Madam President, first, let me compliment and thank the

assistant majority leader, the Senator from Illinois, for his

consistent comments with regard to the U.S. role in Iraq. He has made

it clear that the U.S. interest has not been served by these last 5

years, that we have lost our focus on the war on terror. As he pointed

out, we have real concerns, internationally, about terrorism, and we

have been distracted, particularly in Afghanistan, because of the focus

on Iraq.

He pointed out very clearly that the United States has invested so

much--the lives of our soldiers, the cost to the taxpayers, those who

have come back wounded. And what have we done this for? These soldiers

deserve the right mission: that we concentrate on dealing with the war

against terror, that we have the Iraqis take responsibility for their

own country, particularly in the midst of civil war. A lot of this is

just Iraqis fighting Iraqis--Shiites fighting Shiites for power--and

the United States has sustained fighters on both sides, in some cases.

This is so counterproductive to U.S. interests.

I congratulate the Senator and thank him for continuing to bring out

these issues. We hope in the next 10 months there will be some changes.

We also understand we have to transition to a different mission,

considering the type of sacrifices that have been made by our troops

and the taxpayers of this country. I thank him very much for his

leadership.

Madam President, I was part of the Foreign Relations Committee

yesterday when General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker testified before

our committee. When I had the time, I started to thank, on behalf of

the people of Maryland, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker and all

the soldiers and all the diplomats who have served in Iraq. They have

served with great distinction. I am humbled by their skills and

sacrifices. I acknowledge the tremendous sacrifices that have been made

by their families. But I must tell you, they deserve the right mission,

what is in the best interests of the United States. How should we judge

that progress? It is an interesting point, as to whether we have made

satisfactory progress in Iraq.

Let me go back to January 10, 2007, when the President brought

forward his ``New Way Forward in Iraq.'' His own words were that:

One of the reasons for the surge was to reduce our troop levels. But

if we look at the presurge troop levels, it was 132,000 Americans; at

the height of the surge last July, 160,000; and today, we have more

than 140,000. We learned yesterday that General Petraeus believes we

will be at that 140,000 level for the indefinite future, that there

cannot be a commitment made at this stage to reduce our troop levels

below 140,000. So at the end of the day we have more troops in Iraq

rather than less.

The President stated in that same speech:

As a result of that, benchmarks were established--not by the

Congress, benchmarks were established by President Bush and his

administration with the Iraqi Government. When you look at the progress

we have made--let me use General Petraeus's comments that he made:

Only 3 of the 18 benchmarks have been satisfactorily met. The

circumstances on the ground in Iraq are unsatisfactory. Iraqis are not

getting the basic services they need.

I questioned Ambassador Crocker, and following up questions that I

posed to a panel we had last week before the Foreign Relations

Committee, a panel of retired generals, experts in this area, and that

was: Can you name a national leader in Iraq who is willing to step

forward to provide the type of leadership, make the necessary

concessions so that you can have a government in Iraq that has the

confidence of its people? Because that is what we need to make the

political progress. No one could mention a person's name. Ambassador

Crocker said--and I used the examples of South Africa and Northern

Ireland, where you had people willing to step forward--Ambassador

Crocker said:

What an understatement that was. That was the understatement of our

hearing.

We seem to be changing our goals as to what is success or what we are

trying to achieve, what is in the best interests of America, what type

of government we want in Iraq. Well, our expectations certainly have

changed there. There is no expectation that we will have the type of

strong national government that has the confidence of all the ethnic

communities. We have changed the expectation as to what that Government

in Iraq's relationship will be with Iran. We seem to acknowledge that

it may, in fact, strengthen Iran. There is no agreement now that we

need to reduce our troop levels--certainly by the administration's

mission. They want to maintain the troop level at the current level

with no commitment to reduce it. There is certainly no expectation to

reduce the cost to U.S. taxpayers. We are going to get a supplemental

appropriation asking for more money from the U.S. taxpayers.

We certainly have not focused on the major dangers against terrorism.

If we did, we would be concentrating on Afghanistan, not spending so

much effort in Iraq. The current situation yesterday was characterized

by our experts as: fragile, uneven, reversible. We went through the

current flare-ups in Basra and Baghdad where Shiite are fighting

Shiite, a fight for power within Iraq with U.S. soldiers in the middle

of that power struggle.

