Mr. President, tonight, as we all know, President Bush is

going to speak to the Nation about the situation in Iraq. I think that

we all have a pretty good sense of much of what he is going to say. He

will talk, as he should, about the extraordinary courage of our troops

across the world; he will talk, as he should, about the march of

democracy; and he will speak with pride about Iraqi elections and the

end of tyranny. He will stress, as we all share, the importance of the

war on terror. All of us in this Chamber stand in awe of the courage of

our troops and all of us in this Chamber and in this country are

passionate about democracy. But the fact is that honoring our troops

and extolling the virtue of democracy, those words alone are not going

to be enough to improve the situation and the reality of the perilous

direction that we are currently headed in Iraq. What we need are not

just the words extolling the virtues of things with which we all agree.

What we need is a policy that is going to address the complex and in

some ways self-inflicted predicament that we face today. The best way

to honor troops, Mr. President, the best way to protect our troops, is

to provide them with the best policy possible. The fact is that that is

not what we have today. Yesterday, I attended the funeral of

Christopher Piper of Marblehead, MA, special

forces, who died of wounds from an IED, and two other of his fellow

soldiers died previously in that same incident. The overwhelming

outpouring of emotion and patriotism--kids holding flags along the

sides of the streets, people, good citizens, patriots all, coming out

to say goodbye to their native son--was moving beyond words.

Christopher Piper, and all of the soldiers like him currently serving

and all those who will go over there, deserve a Government leadership

that makes the best decisions possible to be able to provide them the

greatest security possible to accomplish the mission as rapidly and

effectively as possible.

Today, I regret to say, the experience in Iraq has proven again and

again to America and the world that we have no realistic comprehensive

strategy to reduce the risks to our soldiers and to achieve our goals.

While our military has done--and continues to do--a superb job, our

civilian leadership has not, and our soldiers are paying the price

every single day. It is time for a realistic plan for success.

To achieve that plan, we have to begin by tearing down the wall of

arrogance. When the Vice President absurdly claims the insurgency is in

its last throes, it insults the common sense and intelligence of the

American people, and he diminishes our stature in the world. How can we

expect the Iraqi people to take us seriously and do their part when the

White House says the insurgency is fading, and yet Iraqis live in

constant fear--explosions waking them up in the night, reminding them

of the danger inherent in a short walk to work or to school the next

morning.

I know that we should not dwell on mistakes. We need to understand,

however, the consequences of the decisions we have made and our ability

to effectively move forward because the only way you can move forward

and have a comprehensive strategy is to understand where you have been.

With allies reading the Downing Street memo and the American people

increasingly aware that the rationalization for war changed midstream,

it now becomes that much harder to rally the collective strength of the

Nation and the world to our cause.

We have to acknowledge the past in order to overcome it because the

truth is that, until this moment, the stubbornness of this

administration has made a difference. It hurts our chances for success.

It leads to frustrated expectations of Americans themselves. It makes

it much more difficult for the Iraqi people to embrace the cause, and

it makes it so much easier for sidelined nations to turn their back on

a common interest and say: OK, it is their deal, let them go solve it

because they don't seem to understand it.

The bottom line is that when it comes to war and the safety of

American troops, there is no time for excuses. All of our troops

deserve the best we can provide, and they deserve it now. This is the

time for the administration to tell the truth about what is happening

on the ground and be open to new ideas about how we are going to get

the job done. Admitting mistakes is a necessary hurdle and a

constructive tool for this administration if it wants to build the

strength necessary to get it right in Iraq. Admitting mistakes paves

the way for elected officials and the American people to come together

and to move forward. Admitting mistakes actually lays the groundwork

for the climate of cooperation that allows allies to add to our

strength. Admitting mistakes eases the concerns of the Iraqi people and

helps us make them understand that there will be no success unless they

embrace the burden of their own future. And that includes acknowledging

that Iraq today is something that it was not before the war--a breeding

ground for jihadists. Today, there are 16,000 to 20,000 insurgents, and

the number of jihadists among them is growing, according to our own

estimates. So this is a growing challenge, and we need to take

immediate steps to address it. Our officer corps reports that every

time our troops kill or capture an insurgent, there are three more who

just step forward to take his place. That is not a compelling strategy

for success.

So I hope that tonight we hear something new from the President. I

hope the President will recognize that the American people demand more

than a communications strategy--they demand real leadership, with real

decisions and real choices that provide a strategy for success and that

get our troops home. If the President does this, he will begin to

restore the confidence of the American people and the respect of the

world. In showing real leadership, he will make it clear to the Iraqi

people that it is time for them to take the lead.

I also hope the American people understand that there still can be a

plan for success in Iraq if we move quickly, if we make the right

choices, if we reach across the aisle for bipartisan effort, if we

reach out to other nations. The mistakes that we have made do not

change the fact that our military is the most powerful and competent in

the world and that democracy is one of the world's most powerful ideas.

