Mr. President, this past Wednesday, Washington felt a

little like Hollywood. In fact, not many blockbuster movies have gotten

the kind of massive press and critical acclaim that we saw yesterday

for the release of the Iraq Study Group report. Official Washington

rushed to embrace the report--understandably, since it reflected the

same flawed mindset that led so many here to embrace the war in Iraq 4

years ago. Unfortunately, that same mindset is now what is keeping too

many here from fixing an Iraq policy that many now agree is badly

flawed.

The administration still believes that Iraq is the be-all and end-all

of our national security. So, too, does most of Washington.

Unfortunately, the Iraq Study Group report does too little to change

that flawed mind-set. I respect the serious efforts of the group to

correct the administration's misguided policies, and the report has

some valuable ideas. But the very name, the ``Iraq Study Group'' says

it all. We need recommendations on how to address Iraq, but those

recommendations must be guided by our top national security priority--

defeating terrorist networks operating in dozens of countries around

the world. We can't just look at Iraq in isolation--we need to also be

looking at Somalia and Afghanistan and the many other places around the

world where we face grave and growing threats.

The report doesn't adequately put Iraq in the context of a broader

national security strategy. We need an Iraq policy that is guided by

our top national security priority--defeating the terrorist network

that attacked us on 9/11 and its allies. Unless we set a serious

timetable for redeploying our troops from Iraq, we will be unable to

effectively address these global threats. In the end, this report is a

regrettable example of ``official Washington'' missing the point. The

report may have gotten a glowing reception at its DC premiere, but I

don't think it will get the same response once it goes on the road.

Maybe there are still people in Washington who need a study group to

tell them that the policy in Iraq isn't working, but the American

people are way ahead of this report. It has been just over a month

since the American people told us clearly what they were thinking about

Iraq. They recognize that we need a timetable to bring the troops out

of Iraq. They know that a flexible timetable is needed to preserve our

military readiness, to prevent more unnecessary and tragic American

casualties in Iraq and to protect our national security. They are the

ones we should be listening to--not the insiders, politicians and

think-tankers who believe they have cornered the market on wisdom.

Unfortunately, the focus of this commission, and the amount of

attention being given to this single report, show just how myopic this

administration and Members of Congress are. The long-running debate

here in Washington about whether and when to redeploy our troops from

Iraq always centers on the situation on the ground there, and whether a

drawdown of troops will make it better or worse. Those are important

considerations. But even more important are the issues that are largely

ignored--the fact that our commitment of troops and resources in Iraq

is dangerously weakening our national security and the opportunity cost

of ignoring the growing threats elsewhere in the world.

As the administration and Congress mull over the Iraq Study Group's

recommendations, it comes as no surprise that the group's work includes

what the New York Times had called a ``classic Washington compromise.''

But we need much more than a compromise to fix our national security

policy. We need a dramatic and immediate change of course in Iraq--a

timeline to redeploy our troops from Iraq so that we can refocus on the

terrorist networks that threaten the safety of the American people.

The war in Iraq was, and remains, a war of choice. The administration

has tried to create a false choice, between staying in Iraq with no end

date in sight and ``cutting and running.'' They want us to believe that

Iraq is the central front in the war on terror, just as

they wanted us to believe their trumped-up reasons for going to war in

the first place. They want us to believe that any option besides

staying the course is going to be detrimental to our national security.

That argument is mistaken.

The real choice is this: continuing to devote so much of our

resources to Iraq, or devoting some of those resources to waging a

global campaign against al-Qaida and its allies. We cannot do both.

The administration's choice--to maintain a massive and seemingly

indefinite U.S. presence in Iraq--is harmful both to our efforts in

Iraq, as well as to our global efforts to defeat the terrorists that

attacked us on 9/11.

Our indefinite presence in Iraq is destabilizing and potentially

damaging Iraqi efforts to rebuild their government and their country.

That is not the fault of our brave troops--it's the fault of the

policymakers here in Washington, who don't recognize that our presence

is generating instability in Iraq, and that, unless we make it clear

that we intend to leave, and to leave soon, our presence is more

harmful than it is helpful.

The Administration's approach in Iraq is a diversion from the global

fight against terrorism. Iraq isn't, and never was, the central front

in the war on terrorism. Unfortunately, because of our disproportionate

focus on Iraq, we are not using enough of our military and intelligence

capabilities for defeating al-Qaida and other terrorist networks around

the world. While we have been distracted in Iraq, terrorist networks

have developed new capabilities and found new sources of support

throughout the world. We have seen terrorist attacks in India, Morocco,

Turkey, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Spain, Great Britain, and elsewhere.

The administration has also failed to adequately address the

terrorist safe haven that has existed for years in Somalia and the

recent instability that has threatened to destabilize the region. And

resurgent Taliban and al-Qaida forces are contributing to growing

levels of instability in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the U.S. presence in Iraq is being used as a recruiting

tool for terrorist organizations from around the world. In Indonesia,

home to historically moderate Islamic communities, conservative

religious groups are becoming increasingly hostile towards the U.S. In

countries like Thailand, Nigeria, Mali, the Philippines, and elsewhere,

militant groups are using U.S. policies in Iraq to fuel hatred towards

the West.

This administration's choices have been devastating to our national

security. Unfortunately, the Iraq Study Group's report doesn't do

enough to put Iraq into a global context. It doesn't recognize the

extent to which our disproportionate efforts in Iraq are damaging our

national security. And, even where the report suggests the toll that

Iraq is taking on our ability to address global threats, it ends up

falling back into the same Iraq-centric mindset that we need to change.

