Mr. President, on July 7, 2004, the Senate Select

Committee on Intelligence issued an important report regarding flaws in

our prewar intelligence on Iraq. Last week, Lord Butler issued a

similar report on British intelligence. In a related vein, the 9/11

Commission will issue its report this Thursday.

Each of these reports either already has, or no doubt will, shed

light on how we can improve our ability to protect this country and our

allies from future terrorist attacks.

Coming almost 3 years after 9/11, it is important to note that many

reforms have already been implemented by Congress and the

administration without waiting on a committee or a commission report.

Still, the recommendations of each of these reports ought to be

carefully considered and debated by Congress.

If this were not a Presidential election year, we might be able to

even undertake this important work without playing the blame game in

order to score political points. My hope is that we will, to the extent

humanly possible, strive to do so. If not, we risk politicizing the

process to the detriment of long-term solutions to our intelligence

problems.

Some have used the occasion to criticize our Nation's policies in

Iraq and the broader war on terror. Some say, on the one hand, that our

leaders did too little before 9/11 to stop the horrible events of that

day. Some say, on the other hand, that our leaders did too much in

removing Saddam based in part on the remarkable clarity that comes with

20/20 hindsight.

I did not say, and consciously so, President Bush's policies but,

rather, our Nation's policies because our policies in Iraq and in the

broader war on terror have generally been a consensus policy authorized

by the Congress and ultimately implemented by President Bush. In fact,

the policy of regime change in Iraq was shared by the Clinton and Bush

administrations and is now being criticized for political gain by some

who voted for those very policies.

It is important that we set the record straight. The Senate

Intelligence Committee report in particular directly rebuts some of the

more outrageous claims that administration officials, including the

President himself, intentionally misled the American people. Indeed,

due to systemic flaws in our intelligence apparatus, it appears that it

was the administration itself that was misled to some extent. But that

does not mean we were wrong to remove Saddam Hussein from power. There

were many good reasons for the regime change in Iraq in addition to

those which have at least so far turned out to be mistaken.

There is no question that the world is better off with Saddam Hussein

in a prison cell instead of remaining in his royal palaces. There is

every reason to believe he is precisely where he belongs.

When the Senate voted overwhelmingly on a bipartisan basis in October

2002 to authorize military force to defend the national security of the

United States and enforce all relevant United Nations security council

resolutions, the resolution this body passed noted that Iraq, in 1991,

entered into a United Nations-sponsored cease-fire agreement pursuant

to which Iraq unequivocally agreed among other things to eliminate its

nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons programs and the means to

deliver and develop them and to end its support for international

terrorism.

That resolution also noted that the efforts of international weapons

inspectors, U.S. intelligence agencies, and Iraqi defectors led to the

discovery in 1991 that Iraq had large stockpiles of chemical weapons

and a large scale biological weapons program and that Iraq had an

advanced nuclear weapons development program that was much closer to

producing a nuclear weapon than intelligence reporting had previously

indicated.

That resolution also said that Iraq in direct and flagrant violation

of the cease-fire attempted to thwart the efforts of weapons inspectors

to identify and destroy Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and

development capabilities which finally resulted in the withdrawal of

inspectors from Iraq on October 31, 1998.

That resolution went on to note that the current Iraqi regime at that

time under Saddam Hussein has demonstrated its capability and

willingness to use weapons of mass destruction against other nations

and against its own people.

Iraq continues to aid and harbor other international terrorist

organizations, including organizations that threaten the lives and

safety of U.S. citizens.

It was on this last point that Acting Director of Central

Intelligence John McLaughlin said just yesterday in an interview:

Saddam dared the United Nations Security Council and the free nations

of the world to act and act we, the coalition, did. Congress expressly

recognized in the authorization it gave President Bush that ``the

attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, underscored the

gravity of the threat posed by the acquisition of weapons of mass

destruction by international terrorist organizations.''

We knew that Saddam had them but we did not yet know what he did with

them. Why he kicked out United Nations weapons inspectors in 1998 and

never accounted for them, all the while defying resolution after

resolution of the United Nations Security Council we may never know for

sure.

I once thought that no one would question whether America was safer

and that the Iraqi people are better off without Saddam but some,

during this political season, have come awfully close. Put another way:

Does any reasonable person truly believe that America and Iraq were

better off with Saddam Hussein in power? Surely not. Surely not. But

you simply can't have it both ways. You must choose, and choose we did.

I believe the Senate made the right decision in supporting our

efforts in Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Nothing we learned

since then has changed my mind. It has been our official consensus

policy since 1998 under both Presidents Clinton and Bush, under both

Democrat and Republican leadership in the Senate. For example, in the

Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, we said:

Everyone, Republican and Democrat, knew that the dictatorship of

Saddam raised the prospect of a dangerous and irrational government in

the Middle East. Everyone knew that the Iraqi people were living under

a brutal and murderous tyrant. And at that time everyone knew that

Saddam was armed with weapons of mass destruction.

It was in a speech to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Pentagon

staff generally that President Clinton eloquently described the

consequences of inaction. He said:

That was President Clinton in 1998.

