

**Remarks of Senator Joe Lieberman**  
**American Leadership in a Dangerous World**  
**Monday, July 28, 2003**  
*(As prepared for delivery)*

I want to speak today about the questions currently swirling around Washington about the effectiveness and integrity of America's foreign and security policy with specific regard to Iraq and September 11, 2001.

To say the obvious, we live in dangerous times. A dictatorial regime in North Korea may be developing nuclear weapons. Violence is tearing apart Liberia. American soldiers are being attacked daily after freeing Iraq from tyranny. Terrorists are working to deliver more horror to our inadequately defended doorstep.

Now more than ever, we need the kind of leadership the American people have a right to expect in such times. Leadership in a dangerous world requires both strength of purpose and acceptance of responsibility, from the President and all who serve our country.

Some have pointed to the controversies over those 16 words in the State of the Union, the unfound weapons of mass destruction, and continuing unrest in Iraq as evidence that President Bush misled us into an unjustified war. But nothing we have learned since the end of the conflict should make us doubt whether we were right to liberate the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein and protect America and the rest of the world from his aggression.

We Democrats are the party of Roosevelt, Kennedy and Clinton, Presidents who had the strength of purpose to use America's military might when it was needed to protect our security and uphold our values.

The war in Iraq was fought for both our security and our values. The end was just and the means were fitting to the task, as was the killing of Saddam Hussein's two sons. Action was required, not ambivalence. Supporting that action, as most Democrats in Congress did, was in the best tradition of the Democratic Party.

But being right is not enough. In our democracy, a President does not rule. He governs. He remains always answerable to us, the people. And right now, this President's conduct of our foreign policy is giving the country good reason to question his leadership.

It is not just about 16 words in a speech. It is about distorting intelligence and diminishing credibility.

It is not about searching for scapegoats. It is about seeing, as President Kennedy proved after the Bay of Pigs, that Presidents stand tall when they willingly accept responsibility for mistakes made while they are in charge.

It is about our nation's security, and therefore it must not be about political advantage. It must be about the national interest—and the leadership we need to make America as safe as it can be.

One critical test of leadership is trust. Earning and keeping the trust of the people that it is your privilege to serve and your duty to protect.

The case against Saddam Hussein was strong. He invaded his neighbors; slaughtered and suppressed his own people; funded terrorists; built weapons of mass destruction, and never told the U.N. what he did with them.

The indictment was clear. The facts were on our side. No exaggeration was required.

Why then did the White House insist on pushing the uranium claim into the President's speech despite the CIA's consistent opposition?

Were other facts trumped up or left out? Why has no one been held accountable—why not a single person fired?

These questions matter. And the answers matter more. Because by compromising the truth, the Bush Administration has encouraged those who have been spreading lies about our motives in Iraq. It has caused too many Americans to begin to distrust their government. And it has made us weaker in the world.

By its actions, the Bush Administration threatens to give a just war a bad name. But by their words, some in my party are sending out a message that they don't know a just war when they see it, and, more broadly, are not prepared to use our military strength to protect our security and the cause of freedom.

We have watched some opponents of the war seize upon this emerging scandal with a disquieting zeal, as though it offers proof that they were right all along.

The same is true of some who supported the war but now seem to have forgotten why. What made this war just was the clear evidence of 12 years of Saddam Hussein's brutality—and that is not diminished by 16 misleading words in George Bush's speech.

Second, leadership demands foresight.

In the months leading up to the war, many of us urged the President to prepare for the challenges that would follow Saddam in Iraq:

To be ready to deploy teams to secure suspect WMD sites. To build international partnerships to keep the peace and help rebuild. To start assembling an interim Iraqi government and guaranteeing Iraq's control of its own oil.

The Administration replied with reassurances—but its plans were inadequate. And today we are paying the price. The worst weapons may have slipped onto the open market. Very few nations have come to our side. American soldiers are being killed with painful frequency.

It didn't need to be this way. But the Bush Administration chose not to look ahead and not to listen to the experts—including many of those who wear the uniform of the U.S. military. That was wrong, and it has hurt.

Third, leadership demands reflection and responsibility. A leader needs the courage to look back and fix the errors of the past—even when those errors could be his own.

Our government failed us on September 11th. Terrorists slipped through our fingers. Pieces of the puzzle were left on the FBI and CIA floor. Firefighters probably died because of inadequate communications equipment.

But President Bush's instinct has been to turn away from the facts. And that has set us back.

It was clear after 9/11 that our government wasn't organized to protect the homeland. Arlen Specter and I proposed a bipartisan solution—a new Homeland Security Department. The Bush Administration opposed it for eight critical months.

It is clear that our first responders don't have what they need to safeguard us from the new threats. Money for personnel. Equipment. Training. Information. The Bush Administration offers mostly words but too little real support.

It is clear that our intelligence and law enforcement agencies still struggle to work well together. Bureaucratic barriers remain; most astounding, terrorist watch lists aren't yet consolidated. But the Bush Administration seems to spend more effort protecting the intelligence status quo than challenging it and improving it.

The Administration isn't just failing to deliver the answers. It is turning a deaf ear to some of the most important questions.

After spending a year resisting the creation of an independent commission to investigate the 9/11 attacks, the Administration still isn't cooperating with it proactively.

The Joint Intelligence Committee report just released last week blanked out 28 key pages. The Republican chair of the committee said correctly that shouldn't have happened.

In the 2000 campaign, George W. Bush vowed to usher in a new era of responsibility. But the pattern of his Administration, in response to all these mistakes, has been to resort to an older politics of denial.

In its place, we must offer more than criticism and negativity. Today let me suggest four specific steps we can take right now that would help restore faith in the integrity and effectiveness of our foreign policy and security leadership:

First, we should immediately strengthen the power of Iraq's Governing Council. Concrete steps toward self-government will help prove—to Americans, Iraqis and the world—that we are liberators, not occupiers.

Second, the Bush Administration must let every line of those 28 pages of the Joint Intelligence Committee report be published—unless they compromise intelligence sources and methods.

Critical information on foreign government financing of terrorism must not be suppressed unless agents' lives or the inner workings of our intelligence agencies really are on the line.

Third, we need fundamental intelligence reform—now. The Administration continues to resist it, and that's dangerous. Ever since the time of Paul Revere, the right warning at the right time has helped save American lives.

To start, the President should issue an executive order this week requiring the various federal terrorist watch lists to be consolidated by the end of this year. It is simply inexcusable that we have not yet seamlessly integrated all these lists and made them available when appropriate to all federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

If, somewhere in America today, a cop or border guard or airport security officer stops a suspected terrorist, he or she might never know it—because there is no single, consolidated federal list.

Nearly two years after September 11th, how can that still be the case?

Finally, I call upon President Bush to take the kind of the buck-stops-here responsibility for the lapses of leadership we've seen—to stop the dodging and weaving and replace it with the kind of openness and honesty that America needs right now in this time of crisis.

I make these criticisms and offer these alternatives not because I want George W. Bush to fail at foreign policy and national security, but because I want America to succeed. That is why I have restated my unshaken confidence that the war against Saddam was a just and necessary war, conducted with brilliance and bravery by the men and women of our military.

I want the American people to have confidence when it comes to our national security that their leaders are working together and doing everything we can to protect them.

And I want the world to believe again that we are the trusted torchbearers of liberty—and the planet's best guarantor of security.

That is the proud, principled America that, with bipartisan leadership, helped defeat Hitler, Stalin, Milosevic, and now Saddam, and made the world safer for democracy. And that is the America we can be again—if together we meet the challenges of leadership with purpose and responsibility.

Thank you.