Madam President, in November, the American people sent a

clear message to Washington. They said: Change the course in Iraq. A

few weeks later, the Iraq Study Group issued its bipartisan report

calling for a change of course in Iraq. Even the President's new

Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, during his confirmation hearing,

acknowledged that the current course in Iraq was not working. But

instead of developing a new strategy, the President has stayed on his

failed course, plunging American troops deeper and deeper into a civil

war on the streets of Baghdad and relying on the promises of Iraqi

politicians who have not delivered on previous promises.

The question for us today is whether we will accept that failing

strategy or whether we will change it. The President's deepening

military involvement will not lead to a stable Iraq because it has a

fundamental flaw. It tries to impose a military solution on a political

crisis.

Listen to the assessment of Iraq Prime Minister Maliki of the

situation in his country. This is what he said:

Outside the White House is a consensus that a political solution

among the Iraqis is required, but President Bush persists on a military

deepening involvement.

The President claims that Iraqis will meet the political benchmarks

that they have put forward, but the track record of Iraqi politicians

indicates otherwise. On issue after issue, the Iraqi politicians have

failed to keep their word, and Iraq is worse off because of those

failures.

The President's course of action--deeper and deeper military

involvement--sends a signal that the Iraqi leaders can continue to

bicker without consequence. If the Iraqis fail to meet their own

benchmarks, the President will presumably continue to bail them out by

sending American troops to police an Iraqi civil war. Unless failure to

meet benchmarks has consequences, those benchmarks have little meaning.

We must change the course if there is going to be any hope of success

in Iraq.

The best leverage we have is the presence and mission of American

forces. As long as our presence is open-ended, the dynamic in Iraq will

remain the same: Insurgents will target our troops, militias will cause

mayhem, and the Iraqi politicians will sit in relative safety in the

Green Zone, unwilling to make the compromises so essential to reaching

a political settlement that can save their country. But if we send a

clear message that we are ending the open-ended commitment, that will

shift responsibility to the Iraqis, both politically and militarily,

for their own future.

By requiring the President to change the mission of American forces

to the three missions specified in the Reid resolution, by beginning a

phased redeployment of American forces in 4 months, the resolution

before us would force the Iraqi leaders to face reality and to

understand that their future as a nation is in their own hands, not

ours. The Iraqis will finally be forced to decide if they want a civil

war or they want a nation. They will then understand we cannot save

them from themselves.

The President and his supporters ask for patience. But asking for

patience now, after all these years of asking for patience without

success, is a little like Lucy asking Charlie Brown to try to kick the

football one more time. We ought to be wise enough by now to know that

increased military involvement won't achieve the political settlement

that is needed.

General Peter Chiarelli, Commanding General of the Multi-National

Corps in Iraq, said the following:

General Casey made a similar point in early January when he said:

The real battle for Baghdad is a political battle. Maximizing success

in Iraq requires us to change course and to shift responsibility to the

Iraqi political leaders for the future of Iraq. To paraphrase British

Prime Minister Tony Blair, the next chapter of Iraq's history needs to

be written by the Iraqis.

Our vote today will decide whether we will begin changing course to

maximize chances of success in Iraq or whether we will remain mired in

the status quo of sending more and more American troops into the middle

of an Iraqi civil war.