Mr. President, according to the Washington Post, a recent

poll by the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, which is, for all

intents and purposes, an entity of the U.S. Government, showed that 80

percent of the Iraqis surveyed reported a lack of confidence in the CPA

and 82 percent disapprove of the U.S. and allied militaries in Iraq.

I mention this for two reasons.

First, I remember when, less than 2 months ago, much was made by

administration officials and several Senators of a February poll which

suggested that Iraqis strongly supported the U.S. occupation. They held

it up as proof that our strategy was working, even if they could not

explain what the strategy was.

To quote one of my friends on the other side of the aisle, who spoke

on April 8:

He concluded by saying that this encouraging news was thanks to the

leadership of the President of the United States.

Whatever the accuracy of that February poll, the CPA's recent poll

indicates that far more Iraqis today oppose what we are doing in Iraq.

The CPA's poll also shows that more than half of Americans surveyed

oppose the President's policy.

This latest poll also compels us to ask why so many of the people we

sought to liberate, and did liberate from the brutality of Saddam,

turned against us so quickly. And why so many Americans are questioning

the President's decision to go to war.

There are many reasons, the genesis of which dates back to the

President's fateful decision to shift gears from fighting al-Qaida,

which had attacked us, to overthrowing Saddam Hussein, who had not

attacked us and who apparently had no plan or ability to.

That decision, followed by a remarkable series of miscalculations and

misguided policies, has enmeshed our troops in an ill-fated, costly war

from which neither the President, nor anyone else in his

Administration, appears to have the faintest idea of how to extricate

ourselves.

Let's review the history.

After September 11, there was nearly universal support for

retaliation against al-Qaida. There was widespread sympathy and support

for the United States from around the world. But then the President,

encouraged by a handful of Pentagon and White House officials, most

notably the Vice President, who were fixated on Saddam Hussein, changed

course. And what followed, I believe, has very possibly increased the

risk of terrorism against Americans.

We remember when someone in the administration ``gave currency to a

fraud,'' to quote George Will, by putting in the President's 2003 State

of the Union speech that Iraq was trying to buy uranium in Africa.

This administration repeatedly, insistently and unrelentingly

justified pre-emptive war by insisting that Saddam Hussein not only had

weapons of mass destruction but was hell-bent on using them against us

and our allies.

Administration officials, led by Vice President Cheney, repeatedly

tried to link Saddam Hussein to 9/11 in order to build public support

for the war, though there never was any link--none.

Truth tellers in the administration--like General Shinseki and

Lawrence Lindsay--were either ridiculed or hounded out of their jobs

because they had the temerity to suggest realistic estimates for the

number of soldiers and amount of money it would take to do the job

right in Iraq.

Incredibly, there was no real plan, despite a year-long, $5 million

study by the State Department, to deal with the widespread looting that

greeted our soldiers once Saddam had fallen--doubling or tripling the

cost of reconstruction, and leaving open the gates to stockpiles of

weapons and ammunition that have been used with deadly results against

our soldiers.

We remember President Bush flying onto the aircraft carrier and

declaring ``Mission Accomplished'' when, in fact, the worst of it was

ahead.

Two months later, the President taunted Iraqi resistance fighters to

``Bring It On!'' while our troops were still in harm's way and were

fending off ambushes and roadside attacks every day and every night.

Some of our closest allies and friends, like Mexico and Canada, and

even those countries Secretary Rumsfeld called ``Old Europe,'' were

belittled and alienated because they disagreed with our strategy of

pre-emptive war--countries whose diplomatic and intelligence and

military support we so desperately need today.

That sorry chronology has brought us to where we are today. Each day

that passes, more Iraqis seem to turn against us, threatening the

mission and morale of our troops.

The latest episode in this misguided adventure is the Abu Ghraib

prison scandal. It is tragic for many reasons, but none more so than

the harm it has caused to the image of our Armed

Forces and to our Nation, particularly among Muslims, and the fact that

it could so easily have been prevented.

The International Red Cross had warned U.S. officials about the

mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners last year, and nothing was done about

it for months.

We also know that similarly cruel and degrading treatment of

prisoners occurred at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. The New York

Times first reported it last March. It described prisoners who had been

kept naked in freezing cold cells, forced to stand for days with their

arms upraised and chained to the ceiling, subjected to other

humiliating and abusive treatment, and in at least two instances

prisoners died in what were ruled homicides. We have since learned that

many more detainees have died in U.S. custody in both Afghanistan and

Iraq.

