Mr. President, an issue I wish to address today relates to

a request that Senator Clinton, my colleague from New York, made to the

Secretary of Defense back in May, asking that appropriate oversight

committees in the Congress, particularly the Armed Services Committee

on which I serve, as does the Presiding Officer, be given briefings

regarding what current contingency plans might exist in the Department

of Defense if we do, in fact, begin a withdrawal of our forces from

Iraq.

The Secretary of Defense did not respond to the Senator from New York

directly. Instead, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Eric

Edelman, wrote her a letter with which she took great umbrage last

weekend stating, and I quote from Mr. Edelman's letter,

I have great concerns about this letter, having spent 5 years working

in the Pentagon and knowing these sorts of letters require coordination

among the highest offices inside the Pentagon. I ask that the Secretary

of Defense clarify that position of the Department of Defense on the

matters that his Under Secretary addressed.

Is it the policy of the Department of Defense that a discussion of

the withdrawal of forces reinforces enemy propaganda and that we might

be abandoning our allies, as we are perceived to have done in Lebanon

and Somalia?

The first thing I ask is, what allies did we abandon in Lebanon and

Somalia?--I was in Lebanon as a journalist. We went into Lebanon as

part of a U.N. peacekeeping force in order to separate warring

factions. We were there purely on a mission of peace. We were not there

to side with one faction or another. In Somalia, it was basically gang

warfare. We all know that now.

This is the kind of rhetoric that, in my opinion, was designed purely

for the purpose of attacking Senator Clinton rather than addressing the

issues that we need to be looking at.

There is probably no greater testimony to that than to just go back

to the bill that Senator Warner and Senator Lugar offered as an

amendment on the Defense authorization bill, which was just pulled

because this amendment--which was put together after careful thought by

the former chairman of the Armed Services Committee and the former

chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, two of the esteemed

leaders of the Republican Party--asked for the same thing. In fact, it

called for the same thing.

Senator Warner and Senator Lugar were stating in this amendment that

the President should require, among other things, a report to be

presented to the Congress no later than October 16, 2007, which

specifically addressed the same issues that Senator Clinton asked to be

addressed in her letter, showing what the plans might be and when they

might be executable in the event we decide to withdraw our forces from

Iraq.

Also, I think it is a legitimate question for people in Congress to

be asking when we look back at the way we ended up going into Iraq. I

was not a Member of this body, but I watched, as did so many Americans,

on television as this body and the House of Representatives had

administration officials testifying. They asked in the runup to this

war how long we were going to be in Iraq, and the answer was a litany.

It was as long as is necessary and not 1 day more.

For Under Secretary Edelman to in any way indicate that it is the

policy of this administration that they do not have to share the

thought they are putting into these options is totally out of line.

For that reason, I joined with Senator Clinton, Senator Bayh, and

Senator Byrd in a letter to the chairman of the Armed Services

Committee specifically asking that we have hearings in the Armed

Services Committee that will address these issues. If the

administration wants to go into closed hearings, that is fine. But I am

asking today, No. 1, that the Secretary of Defense clarify for us what

his beliefs are with respect to the rhetoric that came out of a letter

that took 2 months to be generated from his Department in response to

what Senator Clinton asked for; and then secondly, that the other

Members of this body join me in expressing their concern on this issue.

We have to have contingency plans. It is within the purview of the

Congress for us to examine them. Again, I ask Senators on both sides of

the aisle to put their eyes on this and join me in this expression of

concern.