Mr. President, 3 years ago when the Congress and the

country debated the resolution to give President Bush the authority to

launch a preemptive war against Iraq, reference was often made to the

lessons of Vietnam.

There are many lessons, both of that war and of the efforts to end

it. But one that made a deep impression on me came from former

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. He was, after all, the architect

of that war. He said our greatest mistake was not understanding our

enemy.

Vietnam was a relatively simple country. It had changed little in the

preceding 3,000 years. It was for the most part racially, ethnically,

linguistically, and even religiously homogeneous. One would have

thought it would be easy for American military and political leaders to

understand.

Apparently it was not. The White House and the Pentagon, convinced

that no country, particularly a tiny impoverished land of rice farmers,

could withstand the military might of the United States, never bothered

to study and understand the history or culture of Vietnam, and they

made tragic miscalculations. They lacked the most basic knowledge of

the motivation and the capabilities and resolve of the people they were

fighting.

At the start of the Iraq war, those who drew some analogies to

Vietnam were ridiculed by the Pentagon and the White House. Iraq is not

a Vietnam, they insisted. Our troops would be greeted as liberators.

Troop strength was not a concern. Our mission would be quickly

accomplished. Democracy would spread throughout the Middle East.

Freedom was on the march.

It is true that Vietnam and Iraq are vastly different societies, but

the point was not that they are similar but that some of the same

lessons apply.

We did not understand Vietnam, a simple country, and we paid a huge

price for our ignorance and our arrogance. Iraq, a complex country

comprised of rival clans, tribes, and ethnic and religious factions who

have fought each other for centuries, we understand even less.

If this were not apparent to many at the start of this ill-conceived

and politically motivated war, a war I opposed from the beginning, it

should be obvious today. Yet to listen to the Secretary of Defense or

to the President or the Vice President, one would never know it.

We know today that President Bush decided to invade Iraq without

evidence to support the use of force and well before Congress passed a

resolution giving him the authority to do so--actually, authority he

did not even believe he needed--despite our great Constitution which

invests in the Congress the power to declare war.

Twenty-three Senators voted against that resolution, and I will

always be proud to have been one of them.

We know today that the motivation for a plan to attack Iraq, hatched

by a handful of political operatives, had taken hold within in the

White House even before 9/11 and without any connection to the war on

terrorism that came later.

We know that the key public justifications for the war--to stop

Saddam Hussein from developing nuclear weapons and supporting al-

Qaida--were based on faulty intelligence and outright distortions, and

they have been

thoroughly discredited. United Nations weapons inspectors, who were

dismissed by the White House as being naive and ineffective, turned out

to have gathered far better information with a tiny fraction of the

budget of our own intelligence agencies.

We know the insurgency is continuing to grow along with American

casualties--1,999 killed, and at least 15,220 wounded, many with

crippling injuries, as of yesterday--despite the same old ``light at

the end of the tunnel'' assertions and cliches by the White House and

top officials in the Pentagon.

The sad but inescapable truth, which the President either does not

see or refuses to believe or admit, is the Iraqi insurgency has

steadily grown, in part because of, not in spite of, our presence

there.

After baiting the insurgents to ``bring them on,'' as the President

said, we got what the President asked for. More than 2 years later, the

pendulum has swung against us and the question is no longer whether we

can stop the insurgency; the question is how do we extricate ourselves.

According to soldiers who volunteered for duty in Iraq believing in

the mission and who have returned home, many Iraqis who detest the

barbaric tactics of the insurgents have also grown to despise us. They

blame us for the lack of water and electricity, for the lack of jobs

and health care, for the hardships and violence they are suffering day

in and day out.

Unlike our troops and their families who are making great sacrifices

every day, most Americans have been asked to sacrifice nothing for this

war. In fact, we don't pay the bills. The bills are being sent to our

children and our grandchildren by way of our rapidly escalating

national debt and annual deficits.

Yet as the hundreds of billions of dollars to pay for the war

continue to pile up and domestic programs, such as Medicaid, job

training, and programs for needy students, are cut, then the sacrifices

are going to be felt as well.

Slogans have become little more than political rallying cries for the

White House, slogans as empty and unfulfilled as ``mission

accomplished.'' Our troops were sent to fight an unnecessary war

without sufficient armor against these ruthless and barbaric bombing

attacks, without adequate reinforcements, without a plan to win the

peace, and without adequate medical care and other services when they

return home on stretchers or crutches or with eye patches, unable to

walk, to work, to pay their mortgages, or to support their families.

