Mr. President, I thank the Chair. I may request to speak

for a few more minutes than 5, and when the time comes, I will so

inform the Chair.

Last week the American people went to the polls across our great

Nation. They went not simply to choose new political leaders, but to

ask those leaders--Democrats and Republicans alike--to work together

for a new and long-overdue direction in Iraq.

There is no doubt that the majority of American voters want change in

an Iraq policy that has brought such death and chaos and the prospect

of failure. There is no doubt that they want us to speak honestly about

the current failures and boldly about the way through the present

crisis. But it is also very clear that Americans are not defeatists.

They want success in Iraq, they want our troops to succeed, and they

want them to come home.

I note as I speak here there are hearings occurring in the Armed

Services Committee. I commend Senator Warner and Senator Levin for

holding such a hearing. They heard this morning from some of our

leading military figures. This afternoon there will be additional

witnesses appearing before them. So I am very conscious that a lot of

people are thinking about this issue now and that we hope to come up

with some positive suggestions on how we might come to a successful

conclusion of this policy--a policy, I might add, that is in deep

jeopardy of failure.

In that respect, the message of the American people was one of hope:

that years of strained, painful debate can give way to American

pragmatism; that leaders can find in national security not a political

cudgel but a political consensus; and that Iraq, even now, is not past

salvaging, if we right our course immediately.

I hope the resignation of Secretary Rumsfeld is a sign that the White

House has heard that message. But I would add very quickly that it is

not enough to change the leadership at the Pentagon when a week ago

Sunday the Vice President of the United States proclaimed that we

intend to go, and I quote him, in Iraq. The

President must fundamentally change our Iraq policies if we are to

reverse the downward spiral into chaos that threatens the territorial

integrity of that country and our larger regional security interests--

as well as the success of our war on al-Qaida and international

terrorism.

In the midst of an election season, some of America's best foreign

policy minds were working diligently to find that new direction. We are

lucky to have two distinguished former public servants to chair the

Study Group on Iraq: the former Secretary of State James Baker and the

former Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, Lee

Hamilton. Their group of experts is striving diligently to find

consensus on a set of policy recommendations to put before the

President and the Congress of the United States. It is painful work,

but it is necessary work. And the tragedy of Iraq--over 30,000 injured

troops, hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis dead, more than 2,800

of our fellow citizens in uniform killed--the tragedy of Iraq demands

nothing less than a new direction and some new thought.

It will take every dram of our honesty and pragmatism to turn around

a society that--despite $400 billion of taxpayer money, $250 million

every single day and still counting--remains broken, crippled, and

fractured. The Iraqi economy is in worse shape today than it was in

March of 2003. Electric and water treatment capacity, oil production,

access to clean water, are all below prewar levels. America has spent

$14 billion training and equipping 300,000 Iraqi police and security

forces; yet today as I speak on the floor of this Chamber, some 23

separate sectarian militias alone operate with impunity throughout

Baghdad. Sectarian killings continue largely unabated, averaging scores

of deaths a day.

These realities mean that none of us should underestimate the

difficulties ahead. We need to recognize--every single time we talk

about this matter--the remarkable service being performed by our men

and women in uniform. Theirs is a very difficult job. Anyone who has

been there, regardless of his or her views on policy, has to admire

immensely the courage and determination of these people as they go out

every single day, facing the kinds of problems that are everywhere in

the streets of Baghdad, Fallujah, and other major urban areas. So I do

not underestimate the tremendous burden these people bear every single

day, as too often they become nothing more than target practice for

those who seek to gain the upper hand in Iraq.

Nor do I underestimate the difficult task facing Jim Baker, Lee

Hamilton, and their colleagues on this task force that is determined to

find some answers to Iraq. They know, as I do, if there were any easy

solutions we would have discovered them by now. It may be that members

of the Baker-Hamilton commission will not be able to arrive at a

consensus. I hope that is not the case. But I have no doubt that their

efforts are taking place in a constructive and bipartisan spirit and we

here should do everything we can to follow their example in the weeks

and months ahead.

