Mr. President, the calendar has just turned to

October. The long-awaited month of September has passed. Why September?

September, the month of the Petraeus report, was to be the month of

accountability for Iraq, for its Government, and a time for

accountability of the President's policy in Iraq. Instead, the result

of the long-awaited month of September is that we are, once again,

staying the course, as the President would have us do. We were not able

to change course through the Defense authorization bill which passed

yesterday, though many of us tried. Our efforts to change the mission

away from deep involvement in Iraq's civil war and toward a more narrow

focus on fighting al-Qaida failed, by a narrow margin, but failed.

Efforts to enforce the transition with the power of the purse came up

short as well.

Tragically, for well over 4 years into this war, at a time when the

Army chief of staff is sounding the alarm about readiness of our Army,

the Senate was not even able to provide our troops and their families

with predictable deployment schedules--a stunning week. This is far

less than the American people expect from us, when they elected us to

do far more. Over the next few months, I implore my colleagues to use

this time well and to think deeply about what our commitment in Iraq

means to our future and the world. I especially want my colleagues and

the American people to think about what might happen if there is

another attack on the United States, which is always a possibility. The

fact there has not been says there has been some interdiction and a lot

of good luck, and al-Qaida takes its time in planning what it really

cares about.

What if that attack has nothing to do with Iraq? What if the next

attack is the result of planning and plotting

from al-Qaida and its terrorist affiliates who live in a safe haven on

the Pakistani border? Will we regret that we did not do more to force

the President to focus on the real threat facing this country--the only

threat which wants to take us down in any way, shape, or form, which is

possible?

We cannot continue to repeat the same mistakes over and over. It is

past time for a thorough understanding of how we got to be mired in

Iraq's civil war, and why we must get out of it.

I am often reminded of a prescient quote from Sandra Mackey in her

book, ``The Reckoning: Iraq and the Legacy of Saddam Hussein,'' which

was written, incidentally, before the war began.

Her book posed the central question: Would a future Iraq without

Saddam Hussein be even more unstable and more problematic for the

security of the United States itself?

Mackey did what this administration failed to do prior to the war and

continues to fail to do today. She studied the historical, religious,

ethnic, and political landscape that produced Iraq and the combination

of the above factors that produced Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and

allowed it to be sustained. She did her homework on the background and

the nature of the country and the people and the ebb and the flow of

the forces that have worked there for 1,500 years.

She predicted that we would pay a great price for our ignorance and

utter lack of understanding of Iraq as a country.

She wrote in her book, looking back to the first gulf war, and now

the future:

Just say the word ``Saddam,'' and you had people's attention, at

least for a few moments.

That being the Tigris and the Euphrates.

What a horrible price it is: 3,800 brave men and women killed; nearly

28,000 wounded, maimed, and scarred--most mentally and/or physically

for the rest of their lives. Families have been torn apart. Divorce and

suicide rates are climbing rapidly. Last year, 99 of our soldiers

committed suicide, which is the highest rate since the Army started

keeping records on that 26 years ago.

The war has cost us as a people and our security so dearly in lives,

resources, our standing around the world, our sense of ourselves, our

self-esteem, and our moral authority.

It tears my heart out that our troops are dying every day and

suffering from these horrific wounds which are the new property of the

recent years because of the White House's misguided policies from which

it will not move.

So I ask, why must we remain bogged down in Iraq--at such great

cost--when there is a far greater threat that we must face and are not

facing? Instead of focusing our resources on Iraq's civil war, we

should be focusing all of our efforts on the elimination of al-Qaida,

and, incidentally, doing something called protecting the American

homeland, which seems to be casually handled in budget and in action.

We must finally understand the fundamental fact that our brave and

highly skilled soldiers cannot resolve Iraq's internal political,

social, and religious fights--there is no argument about that--

particularly when enormous majorities of these people--98 percent of

Sunni Arabs and 84 percent of Shia--want our forces to leave the

country. That is more than a hint.

This is not defeat. It is not surrender. It is not retreat. It is

simply getting a grip on the problems we face.

The reality is, it is not our fight. We cannot contribute there.

There is very little we can do to affect it, if anything. Iraq is

chaotic and violent because of deep-seated, centuries-old disputes that

have nothing to do with us. It will likely remain chaotic and violent

for the long foreseeable future, whether our military is involved in

their dispute or whether it is not involved. It will not make any

difference.