The mistakes do not change the fact that the Iraqi people understand,

through the powerful memory of generations, that they have a unique

opportunity to shape their own future. If the President finally opens

to these new ideas and gets this right, tells the truth about the

complex challenge, and the Iraqi people get serious about doing their

part and bearing the burden, we can have the success that we need and

seek in Iraq.

So what can the President say tonight to get things right in Iraq and

put us on the road to success? The President can start by immediately

declaring that the United States does not seek permanent bases or any

permanent military presence in Iraq. Erasing suspicion of indefinite

occupation is critical to eroding support for the insurgency. Getting

that right also means using the extraordinary leverage that we have to

get the Iraqis to do their part. Our massive military presence is all

that stands between the Iraqi people and complete chaos. Our special

forces are protecting Iraqi leaders. With this kind of leverage, it is

nothing short of shocking that the administration allowed 6 months to

go by from the last election before including Sunnis in the political

process. This was an obvious crucial prerequisite to success.

Yet there was no sense of urgency and minimal pressure applied. It is

time for the administration to use its leverage to insist that the

Iraqis do their part and establish a truly inclusive political process

and meet the deadlines for finishing the Constitution and holding new

elections in December. There can be no wavering from those dates.

Getting it right also means putting together a real plan for training

Iraqi troops and following through on it. This should be our top

priority. It is the key to getting our troops home and avoiding a

humiliating withdrawal. It is time to move beyond fudging the numbers

and finally put the training of Iraqi troops on a true 6-month wartime

footing. That includes ensuring that the Iraqi Government has the full

budget necessary to be able to deploy and continue the training.

It is also time to stop using the in-country training requirement as

an excuse for refusing offers made by Egypt, Jordan, France, and

Germany to do more. Why would we turn down the opportunity of other

countries to help us do more? Why would we turn down the opportunity to

be able to give our troops the relief they deserve?

Getting it right also means drawing up a detailed plan--a real plan,

shared with the Congress of the United States--with the clear milestone

of transfer of military and police responsibilities to the Iraqis after

the December elections.

The administration's plan should take into account both political and

security objectives, including Iraqi force structure and capacity, and

it should be specifically tied to a series of specific tasks and

responsibilities. This plan must have more than just dates and numbers.

It must make it clear to the Iraqi Government that American patience is

limited.

The Iraqi people need to understand that in America, today, when we

see Army recruitments suffering, families organizing to protect their

kids from recruiters, and when we see the divorce rate for military

officers skyrocketing--I am told the divorce rate among officers for

the last year is up some 70-plus percent; and since the year 2000, up

over 300 percent--when we see this kind of damage to the long-term

capacity of the American military, we need to take it seriously. I

know the Iraqi people already understand that our troops are skilled

and brave. Now they need to understand we must see legitimate progress

that offers a real chance of American troops beginning to come home.

At the same time, if the administration wants the Iraqis to bear the

burden, they need to move beyond the hollow ``stay as long as it takes

no matter what'' talk that provides an endless security blanket--a

disincentive for Iraqis to stand up for Iraq--and, instead, they must

talk forcefully about the transfer of responsibility.

If the administration gets this plan right, and the Iraqis succeed in

adopting a new constitution and holding elections as planned, trained

Iraqi security forces should be ready to take on more responsibility at

the critical moment when support for the insurgency is diminishing.

That is the kind of careful, strategic planning we need to set the

stage for American forces to be able to be reduced in number, as the

Iraqi security forces assume more of the mission. But, again, this

simply will not happen unless the Iraqi forces themselves assume more

of their part. We must make the Iraqi Government understand the

patience of America is finite, and that real progress must be achieved.

We all understand that deploying capable Iraqi security forces is

imperative to success. It always has been imperative to success. Yet

the numbers we have been given again and again have been false. But the

administration would also have us believe Iraqi forces alone could end

the insurgency. That is simply not true. I hope the President strikes a

different tone tonight and commits to work simultaneously, equally,

forcefully on all fronts--security, economic, and political.

The administration should know by now that overly optimistic

predictions for Iraq and rebuilding Iraq have actually been a drag on

our mission. Reconstruction lags behind even in the Shiite south and in

the Kurdish north, where security is far less of an issue. This sends

the wrong message to those whom we ask to sacrifice for freedom.

We need to speed up work in these areas in order to demonstrate that

progress will be made in the rest of Iraq. If Iraqis, particularly

Sunnis, who fear being left out in the cold, see electricity flowing,

jobs being created, infrastructure being built, and a government of

their own choosing being formed, the lure of the insurgency will

diminish. The violence and risk to our troops will decrease. To get it

right in Iraq, we must show all Iraqis they are fighting not only for a

future of freedom but for a tangibly improved future for their lives on

a day-to-day basis, and for their children.

