right again. He said:

He was warning the nation and he deserves credit for having done so

then.

On February 23, 1998, the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts

said this:

I am hooked. Incredible. I am proud of the distinguished Senator from

Massachusetts for having said that during the Clinton years. I just

wish he would acknowledge that he said that during the Bush years.

There are other distinguished Senators who knew of this threat and

who made statements on what we should do back during the Clinton years,

and even during the Bush years.

It bothers me that this President has been so viciously attacked by

people who know the facts and who knew them back during the Clinton

years and spoke out about them during the Clinton years, who are so

willing to demean this President during the years of George W. Bush as

President. It never ceases to amaze me how out of tune we become when

Presidential years come along. I think it happens to both sides. I

really believe that. I believe there are partisans on both sides. But I

have never seen it like it is today.

It used to be that we supported whoever was President in foreign

matters. We stand together. I guess this partisanship really began

during the Vietnam war. But it has reached a pitch today that is

unseemly.