Mr. President, I would like to start by saying I believe

our colleagues who scheduled this debate today have done a great

service to this body and to the American people. The topic of the

United States in the world and specifically the United States in the

war on terror is of great importance to the American people. They

deserve to have the kind of elevated discussion we are giving this

evening.

This should not be a partisan issue. Rather, it is an issue of our

national and personal security. Never in our Nation's history have we

been so dependent on credible intelligence for our safety and security

as we are today.

The real test all of us will face as policymakers on behalf of the

people of the United States will be how wise we are in identifying the

problems we need to address and how willing we are to cast away the

anchor of the status quo and initiate real reforms. In both of those

efforts, one of our strongest assets will be our American intelligence.

If we were to ask any person who has a reasonable knowledge of the

capabilities of terrorists and the extent of America's vulnerability

the question, what is the likelihood the United States of America will

suffer another successful terrorist attack on our homeland within the

next 5 years, the consensus answer is certainly going to be almost a

100 percent likelihood of a successful attack.

That is a sad but true fact. It is a sad but true fact which is

unnecessary. In part, it is unnecessary because we need to initiate the

reforms within our intelligence community. Reforms we have learned from

the experience of September 11, and learned again in the war against

Iraq and, I suggest, we will learn again in the incidents that have led

up to the events in Haiti, the lack of transforming our intelligence

community to a set of agencies that can effectively understand,

interpret, and then assist policymakers in making decisions that will

make us more secure, those reforms have not been made.

It is also unfortunately true there has been a lack of

accountability. We have had major intelligence failures in the last 3

years. Yet, as of today, virtually no one has been held accountable for

those. What signal does that send to our agency and our adversaries,

that we are willing to tolerate performance that is less than

acceptable, or to benefit by performance which is beyond the call of

duty, and the former is not sanctioned and the latter is not

recognized.

What I think we are facing this evening is a series of deficits that

will prove as significant to the future of the American people as the

skyrocketing budget deficit of this administration will be to our

economic future. These deficits include a deficit in judgment. The

reality is in the spring of 2002, the United States and our coalition

partners had the terrorist group which had perpetrated the tragedy of

September 11 on the ropes in Afghanistan. But a decision was made in

the early spring--a decision which military officials

close to its implementation describe as an ending of the war on terror

in Afghanistan and a substitution of a manhunt in Afghanistan and

Pakistan, and a redirection of American intelligence and military

personnel and resources to commence the war in Iraq.

This was more than a year before the war actually started. If you

will read the front page of this past Sunday's New York Times, it talks

about the fact that we are now, 2 years later, beginning to reintensify

our efforts in Afghanistan, and we are returning to Afghanistan those

very military and intelligence resources that were shifted to Iraq in

the beginning of the spring of 2002.

So the consequence of making a decision that our greater enemy was

Saddam Hussein than the enemy which had already shown the capability,

the will, and the presence in the United States to effectively strike

us on September 11 has been to allow our greater enemy to become yet

stronger.

Al-Qaida is a powerful network today. It is a powerful network which

is less hierarchical, more entrepreneurial, more diffuse, more

difficult to attack--especially as al-Qaida cells form alliances with

other radical Islamic groups. We missed the opportunity in the spring

of 2002 to have cut off the head of this snake because we exercised

unacceptably poor judgment as to which was the greater danger to the

people of the United States.

What is the report card on that decision of judgment? I quote from a

statement made by the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Mr.

George Tenet, on Tuesday of last week. This is what the leader of our

American intelligence community said:

Continuing to quote from the director of the CIA:

You should not take the fact that these attacks occurred abroad to

mean the threat to the United States homeland has waned. As al-Qaida

and associated groups undertook these attacks overseas, detainees

consistently talked about the importance the group still attaches to

striking the main enemy: the United States.

In conclusion, the Director of Central Intelligence made this

chilling observation:

That is the residue of the decision to allow the snake of al-Qaida to

regenerate itself because we determined that the greater enemy to the

United States--the enemy which had the greater capability to threaten

the people of the United States of America--was Saddam Hussein. We have

paid and we will pay a significant price for that flawed judgment.

There is also a deficit in credibility. Once the administration made

the decision at least as early as the spring of 2002--and probably

earlier--it used incredible information to convince the Congress and

the American people to support that invasion.