I hope to add briefly to that debate by sharing some of my own

thoughts this afternoon. Taken individually, none of these proposals

that I am going to discuss are groundbreaking or earthshattering in any

way. A sound foreign policy rarely is. But after a war sparked by

ideology and grand theorizing, maybe we can once more learn the value

of quiet virtues. Taken together, I believe these suggestions might

help to reverse the ongoing spiral into violence and chaos, permit the

phased redeployment of U.S. troops within and from Iraq, and secure

America's regional interests to the greatest extent.

Clearly, our interests are in disrepair, and other regions cry out

for attention. We are further away from stabilizing Afghanistan and

dealing a mortal blow to our al-Qaida and Taliban enemies. In fact,

drug traffickers and

tribal warfare now threaten to destroy the fragile foundation of

Afghanistan's nascent democracy and the Taliban is stronger now than at

any point since our invasion.

This summer an emboldened and defiant Iran launched a proxy war

against our ally Israel; and the apocalyptic mullahs are undeterred in

their pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Last month North Korea claimed to have tested a nuclear weapon of its

own, a further example of our country's growing vulnerabilities, a

further cost of this administration's fixation on Iraq. While we have

been bogged down in that country, North Korea has taken the chance to

expand its nuclear arsenal fivefold.

Al-Qaida, Afghanistan, Iran, North Korea--the conclusion is

irrefutable: America is less safe today because of our Iraq diversion.

That is precisely why so many voices among our civilian and military

leadership are calling upon the President to change course in that

country.

I believe there are five key ingredients to any course change that we

must take: establishment of internal security in that country; phased

redeployment of United States forces; continued training of an

independent, professional military and security force for Iraq; a

strong central government; and regional and international engagement.

Let me first talk briefly about security. I think we must continue to

recruit and train forces that reflect Iraq's ethnic diversity, forces

that are capable of neutralizing sectarian militias and are able to

restore and maintain domestic stability. Without that, nothing is

likely to happen. But I believe the hour has arrived when Iraq must

assume the responsibility for policing itself. At great cost, the

United States has given the Iraqi people the chance for a much brighter

future. Now they must seize it. There is not a treasury deep enough nor

an army large enough to achieve this goal if the Iraqi people

themselves lack the will to achieve it for themselves.

Second, redeployment. ``More troops or fewer troops'' is a sterile

debate. The reality is that in cities such as Baghdad and Falluja, our

soldiers are going door to door like a police force on the front lines

of religious violence, and they need to be removed from that fruitless

exercise. Our troops should be relocated from these larger urban zones

to less populated regions and border areas where they can more

effectively advance our strategic interests: continued training of

Iraqi forces and the protection of Iraq's territorial integrity until

Iraqis can do so for themselves.

Remaining United States forces should be repositioned to United

States bases in Kuwait and Qatar, where they could be available to

protect American interests if they should be called upon, and to

Afghanistan, where we must redouble our efforts to capture bin Laden,

dismantle al-Qaida and neutralize the Taliban and the drug lords who

are funding them.

These movements must begin immediately and continue over the next 12

to 18 months, in concert with our efforts to enhance the stability of

the Iraqi Government, engage Iraq's neighbors, and build a better and

more secure life for the people of that country.

Third is professional military and security forces. Iraq will never

be unified as a sovereign and secure nation until all of its citizens

can count on the Iraqi forces to be capable of maintaining internal

stability and protecting the nation's territorial integrity. But no

Iraqi Army can ever meaningfully stand up when Iraq's political

atmosphere remains so poisonous.

Which leads me to my fourth point, unity government. Our commanding

generals have rightly concluded there is no military solution to Iraq's

unfolding civil conflict. Only a political solution which unifies all

Iraqis around a common cause will save Iraq from becoming a failed

state.

So, along with the training of Iraqi troops, I believe we must tackle

Iraq's political chaos, because only stability will be the cornerstone

of a prosperous nation.

Finding common cause must come first and foremost from within Iraq.