Many of our veterans have been treated shamefully by their Government

when it sent them into harm's way under false pretenses and again after

they returned home.

Today I worry about places such as Ramadi, where more than 300

members of the Army National Guard from my State of Vermont are

currently serving valiantly alongside their comrades in the Marine

Corps and the Pennsylvania National Guard. Dozens of other citizen

soldiers from the Vermont Guard are serving across Iraq, while hundreds

more are deployed throughout the Persian Gulf region.

Many Vermonters have been killed in Ramadi and elsewhere by roadside

bombs and all-too-accurate sniper attacks. The insurgents too often

seem to attack and then escape with impunity. You can actually open

newspapers and see photos of armed insurgents walking the streets of

Iraq in broad daylight.

Many of these cold-blooded attacks are by people who are willing to

trade their own lives to kill civilians, security guards, and our

soldiers who now have no way of knowing whom they can trust among the

general population.

The President has no plan to deal with Ramadi, let alone the rest of

Iraq, except doing more of what we have been doing for more than 2

years at a cost of $5 billion a month--money we don't have and that

future generations of Americans are going to have to repay. Nor has he

proposed a practical alternative to our wasteful energy policy that

guarantees our continued dependence on Persian Gulf oil for decades to

come.

I am sure that what our military is doing to train the Iraqi Army and

what our billions upon billions of dollars are doing to help rebuild

Iraq--whatever is not stolen or wasted by profiteering contractors--is

making a difference. Iraq is no longer governed by a corrupt, ruthless

dictator, and there have been halting but important steps toward

representative government.

I applaud the Iraqis who courageously stood in long lines to cast a

ballot for a new constitution, despite the insurgents' threats. There

are many profiles in courage among the Iraqi people, just as there are

in the heroic and daily endeavors of United States soldiers there.

But this progress masks deeper troubles and may be short lived,

threatened by a widening insurgency and a divisive political process

that is increasingly seen as leading to a Shiite-dominated theocracy

governed by Islamic law and aligned with Iran, or the dissolution of

Iraq into separate Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite states.

Mr. President, this war has been a costly disaster for the United

States of America. More than half of the American people now say they

have lost confidence in the President's handling of it.

Far from making us safer from terrorists, in fact, it has turned Iraq

into a haven and recruiting ground for terrorists and deflected our

attention and resources away from the fight against terrorism. If

anything, it has emboldened our enemies, as it has become increasingly

apparent that the most powerful army in the world cannot stop a

determined insurgency.

Regrettably, it is no longer a secret how vulnerable we are.

Hurricane Katrina showed how tragically unprepared we are to respond to

a major disaster 4 years after 9/11 and after wasting billions of

dollars on an unnecessary war.

Our cities are little further than the drawing board when it comes to

developing workable evacuation plans for a terrorist attack or other

emergency, not to mention how to feed, house, and provide for millions

of displaced persons.

This war has caused immense damage to our relations with the world's

Muslims, a religion practiced by some 1.2 billion people, about which

most Americans know virtually nothing. We cannot possibly mount an

effective campaign against terrorism without the trust, respect, and

the active support of Muslims, particularly in the Middle East where

our image has been so badly damaged. Our weakened international

reputation is another heavy price our country has paid for this war.

Each day, as more and more Iraqi civilians, often children, lose

their lives and limbs from suicide bombers and also from our bombs, the

resentment and anger toward us intensifies. And every week, the number

of U.S. service men and women who are killed or wounded creeps higher

and will soon pass 2,000, but, even more tragically, shows no sign of

diminishing.

This war has isolated us from our allies, most of whom want no part

of it, and if we continue on the course the President has set, it will

also divide our country.

Other Senators and Representatives, Republicans and Democrats, have

expressed frustration and alarm with the President's failure to

acknowledge that this war has been a costly mistake, that more of the

same is not a workable policy, and that we need to change course. My

friend Senator Hagel, a Vietnam veteran, has pointed out the increasing

similarities to Vietnam. We learned this week that the administration

has even resumed the discredited Vietnam-era practice of measuring

progress by reporting body counts.

White House and Pentagon officials and their staunchest supporters in

Congress warn of a wider civil war if we pull our troops out. They

could be right. In fact, it could be the first thing they have been

right about since the beginning of this reckless adventure.

My question to them is: When and how then do we extract ourselves

from this mess? What does the President believe needs to happen before

our troops can come home? What is his plan for getting to that point?