For example, the report says that ``the United States should provide

additional political, economic, and military support for Afghanistan,

including resources that might become available as combat forces are

moved out of Iraq.'' But then it goes on to recommend that ``The most

highly qualified U.S. officers and military personnel should be

assigned to'' teams imbedded in Iraqi battalions and brigades. Those

are the very people we need in places like Afghanistan and elsewhere we

face significant threats to our national security. It was the

administration's decision to move resources from Afghanistan to Iraq

that contributed to the resurgence of the Taliban there--we can't

afford to perpetuate that mistake.

Elsewhere, the report recommends that the DNI and Secretary of

Defense ``should devote significantly greater analytic resources to the

task of understanding the threats and sources of violence in Iraq.''

The problem is that the report doesn't consider the relative importance

of directing more intelligence resources to understanding Iraq as

opposed to al-Qaida and its affiliates around the world, Afghanistan,

Somalia and other critically important regions and concerns. So it came

up with a recommendation that doesn't serve our overall national

security interests. Implementing this recommendation at the expense of

fighting terrorism and dealing with other terrorist safe havens around

the world will make us less safe.

We need to return to the post-9/11 mindset. In the days after 9/11,

we all shared an anger at and a resolve to fight back against those who

attacked us. This body was united and was supportive of the

Administration's decision to attack al-Qaida and the Taliban in

Afghanistan. No one disputed that decision.

That is because our top priority immediately following 9/11 was

defeating the terrorists that attacked us. The American people expected

us to devote most of our national security resources to that effort,

and rightly so. But unfortunately, 5 years later, our efforts to defeat

al-Qaida and its supporters have gone badly astray. The administration

took its eye off the ball. Instead of focusing on the pursuit of al-

Qaida in Afghanistan, it launched a diversion into Iraq--a country that

had no connection to the 9/11 plot or al-Qaida. In fact, the

President's decision to invade Iraq has emboldened the terrorists and

has played into their hands, by allowing them to falsely suggest that

our fight against terrorism is anti-Muslim and anti-Arab, when nothing

could be further from the truth.

But instead of recognizing that our current policy in Iraq is

damaging our national security, the President continues to argue that

the best way to fight terrorists is to stay in Iraq. He even quotes

terrorists to bolster his argument that Iraq is the central front in

the war on terror. Just a few months ago, he told the country that

Osama bin Laden has proclaimed that the ``third world war is raging''

in Iraq and that this is ``a war of destiny between infidelity and

Islam.''

Instead of letting the terrorists decide where we will fight them,

the President should remember what he said on September 14, just 2 days

after 9/11.

The President was right when he said that, and he is now wrong to

suggest that we must stay in Iraq because that is where the terrorists

say they want to fight us. al-Qaida and its allies are operating around

the globe. We must engage in a global campaign to defeat them, not

focus all of our resources on one country.

The way to win a war against global terrorist networks is not to keep

over 140,000 American troops in Iraq indefinitely. We will weaken, not

strengthen, our national security by continuing to pour a

disproportionate level of our military and intelligence and fiscal

resources into Iraq.

Unfortunately, the administration has yet to understand that the

threats to our country are global, unlike any we have encountered in

the past. Our enemy is not a state with clearly defined borders. We

must respond instead to a loose network of terrorist organizations that

do not function according to a strict hierarchy. Our enemy isn't one

organization. It is a series of highly mobile, diffuse entities that

operate largely beyond the reach of our conventional war-fighting

techniques. The only way to defeat them is to adapt our strategy and

our capabilities, and to engage the enemy on our terms and by using our

advantages.

We have proven that we can't do that with our current approach in

Iraq.

By redeploying our troops from Iraq, we can pursue a new national

security strategy. We can finish the job in Afghanistan with increased

resources, troops, and equipment. We can develop a new form of

diplomacy, scrapping the ``transformational diplomacy'' this

administration has used to offend, push away, and ultimately alienate

so many of our friends and allies, and replacing it with an aggressive,

multilateral approach that would leverage the strength of our friends

to defeat our common enemies.

And we can repair and infuse new capabilities and strength into our

armed forces. By freeing up our Special Forces assets and redeploying

our military power from Iraq, we will be better positioned to handle

global threats and future contingencies. Our current state of readiness

is unacceptable and must be repaired. Our National Guard, too, must be

capable of responding to natural disasters and future contingencies.

This new national security strategy will make our country safer. It

will enable our government to fully address the wide range of threats

our country faces. It will free up strategic capacity to deal with

Iran, North Korea, and the Middle East, and to provide real leadership

internationally against other enemies that we all face, like poverty,

HIV/AIDS, and corruption.

In sum, it will help return the United States to a place of

preeminence in the world and will give us the opportunity to address

the very real threats we face in the 21st century. While the Iraq Study

Group has generated some good ideas and choices, it doesn't put Iraq in

the context of a broader national security strategy.

We face an unprecedented threat to our national security, and we must

respond with much more than a classic Washington compromise. We need to

refocus on fighting and defeating the terrorist network that attacked

this country on September 11, 2001, and that means realizing that the

war in Iraq is not the way to defeat al-Qaida and its global

affiliates. It never was and it never will be. That global fight can't

be won if we let Iraq continue to dominate our security strategy and

drain vital security resources for an unlimited amount of time. The

President's Iraq-centric policies are preventing us from effectively

engaging serious threats around the world. We must change course in

Iraq, and we must change course now.

This isn't a choice, it's a necessity.