Getting it right also means understanding the neighborhood. It means

getting those with an interest in Iraq, such as the Saudis, to act now.

Iraq is surrounded by Sunni neighbors with significant resources, yet

complaints fall from these neighbors about being left out and about

their concerns falling on deaf ears. Many of these countries could do

much more to help, and we should encourage them to do so. Even short-

term improvements, such as providing electricity from their grids, or

supplying diesel fuel--an offer that has been made but is yet

unfulfilled by the Saudis--would go a long way.

But we have to do our part and address their legitimate concerns. If

we want these nations to step up to the plate and help us to secure

Iraq's borders and help, particularly because of their Sunni

background, to bring Sunnis into the political process or help to

rebuild Iraq's economy and infrastructure, then we have to offer a

coherent, strategic security plan for their region. We have to address

their fears of an Iran-dominated crescent, and their concerns about our

sporadic mediation between Israel and the Palestinians. This

administration needs to show it understands there has to be some give-

and-take in the process.

The administration could also give a significant boost to the

rebuilding effort by recognizing the great untapped potential of

private sector contributions. The conference that just took place in

Brussels was a donor conference. What we need is more than donors; we

need investment. The administration, working with the Iraqi Government,

should organize a development conference for Iraqi businessmen and

their regional counterparts who wish to invest in Iraq. Regional

investment would not only strengthen Iraq's economy, it would give

neighboring governments a greater stake in Iraq's success and another

incentive for them to be able to provide more help. And the

administration might want to consider the effect on regional

businessmen when they read headlines about Halliburton's extraordinary

dominance of local contracts.

Much of what I have discussed today--from administration mistakes, to

the steps we need to move forward--all deals with laying the groundwork

for long-term success. But the reality is, the elections are 6 months

off. Iraq is not going to be rebuilt overnight, and it is going to take

time to get the Iraqi troops ready.

In the coming months, even with perfect planning, there will be

violence, turmoil, and hardship. That is why tonight it is critical

that President Bush make clear there are actions we can take in the

short term to ease the burden on our troops. He needs to get this

right, not only to save American lives, but to elevate the confidence

of the American people. For this to happen, the President must

reconsider some hastily brushed aside options.

To date, the administration has been unwilling to entertain the idea

of empowered militias, instead singularly focusing on a unified Iraqi

security force. But Iraq, like Afghanistan, has numerous tribal,

religious, and ethnic militias, such as the Kurdish Peshmerga or the

Shiite Badr Army.

The fact is, these forces are structured, and, most importantly, they

are accepted by the provincial populations. They are capable of

providing protection while helping with reconstruction. In the interim,

while a fully capable Iraqi security force is established, these forces

could meet some of the critical security needs. They could fill the

gap. If they can help do the job, why not let them?

It is time for the administration to put aside its concerns and prod

the Iraqi Government to give the militias legitimacy. We can do this by

integrating them into a kind of national guard, a force that would

provide security in their own areas where they are respected and

accepted.

The administration also needs to get it right on border security. For

2 years now, Senators and others have been commenting on the absence of

adequate border security. The jihadists have been able to move in at

will. If we want to ease the burden on our troops in the short term, we

need to put that kind of adequate border security force in place. The

truth is, it has been absent since day one, which is a shame, because

that is precisely where our allies could help.

As opposed to providing security in urban areas, border security is

generally much less risky for troops. The administration needs to work

with the Iraqi Government to reach out to the world and establish a

multinational force to secure Iraq's borders. Such a force, if

sanctioned by the U.N. Security Council, could attract participation by

Iraq's neighbors and powerful nations with a vested interest, such as

India.

The administration has narrowed our options in Iraq, but there are

still better choices available to us. There is still time to get it

right in Iraq, and I hope, for the sake of our troops, the President

will do so tonight.

We are at a critical juncture in this conflict, both at home and

abroad. The last thing we need is the administration growing even more

stubborn or more defensive. Today, our Nation needs honest, open

leadership, and a comprehensive strategy for success. It is time for

the President to reach out and work across the aisle and across the

globe to clean up this mess.

The President must seize this opportunity to move forward, as the

next months are so critical to the future of Iraq and to the future of

our security. If the administration fails to take the steps that are

available to them, and fails to hold the Iraqis accountable, we will

stumble along, our troops at greater risk, casualties rising, the

patience of the American people wearing thin, and the specter of

quagmire staring us in the face.

Every misstep, every measure untaken, every wise course not followed

carries an unbearable cost. The American people have a right to expect

accountability. We need to decrease the risk to our troops and

strengthen our chances for success. Our troops deserve better than they

are getting. They deserve leadership that is equal to their sacrifice.