If we cannot overcome the insurgency, what can we realistically

expect to accomplish in Iraq--and at what cost--that requires the

continued deployment of our troops? What is it that compels us to spend

billions of dollars to rebuild the Iraqi military when our own National

Guard is stretched to the breaking point and cannot even get the money

for the equipment it needs?

I doubt the President or the Secretary of Defense will answer these

questions. Instead of answers, we get rhetoric that conflicts with just

about everything we hear or read, including from some of this country's

most distinguished retired military officers who served under both

Republican and Democratic administrations.

Six months ago, the Vice President said the insurgency was in its

last throes. That was just the latest in a long string of grossly

inaccurate statements and predictions and false expectations about

Iraq.

Secretary Rice, when asked recently when U.S. forces could begin to

come home assuming the Administration's rosy predictions come true,

could not, or would not, even venture a guess.

Without answers--real answers, honest answers--to these questions, I

will not support the open-ended deployment of our troops in a war that

was based on falsehood and justified with hubris.

Even though I opposed this war, I have prayed, like other Americans,

that it would weaken the threat of terrorism and make the world safer,

that our troops' sacrifices would be justified, and that the President

had a plan for completing the mission.

Instead, it has turned Iraq into a training ground for terrorists, it

is fueling the insurgency, it is causing severe damage to the

reputation and readiness of the United States military, and it is

preventing us from addressing the inexcusable weaknesses in our

homeland security.

The Iraqi people, at least the Shiites and Kurds, have voted for a

new constitution, as hastily drafted, flawed, and potentially divisive

as it may be. Saddam Hussein, whose capacity for cruelty was seemingly

limitless, is finally facing trial for his heinous crimes. Elections

for a new national government are due by the end of the year. By then,

it will be more than 2\1/2\ years since Saddam's overthrow, and we will

have given the Iraqi people a chance to chart their own course. The

sooner we reduce our presence there, the sooner they will have to make

the difficult decisions necessary to solve their own problems in their

own country.

Our military commanders say that Iraq's problems increasingly need to

be solved through the political process, not through military force. We

must show Iraq and the world that we are not an occupying force, and

that we have no designs on their country or their oil. The American

people need to know that the President has a plan to bring our troops

home.

Once a new Iraqi government is in place, I believe the President

should consult with Congress on a flexible plan that includes pulling

our troops back from the densely populated areas where they are

suffering the worst casualties and to bring them home.

It is also long overdue for Congress and the White House to reassess

our policy toward this region.

The President has declared democracy is taking root throughout the

Middle East, and there have been some small, positive steps. But they

are dwarfed by the ongoing threat posed by Iran, Syria's continued

meddling in Iraq and Lebanon, repression and corruption in Saudi Arabia

and Egypt, the danger that the momentum for peace from Israel's

withdrawal from Gaza will be lost as settlement construction

accelerates in the West Bank, and the widespread--albeit mistaken--

belief among Muslims that the United States wants to destroy Islam

itself.

Just as the White House's obsession with Iraq has diverted our

resources and impeded our efforts to strengthen our defenses against

terrorism at home, so has it made it more difficult to constructively,

with our allies, address these regional threats.

As I have said, I did not support this war, and I believe that

history will not judge kindly those who got us into this debacle by

attacking a country that did not threaten us, after deceiving the

American people and ridiculing those who appealed for caution and for

instead mobilizing our resources directly against the threat of

terrorism.

I worry that many of our young veterans who have gone to Iraq and

experienced the brutality and trauma of war and may already feel guilty

for having survived, will increasingly question its purpose. As the

architects of this war move on to other jobs, I fear we are going to

see another generation of veterans, many of them physically and

psychologically scarred for life, who feel a deep sense of betrayal by

their Government.

If President Bush will not say what remains to be done before he can

declare victory and bring our troops home, then the Congress should be

voting on what this war is really costing the Nation.

We should vote on paying for the war versus cutting Medicaid, as some

are proposing; or pay for the war versus cutting VA programs that are

already unable to pay the staggering costs of treatment and

rehabilitation for our injured veterans; or pay for it versus

rebuilding our National Guard; or rebuilding FEMA; or securing our

ports and our borders; or investing in our intelligence so we can

finally capture Osama bin Laden; or investing in health care for the

tens of millions of Americans who cannot afford to get sick; or fixing

our troubled schools, so our children can learn to do a better job than

we have of making the world a safer place for all people.

These, and the tarnished reputation of a country that I love and so

many once admired as not only powerful buy also good and just are the

real costs of this war.

I yield the floor.