To pick one example which has been widely reported, the

administration knew, or should have known, that it was using misleading

information about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, about yellow

cake from Niger, about the existence of tubes which could be used for

centrifuges to make nuclear products, and about the connections of

Saddam Hussein's regime with the tragedy of 9/11.

On several occasions, it was a leading figure within the

administration, including the Vice President of the United States, who

went to the intelligence agencies, asked for further information on the

specific charge relative to Saddam Hussein's status as a producer and

user of weapons of mass destruction, received from the intelligence

agencies a report indicating it was a fabrication, and yet the

administration continued to recycle incredible misinformation.

The administration's fondness for calling Iraq the new front in the

war on terror has become a self-fulfilling proposition. There is

little, if any, evidence that Saddam Hussein had ties to al-Qaida and

that terrorist networks were active in the sections of Iraq that were

controlled by Saddam Hussein.

What now? Now we have created chaos in Iraq, and in spite of the

bravery and professionalism of our troops, we have seen a situation in

which the terrorist organizations which did not exist in Iraq prior to

the war have now become serious threats to the stability of that

country and to the lives of American fighting men and women.

This is how the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, VADM

Lowell Jacoby, described the situation in Iraq when he testified before

the Senate Intelligence Committee on Tuesday of last week:

There was minimal to no al-Qaida influence in Iraq before the war.

Now, and this is credible, al-Qaida has found a new base of operations

in Iraq. There is also a deficit of trust in the American people. This

great democracy has had, as one of its fundamental values, that the

people of America will serve their role as citizens only if they are

fully informed about the operations of their Government. But why does

this administration not want to let the people know the truth about our

foreign policy and about the decision making that takes place in forming

that foreign policy?

This President lacks a basic respect for the common sense of the

American people and relies excessively on secrecy, not to protect the

national interests but to avoid political embarrassment.

I co-chaired the House-Senate joint inquiry into the intelligence

failures that preceded September 11. Our joint committee produced a

lengthy report, some 800 pages, which focused on, among other things,

the findings relative to the support which one or more foreign

governments had provided to some, if not all, of the 19 terrorists.

The executive branch, after 7 months of examining our report,

insisted on censoring the 27 pages of our report that contain the most

important findings about that foreign support. It reached this level of

absurdity. The Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, responding to

media speculation that it was his government mentioned in those

27 pages, pleaded with the President and his administration that the

full report be released. ``How can I defend my kingdom against attacks

of treacherous nature unless I can know what is the basis of those

attacks?'' It was not just the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia. The Foreign Minister of the Kingdom flew to Washington to plead

for the declassification, for the release of this information so that

he could also defend the honor of the Kingdom.

The President refused that request even before the Foreign Minister

had reached the White House. Are we supposed to believe there wasn't

some coordination of efforts, that there were private assurances of

maintaining the status quo despite public pleas for release?

This President has shown that he does not believe the American people

have the right nor the ability to effectively utilize information which

will help them to understand who to hold accountable and to participate

in reforms necessary for their security.

These are some of the deficits we have seen as a result of the events

before and particularly after September 11, that we have seen in the

preparation for the war in Iraq, and which we may well see repeated in

the circumstances leading up to the current anarchy that grips Haiti.

Again, I conclude by saying how pleased I am that Senator Kyl and

other colleagues have given us the chance to have this discussion. We,

too, have a responsibility to the American people to offer them the

best security

that the Government can provide. There is no cave, there is no spider

hole that we will be able to hide in to escape that responsibility

should there be another terrorist attack on our homeland and we have

not utilized the information of our previous failures to make our

Nation more secure.

Let us look in the mirror. The face we see will share the

responsibility for the loss of life and for the deficits I have

outlined which are unacceptable in our democratic society.

Before I conclude, I would like to say that I believe the value of

this debate has indicated the value of similar debates on other issues

that have wide public concern. I will soon seek unanimous consent that

we schedule time for a debate of this nature on the floor of the Senate

on a regular basis for the remainder of this session.

I propose that the next issue to be discussed be our budget deficit,

the inheritance of debt that we are going to leave to our people. The

suggestion made recently by the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board

that we make tax cuts permanent while we also cut benefits for Social

Security and Medicare could help in framing the choices that we will

have in dealing with this budget deficit.

The American people deserve from this, the greatest deliberative body

in the world, to pay attention to their future. They deserve to know

that we serve their interests with sound judgment, with credibility,

and with respect for those who have given us the opportunity to serve

them.

Thank you, Mr. President.