Our intelligence community told us before the Iraq war that Saddam

Hussein had weapons of mass destruction programs--chemical, biological,

and possibly nuclear. Now in the past, in 1991, our intelligence had

sometimes underestimated Saddam's capabilities; so there was no

question that there was reasonable cause for concern for an armed

Saddam, ready to lash out, without warning, against Israel, Kuwait, or

other countries in the region. We also feared that because of his

hatred for America, Saddam might give the weapons he was developing to

terrorists for whom he provided sanctuary. These concerns were nearly

universally shared, as articulated in the quote I read from President

Clinton.

At the outset of our military operations against Iraq in December of

1998, President Clinton described the risks of leaving Saddam in power.

He said:

Again, a statement by President Clinton in 1998.

We should all be glad Saddam Hussein is out of power. Iraq's

fledgling government is taking the first steps toward freedom and

democracy. Neither we nor they have to fear Saddam's regime cooperating

at any level with al-Qaida or other terrorists who wish to do violence

against the American people or our allies. But it is also true that the

weapons programs we found in Iraq were not what our intelligence

information predicted before hostilities broke out in 2003. Saddam

Hussein had the capability and the raw resources to do many things, but

he did not at that time have the fully operational weapons systems we

believed he possessed.

So why, it is logical to ask, did we have this problem with our

intelligence? We know, as the unanimous, bipartisan report of the

Select Committee on Intelligence said, that despite the insinuations of

administration critics, the intelligence we had was not rigged or

interfered with in any way. The same conclusion was echoed by Lord

Butler's report in Great Britain which found no evidence of deliberate

distortion of the intelligence material or of culpable negligence. It

is clear that any such allegations to the contrary are baseless,

partisan, and have no foundation in the truth.

The Select Committee on Intelligence of the Senate found in

conclusion 83:

In conclusion 84, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said:

And in conclusion 102:

How did we get here? How did we know that Saddam had these weapons of

mass destruction, defied resolution after resolution of the U.N.

Security Council, defied every request that he open his country to U.N.

weapons inspectors and reveal what he had or, we might say, what he no

longer had?

Consider in 1993 we saw the first successful terrorist strike by

radical Islamists on U.S. soil--a car bomb that exploded in the

basement garage of the World Trade Center, killing 6 and wounding

1,000. Then in 1996, there was another attack on the Khobar Towers

barracks in Saudi Arabia, killing 19 Americans and wounding 515

Americans and Saudis. In 1998, the United States embassies in Kenya and

Tanzania were attacked by al-Qaida suicide bombers who killed 234

people and wounded more than 5,000. And in 2000, al-Qaida attacked the

USS Cole, killing 17 American sailors and wounding 39.

It was during these same years that Congress made dramatic cuts in

funding for the Government agencies most involved in the fight against

terror, particularly the Central Intelligence Agency. These cuts were

significant, including letting go nearly 40 percent of those recruited

to spy for America's interests. The number of officers in the

clandestine service was downsized by roughly 25 percent and nearly one-

third of our overseas offices were shut down. All of these cuts

seriously hampered the intelligence community's ability to monitor and

analyze the rising threat posed by terrorism. Again, Acting Director of

the Central Intelligence Agency, John McLaughlin, said yesterday,

because of these cuts, we were almost in Chapter 11 in terms of our

human intelligence collection. This much seems clear: Our early warning

system was blinded by a self-inflicted wound.

There is simply no way that President Bush's administration could

have filled all the holes of an underfunded and demoralized

intelligence community in a mere 8 months after it had been dismantled

systematically and deliberately during the preceding years. So when

President Bush came to office, he inherited an intelligence community

that was ill prepared to meet the challenges of the war on terrorism.

We should not make this merely a game of election year ``gotcha.'' We

must debate the causes of our intelligence flaws in a way that commands

the confidence of the American people and in a way that makes them

safer and freer. We must also remain committed to our task in Iraq, to

finishing that task and not allow election-year politics to create a

climate that undermines the morale of our brave troops in the field.

Let us finish the task we have undertaken in good faith and with the

noblest of aspirations on behalf of free people around the world. Let

us not let partisan politics lead us into the trap identified by

Winston Churchill when he said:

September 11 forced the civilized world to realize that the terrorist

foe we had been fighting for years sought a more deadly goal than we

ever suspected. Once Congress and the administration came to grips with

the horrible truth of this new breed of terrorism, we knew what had to

be done. We knew we had to take action. Under President Bush's

leadership, we resolved that our aim was to defeat terrorism as a

threat to our very freedom and our very lives.

Nor could we achieve our aim merely by maintaining a defensive

posture. Fighting terrorism on American soil is not enough. That is

merely a holding pattern and a capitulation of our responsibility. When

it comes to confrontation with terrorists, we must either change the

way we live or we must change the way they live. We chose the latter,

and I believe we chose wisely. It is a policy of action rather than

inaction, and one clearly warranted by the new reality of our post-9/11

world.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.