We had an open intelligence hearing in which a number of experts,

Arabists came and told us that, in fact, America is marginal to what is

going on over there. It is all about Sunnis and Shias and Kurds, and

about their ancient fights going all the way back to the death of

Muhammad. So this sectarian war has nothing to do at all with the

United States, and it has nothing to do with our true enemy, al-Qaida,

which has only latched on to the sectarian competition to take

advantage of our own mistaken involvement in it.

The only thing that can change the course of Iraq is the Iraqi people

and their leaders, and only if they can make dramatic changes in the

way they view one another. I do not think that day will come. That is

this Senator's opinion. We have examples of people getting along on a

temporary basis when there are lots of troops around, other things, but

that is not in their nature. It is not in the nature of that part of

the world. We like to think it is because that is our nature. But it is

not their nature.

There is, however, a vital strategic and tactical role for our

military, and that is eliminating al-Qaida. But it first requires

understanding that global terrorism inspired by al-Qaida is a different

problem from sectarian violence between Sunni and Shia. That is what

you have to understand first--very simple, very plain. Our present

policy continues to follow al-Qaida's playbook by conflating these two

problems to create one single-minded ``enemy,'' thereby tying several

different strands of violence into a single tangled knot. We must untie

this knot and address these issues separately. And we must recognize

that our involvement with Iraq is drastically diminishing our ability

to do anything about al-Qaida.

The war against al-Qaida and affiliated terrorists has two key

components, in this Senator's point of view: a tactical component--

which is tracking, catching, and killing terrorists and disrupting

their plots--and a strategic component--which is addressing the

circumstances that produce terrorists and countering the ideology that

drives them.

Our war in Iraq diverts our military and intelligence resources from

the tactical component--it is very clear that al-Qaida is gaining

strength along with the Taliban in Afghanistan because we moved a lot

of people out to fight a war that we had no business being in, and so

we suffered where we originally were about to be strong--and it limits

the amount of money available to address poverty and evolution of

governments in the Muslim world.

But perhaps the most damaging effect of the war in Iraq is the war of

ideology. The Intelligence Committee has held several hearings this

year looking at the role of ideology in the struggle against violent

extremism. There is plenty of evidence, including unclassified

intelligence assessments, that al-Qaida has successfully exploited the

war in Iraq to recruit and train a new generation of terrorists--thanks

to us. We have made that a possibility for them. Civilian leadership

has handed them that golden gift, and they have made good use of it.

But there is longer term damage the war in Iraq is doing to our

counterterrorism efforts. It is making it impossible for us to make any

progress in the war of ideas throughout the Muslim world. It is clear

that winning this part of the war is the only way we will have an

effect in the long term on this kind of instability and chaos.

Al-Qaida wants us to stay in Iraq. As I said, we are following their

game plan faithfully because our presence validates everything about

their message of Westerners trying to dominate Muslims and occupy their

lands--all of which is sacred to them. As long as we are there, voices

of moderation toward the West will be drowned out.

The bottom line is this: Continued U.S. involvement in Iraq is in al-

Qaida's interest, not America's. The longer we stay mired in Iraq, the

stronger al-Qaida will grow.

Again, declassified intelligence reports and a broad spectrum of

experts have noted al-Qaida is as strong as any other time since 9/11--

this day--and growing stronger.

President Bush says we should not allow Iraq to become ``a safe-haven

from which they could launch new attacks on our country.'' Yet the

President has already allowed al-Qaida to

create a safe haven, a huge safe haven on the Pakistani border. That

situation is deteriorating on a daily basis, and it allows al-Qaida to

continue to plan deadly attacks. And, believe me, that is their purpose

for existing and living, and that is what they want from us. We have

given them what they want from us.

Our struggle to eliminate global terrorism may remain a mystery to

our President, but it must not remain a mystery to us in the Congress

and to the American people. We do have a responsibility to act. Whether

history looks kindly on this Congress or not is not really so

important. But we must take every single serious measure available to

force the President to face reality and refocus America's mission in

that part of the world.