Even before last June, when I first sought information about the

abuses at Bagram, my attempts to seek information about the

dehumanizing and, I believe, illegal treatment of prisoners at

Guantanamo were ignored.

It is no secret that Guantanamo was chosen precisely because the

Pentagon wanted it to be outside the jurisdiction of U.S. courts. They

did not want to be subjected to the watchful eyes of attorneys who know

the law. They did not want to be bothered with U.S. or international

law. As it turns out, many of the prisoners at Guantanamo who had been

drugged and shackled and hooded and denied access to lawyers, were

released after it was determined, a year or two later, that they were

innocent.

Now we hear that there are videos of the treatment of prisoners at

Guantanamo, but, like Abu Ghraib, we only learned about it from the

press. That is the only way we have learned about any of what is

increasingly looking like a pattern of cruel and degrading treatment of

terrorism suspects in U.S. military custody.

Top Pentagon officials continue to insist that there is no pattern;

that we are dealing only with ``isolated incidents.'' We could debate

when ``incidents'' become so pervasive that they are part of a

``pattern.'' One might think that similar types of abuses of prisoners

in U.S. custody in Cuba, Afghanistan, and Iraq during approximately the

same time period would suggest a pattern, but perhaps not to those who

bear responsibility. The fact is, as the Washington Post so clearly

stated on May 20, this was ``A Corrupted Culture.''

We have heard that U.S. military intelligence gave the orders. We

have heard of attempts by military to block investigations by the

International Red Cross. We have heard that FBI officers declined to be

present during interrogations because of the harsh methods that were

used. We have heard of complaints by former Iraqi and Afghan prisoners

that were ignored. We have heard about investigations of alleged abuses

that were cursory, at best. We have heard of instances when denials of

misconduct by military officers were treated as proof that nothing bad

happened, while those who alleged the abuse were never interviewed.

We have learned that self-serving and reassuring statements about

respect for the law by officials here in Washington, including the

President and the Pentagon's top lawyer, bore little resemblance to

what was going on in the field.

The sadistic acts that have now been published on the front pages of

every newspaper in the world as well as millions of television screens

have endangered our soldiers and civilians abroad and threaten our

national security and foreign policy interests abroad. The photographs

will be used as recruiting posters for terrorists around the world.

They depict an interrogation and detention system that is out of

control. They have made a mockery of President Bush's statement a year

ago that the United States will neither ``torture'' terrorist suspects,

nor use ``cruel and unusual'' treatment to interrogate them, and they

directly contradict the more detailed policy on interrogations outlined

in a June 25, 2003, letter to me by Defense Department General Counsel

William Haynes.

It is apparent that, when it comes to Iraq, this administration is

disinterested, at best, in the views of anyone who is either a member

of the minority, or who, Republican or Democrat, dares to utter words

of caution or criticism. But there are some basic truths that cannot be

ignored.

First, atrocities occur in all wars. Invariably, there are

incidents--often many incidents--in which excessive force is used,

civilians are brutalized, prisoners of war are tortured and summarily

executed. There has never been a war without such heinous crimes.

Second, our Armed Forces are the finest in the world. The vast

majority of our troops have conducted themselves professionally and

courageously, in accordance with the laws of war. But even Americans

have at times used excessive force and violated the rights of civilians

or prisoners. There were instances of this long before Abu Ghraib

prison.

And it is precisely because these atrocities are predictable in any

war that the Geneva Conventions and the Torture Convention exist. The

United States was instrumental in the drafting and adoption of these

conventions, whose purpose is to prevent atrocities against civilians

and the mistreatment of prisoners of war, including Americans.

We should also recognize that not only were the abuses at Abu Ghraib

prison not isolated incidents; similar practices have recently been

documented in many prisons in the United States. We have seen the same

types of humiliating and sexually degrading treatment, the assaults by

prison guards, the misuse of dogs against defenseless prisoners, and

the same failure to hold accountable those in positions of

responsibility.

The President reaffirmed, in the midst of the Abu Ghraib scandal,

that the United States is a nation of laws, and that those responsible

for the mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners will be punished. This, of

course, must happen. But it does not obscure the glaring hypocrisy of

this administration.