It must come from Iraq's secular and religious leaders, leaders such as

Ayatollah Sistani. We need Iraqis like him at the table and the United

States needs to encourage more acts of leadership by him and others.

Our political goals for Iraq are clear. Though Iraq's constitution is

federal, with local flexibility for provinces, we must insist on a

stable and unified central government, capable of distributing

resources to its citizens on a just basis. Iraq's oil must be shared

equitably. At the end of the day, Iraq may end up a divided and

partitioned state where sectarian influences govern; but that should

not be our stated policy. Nor should we allow short-term political

expediency to keep us from disbanding sectarian militias. Our failure

to confront them head-on forces uncountable Iraqis to live in daily

fear for their very lives.

That said, I believe we should not preclude the possibility of

integrating ex-militia members into the professional Iraqi military--

but only if they be vetted and retrained first.

Fifth and finally, regional and international engagement. Iraq's

neighbors have a huge stake in a stable and competent Iraq. If there is

one thing that unites all of the nations bordering Iraq, it is the fear

that Iraq will splinter into fractured enclaves with dedicated

sectarian militias that will not only terrorize each other but threaten

the stability of the nations that border them.

It is for that reason that the administration should find willing

partners--if it were willing to look. Iraq's neighbors, as well as

regional international organizations can help Iraq toward unity and

stability--not from the goodness of their hearts but from the fact of

their interest. Regional powers such as Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Saudi

Arabia could be enormously useful to us as mediators--a

group, committed to ensuring the integrity of its borders, the

disbanding of the militias, and the unity of its government.

When it comes to protecting our security, we must be as willing to

wage diplomacy as we have been willing to wage war. Robust, muscular,

and direct negotiations are not gifts to our enemies. They are the

essential tools of avoiding conflict and securing peace and stability.

We are reminded of the eloquence of John Kennedy, who said many years

ago,

Further, rebuilding Iraq's economy should be a part of any regional

and international rescue mission. The Iraqi Government has formally

requested help from the United States to develop an International

Compact for Iraq. This compact could serve as a blueprint for a new

partnership with the international community, one aimed at

consolidating peace and pursuing political, social, and economic

development over the next five years.

There are no guarantees, of course. Iraq is broken. The policies of

the Bush administration, in my view, have sadly failed. But last week's

elections have given us the gift of opportunity--to chart a new course

in Iraq if we are honest enough, tough enough, and bold enough to find

it.

Reducing and withdrawing our troop presence. Restoring security.

Supporting the development of a unified Iraqi Government. Enlisting

Iraq's neighbors and the international community. Creating economic

activity in that shattered country. If we take these steps, or ones

like them, we can serve our larger interests in peace and prosperity

and security, not only for the Iraqis but, as importantly, for

ourselves. We can begin to redeem a great harm.

The American voters have asked this us of us. While they don't have a

specific plan in mind, they want us to come together, to chart a new

course, to make some sense, to be rational and think about the

importance not only of Iraq getting on its feet--but of our nation

meriting its vital role in the world. No other nation in the 21st

century is going to lead but this great nation of ours. Other nations

down the road may assume that responsibility, but as far as I can see,

only one nation can lead now--and it is ours. And if we continue on the

path we are following today in Iraq, that mission will be far more

difficult to fulfill.

So far more is at risk here than just what happens in Iraq. We risk

failing the calling of leadership itself.

Anything I suggested here, I know others have raised. But I came here

today, above all, to ask a question:

Who is thinking about this in a concrete way? I trust that Jim Baker

and Lee Hamilton are. I hope that my colleagues are.

You may not like all of my ideas. You may reject all of them. But

whatever ideas come to the fore, let us debate the substance in

tolerance and good faith, open to new thinking and hungering for new

action.

The American people are watching us, wondering if we have heard their

call for a new way forward. The Iraqi people are watching us, wondering

if their united country can still survive and succeed. Americans and

Iraqis both want what it is within our power to give them: hope.

Again, I thank the President for his indulgence in providing a little

more time.

I yield the floor.