We have created deep and profound sadness and left thousands of

people sitting in wheelchairs for the rest of their lives with shards

of steel through their bodies that cannot be removed by surgeons. So

they sit in wheelchairs in agony for the rest of their lives. They

cannot take them out because they are too close to organs, arteries, so

they sit in agony, probably a great number of them wishing they had

just simply been killed.

I will end that part and simply say that I would also like to remind

the President of the United States that signing the CHIP bill won't

change anything in Iraq, but it may have a whole lot to do with

changing young people in America in the way they grow up, what their

opportunities are, and their sense of optimism and commitment to public

service and to the good of our country.

Mr. President, the Senator from Florida, as usual,

is correct. I thank him for his kind comments; he is not quite so

correct about that.

But, yes, that is very much the case. It is simply an example of why

it is that America--why intelligence is the spear, the tip of the

spear, and that we never do anything ever again without listening to

our intelligence--not to Chalabi, not to Richard Perle, but to our

intelligence--which told us all of these things, which told us what

would happen, timidly at first but more boldly later on.

We just live in a different world. We are homesteaders. I have always

felt that way.

After the industrial revolution, the East got sort of flooded up with

folks who had come from other places, and they went out West with the

Gold Rush and the land rush, they got their 10 square acres and built

their houses and picket fences and went about educating their children

and doing good things but paying very little attention to the rest of

the world because there was no apparent reason to do so. We had never

been attacked since 1812, and that was marginal, and 1941 had not

arrived. This awakened us in many ways, but, in fact, it really didn't.

Conscription for World War II passed the Congress, I believe--or one

House of the Congress--I believe by one vote, after Pearl Harbor. We go

over and we fight just wars, and then we come back and we disarm.

It is not in our nature to know about the rest of the world. There is

not a profound curiosity factor that pulls us, now that we are very

much a part of the world, to understand what is going on in other parts

of the world and in specific countries where there happens to be a

threat of people who have come to see us as greedy, hate our green

lawns and picket fences, and think that our view of life and morality

is way off. They are very serious about that. We slough it aside, but

they are very serious about that.

So how we thought we could somehow do this, come in and mediate

something which had been going on I would say since the death of

Muhammad in 632--but that doesn't matter; it is a question of how his

succession would be carried out. That has lasted ever since. The

British and French came in and created a place called Iraq, but the

tribal people who kept living all through those years there were always

the same and their habits were always the same, and, in fact, it is

true throughout most of the rest of the world, if you go to the

Philippines, if you go to many places--revenge, tribal loyalties, as

opposed to central government loyalties. I have never been convinced

that a constitution or a parliament means a whit to the people of Iraq.

It meant everything to us because it is sort of the definition of

democracy on the rise, but I don't think it made any difference to them

at all.

So we misread because we don't read, we don't read and we don't

study, we don't go, we don't learn languages because we don't think we

have to, and we have not had to because the world has been very

simple--the Soviet soldiers in uniform versus American soldiers in

uniform, our various planes, tanks, and all the rest of it, but then a

red phone on each side to try to calm things down. The world is no

longer simple. Everybody looks like everybody else in very dangerous

places.

When we entered into Iraq, it was without thought, it was without

study. The decision was more or less made within 2 or 3 days of 9/11,

which, when you think about it, is rather silly. So there was no real

understanding of Iraq, even as there is no real understanding of Iran

today, no understanding of North Korea. There is a superficial

understanding, the dramatic parts--nuclear this, something else that,

starvation that. But who are they?

Why is it that North Korea and South Korea--44 million in the south,

22 million in the north--that amongst all of those people, 66 million

people, there are only 400 surnames--``Nelson'' being a surname,

``Rockefeller'' being a surname--there are only 400 surnames. The world

is mixed and varied.

Japan disappeared for 250 years during the Tokugawa era. Nobody could

get in, nobody could get out. That was just 150 years ago, and they

still bear some of that with them. Do we understand that? I don't think

we do. They are a democracy. Are they? They were handed their

Constitution by GEN Douglas MacArthur, and except for a period of 3

months--and I was there during those 3 months--in the last 60 years,

one party has controlled the country in its entirety.

So there are many things to understand in this world, but among those

places we did not understand and still do not are the vicissitudes of

Iraq, the Sunni and the Shiites, each of them bearing within them many

layers of competition, revenge, family feuds, all the rest of it.