On the one hand, last March, referring to the capture of U.S.

soldiers by Iraqi forces, President Bush said, ``We expect them to be

treated humanely, just like we'll treat any prisoner of theirs that we

capture humanely. If not, the people who mistreat the prisoners will be

treated as war criminals.'' On the other hand, there is the White House

Counsel, who called the Geneva Conventions ``quaint'' and ``obsolete,''

and there is the pattern of abuses themselves and the way the

administration ignored inquiries and warnings for months.

The White House set the tone, and the consequences were disastrous.

According to the International Red Cross, 70 to 90 percent of the Iraq

prisoners arrested--who were unquestionably entitled to the protections

of the Geneva Conventions--were later determined to have been detained

by mistake. That is appalling, but not so appalling that the

Administration did anything about it.

The Red Cross reported that soldiers carrying out arrests ``usually

entered after dark, breaking down doors, waking up residents roughly,

yelling orders. Sometimes they arrested all adult males present in a

house, including the elderly, handicapped or sick people. Treatment

often included pushing people around, insulting, taking aim with

rifles, punching and kicking and striking with rifles.''

Is it any wonder that so many Iraqis want us to leave? This is not

what we expect of the conduct of our military operations. The Geneva

Conventions have the force of law, and as a nation whose Bill of Rights

was the model for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that holds

itself out as a force for human rights and human dignity around the

world, we should set the example. Any person taken into U.S. custody

should be treated, at a minimum, consistent with the Geneva Conventions

and in accordance with the Torture Convention.

This fiasco is part and parcel of the increasing insecurity in Iraq

and the dangers facing our troops from a hostile population that has

resulted from such miserably poor planning that so many people warned

of.

It has claimed the lives and limbs of hundreds of Americans and of

thousands of Iraqis.

It has caused deep divisions between ourselves and the Iraqi people

and Muslims around the world.

It has damaged our image as a nation that stands for respect for

human rights.

It represents a colossal failure of leadership.

As I and so many others have said for months, we cannot succeed in

Iraq by ourselves. Not when the rationale for going to war has been

exposed for the pretext that it was. Not when we are widely perceived

as occupiers. Not when photographs of uniformed Americans abusing naked

Iraqi prisoners have become the symbol of that occupation.

We saw, with the horrifying murder of Nicolas Berg by al-Qaida, the

incredible depravity and determination of the enemy we face. Only weeks

ago there were images of dismembered American corpses hanging from a

bridge.

We are united in our revulsion, and in our commitment to bring to

justice those responsible for such despicable acts. The question is how

to do it effectively.

Last October 13th, in a memo entitled ``Global War on Terrorism,''

Secretary Rumsfeld asked, ``Are we capturing, killing or dissuading

more terrorists every day than the madrassas and radical clerics are

recruiting, training and deploying against us?''

Since then, he and the President have called Iraq the main front in

the war against terrorism. It certainly did not used to be. Last week,

I asked Secretary Rumsfeld how he would answer the question he posed

last October--whether we are winning the fight against terrorism. He

said he didn't know.

That speaks volumes. We are spending more than $1 billion a week in

Iraq, and the Secretary doesn't know if we are winning.

President Bush's Iraq policy has been discredited not only among the

world's Muslims, but among most of our friends and allies. Not only

have we lost the moral authority that is necessary to defeat terrorism,

we have been unable to even secure the country we liberated. As I have

said repeatedly, we need a radical change of course, and that decision

can be made only by the President of the United States.

The President has reaffirmed his steadfast support for the Secretary

of Defense, and at this point it appears that Secretary Rumsfeld has no

plans to leave. But many are seriously questioning whether we can

succeed in Iraq, or against terrorism for that matter, so long as he

and General Myers, and Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz, who are so closely

identified with this discredited policy, remain at the helm.

At the same time, the President needs to articulate credible,

achievable goals in Iraq, beyond ``staying the course'' and the usual

cliches about remaking the Middle East.

We and the rest of the world need to know what those goals are and

how he plans to achieve them, to whom we are going to turn over

sovereignty that can effectively govern, how the President plans to

secure the support needed from other nations to effectively address the

deteriorating security situation, how long he expects our troops to

stay in Iraq, and how many more billions of dollars it may cost.

Unless the President can answer these questions, more and more

Americans will question how much longer we can ask our troops to risk

life and limb in Iraq and the taxpayers to continue to pay for a policy

that is not working.