We went through the influence of Iran and that the U.S. soldiers'

presence may, in fact, be generating more support for Iran within Iraq.

So let's take a look at the facts: The United States is supporting

warring parties within Iraq. The fact is, over 5 years, over 4,000

soldiers have died, American soldiers; 30,000 American soldiers have

been wounded.

I have visited them. I know these are life-changing injuries they

will have to live with for the rest of their lives. Six hundred billion

dollars and still counting of U.S. taxpayer money has been spent. This

is a difficult mission for us to maintain. Look at our military. Our

military is stretched. Look at our National Guards. I know what is

happening in Maryland and our National Guard. They are serving with

great distinction, but they are exhausted, and we need them in

Maryland.

Look at our economy. We are losing jobs here in America. One reason

is we are so focused on spending money in Iraq, we are not investing in

our own country. Look what is happening on our fight against terrorism.

Prior to our invasion of Iraq, there was no al-Qaida presence in Iraq.

Now we have hundreds of thousands of troops, American and Iraqis, and a

couple thousand al-Qaida, according to General Petraeus.

We are not focused on the war against terror, we are focused on a

power struggle within Iraq, which should not be our focus. We need to

do a better job in Afghanistan, but yet we are stuck in Iraq. We have

no plan to draw down American troops. I find that unacceptable. That is

not in the best interests of this country.

Let me mention one more aspect of what has happened in Iraq. This is

factual: the number of displaced people, nearly 5 million now, nearly 5

million displaced; 2 million in neighboring countries. General Petraeus

and Ambassador Crocker acknowledged that one of the reasons why

violence in Baghdad is down is that the communities, the neighborhoods

have been ethnically cleansed and people have left. They do not want to

be in a violent neighborhood. They have left.

But they are displaced. What is going to happen to them? Nearly three

million in Iraq alone. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees

has said it is not safe for them to go back to their neighborhoods.

What is going to happen? If we are talking about a solution for Iraq,

we have got to take a look at the refugees. This is a humanitarian

concern, it is a security concern, it is also a concern about stability

in the region.

Let me give you one example. Jordan has now an extra 8 percent of its

population as a result of refugees; an 8-percent increase. Now, if you

used the same numbers in America, that would be 24 million, 24 million

people coming to our country. Think about the stability of the region.

Well, my position has been clear. I have opposed the war since its

inception. I opposed giving the President the right to use our military

more than 5 years ago. I have opposed the manner in which this war has

been conducted. But we are where we are. We cannot reverse history.

Where do we go from here?

Well, we have 10 months left in this administration, 10 months to go,

and the status quo is not what we need. We need to change course in

Iraq, focus on the war on terror, rebuild and restrengthen our

military. We have got to do that and stop spending $12 billion each

month in Iraq at the expense of priorities right here at home. That is

what we need to do starting immediately. We should not wait until the

next election. We should start doing this today.

We need to change our mission. Our mission should be U.S. soldiers

fighting terrorists, not refereeing community fights, neighborhood

fights; American troops protecting our interests and helping transition

the Iraqis to take responsibility for their own security.

We should draw down the U.S. troops, bring them home. The status quo

is not acceptable, that is, 140,000 U.S. troops remaining in Iraq.

There was bipartisan recognition that the status quo is unacceptable.

Several of our most distinguished Republican members of the Foreign

Relations Committee made it clear that the status quo is not

acceptable, yet this administration is trying to maintain the status

quo for the next 10 months.

I hope we can change that. Public opinion is against the status quo.

We know that. What we need is a surge in diplomacy. We need other

countries that have a direct interest in what is happening in Iraq to

step forward. We need to engage international organizations, the United

Nations and the OSCE. We have to have the Iraqis step forward and take

responsibility for the security of their own country. They have oil. We

need the Iraqis to pay for the costs of their own defense. The American

taxpayers should not be doing this.

One more thing I should talk about that we do not need: We do not

need President Bush and the Iraqi Government negotiating a long-term

security plan without Congressional approval. That would only restrict

the options of the next administration or future Congresses. We should

never allow that to happen.

The world has an interest in a safe and secure Iraq, but in working

toward that end, we cannot ignore other competing needs around the

world and at home. We need a more thoughtful approach that will bring

our troops home, refocus our resources on al-Qaida, and Afghanistan and

Pakistan, step up diplomatic efforts, and internalize the effort to

bring stability to that country and to the Middle East.

I yield the floor.