Mr. President, I wish to talk about a couple of events

that are in the news: the proceedings of the 9/11 Commission and the

debate about the President's policy in Iraq.

As I said last week, I am troubled by the partisanship and public

posturing of some members of the 9/11 Commission, both in the hearing

room and in TV studios.

I am not the only one who is troubled. The former National Security

Advisor under President Clinton, Tony Lake, has said the hearings are

And Max Holland, a former fellow at the University of Virginia who is

writing a history of the Warren Commission, notes that

the proceedings of the commission are

He added that

Still others, like Professor Juliette Kayyem, of the Kennedy School

of Government at Harvard, who served on a congressional terrorism panel

to investigate the 1998 African embassy bombings, have questioned why

9/11 commission members have granted so many interviews. She notes that

and that

My understanding of the 9/11 Commission was that it was to

impartially determine the facts and make non-partisan recommendations

on how to go forward.

So far, the 9/11 Commission's descent into ``gotcha'' questioning has

only highlighted a tendency to fight each other rather than the

terrorists. Unfortunately, while American politicians are busy blaming

each other, the terrorists are busy plotting our doom.

This partisanship, unfortunately, is not confined to the 9/11

Commission. Clearly, the central front in the war against terrorism has

shifted to Iraq. Al Qaeda operatives and foreign terrorists have

flocked to Iraq to make a desperate final stand against American

troops, and we must see to it that they lose.

On the issue of Iraq, the most important thing this body could do is

to have an open and honest debate about how to build a moderate

democracy in that country. If Senator Kerry, in particular, believes he

has a solution to the difficult challenges facing our troops and

diplomats in Iraq, let him offer a plan, rather than simply guessing

and criticizing.

Let me be clear: placing the UN in charge in Iraq is not a plan. It

is a pure fantasy.

America did the right thing by liberating the Iraqi people from

Saddam's tyrannical regime, and by so doing, we are making the American

people safer. Succeeding in our efforts to help the Iraqis replace one

of the most repressive regimes on the planet with the single most

representative government in the Arab World will dramatically alter the

political landscape of the Middle East.

Only if the citizens of the Middle East experience the freedoms and

opportunity of democratic reform can we hope to win the war against

terrorism. We can kill terrorists one by one in Afghanistan and Iraq,

but until we change the individual and personal calculations of

thousands of young men who are taught to value death over life, there

will always be more terrorists around every street corner. A free Iraq

will be an oasis of liberty in the heart of the Middle East and a

source of democratic influence on its undemocratic neighbors.

Bringing democratic reform to the Middle East is not a lofty hope but

a necessary reality and a long-term strategy. Citizens who can voice

their frustrations at the ballot box are less likely to do so by

strapping bombs to their bodies.

It is no coincidence that democratic Muslim states such as Turkey and

reforming states such as Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco are not state

supporters of terrorism, while oppressive states such as Syria and Iran

provide aid and succor to international terrorists.

President Bush's multi-tiered approach to combating terrorism is the

right one. And it is improving.

Likewise, our Nation's efforts can be improved upon if we conduct our

debates with the gravity and objectivity required by the high stakes of

the war against terrorism, but forgive me for not being optimistic.

Until now, the critics have proposed two alternatives to President

Bush's plan to stay the course in Iraq. One alternative is to cut and

run or to cede control to the U.N., whose member states by and large

want America to cut and run.

Unless failure is our goal, these are not serious proposals. And they

discount the very simple fact that unless America delivers on its

commitment to eliminate havens for terrorists and support democracy in

Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, we will embolden the terrorists who

delight and attack when America wavers.

How do I know this? Because Osama bin Laden has told us. In his 1998

bin Laden noted, and I

quote:

Former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger recently noted that Bin

Laden also observed:

The terrorists are watching us closely, and we must show strength,

not weakness. We must not allow Iraq to become another Somalia because

going home early is the surest way to embolden the terrorists and

ensure the failure of our efforts to bring peace and security to the

Middle East.

It is clear to this Senator that al-Qaida wants us to fail in Iraq,

just as it wants us to fail in Afghanistan. Al-Qaida terrorists and

other foreign Jihadis are aligning themselves with violent Iraqi

insurgents whose radical ideology has no place in a democratic Iraq.

These zealots want the United States to appear in the Arab world as a

weak horse.

The terrorists are watching us closely, and we must show our

strength, not our weaknesses, as we confront the security challenges in

Iraq that lie between despotism and democracy.

I yield the floor.