Mr. President, the supplemental appropriations bill we

are debating today contains language that would have Congress take

control of the direction of our military strategy in Iraq. Like most

Senators of both parties, I support the appropriations in this bill.

But because I strongly oppose its language on Iraq, I will vote no.

Earlier this week, the Senate majority leader spoke at the Woodrow

Wilson Center and laid out the case for why the bill now before this

Chamber, in his view, offers a viable alternative strategy for Iraq. It

was the most comprehensive recent argument in support of this position,

and so I wish to address myself to its content respectfully and point

by point.

I have great respect for my friend from Nevada. I believe he has

offered this proposal in good faith, and therefore I wish to take it up

in good faith and examine its arguments and ideas carefully and in-

depth because this is a very serious discussion we are having this

morning for America and its future security.

In his speech Monday, the Senate majority leader described the

several steps this new strategy for Iraq would entail. The first step,

he said, is to:

I ask my colleagues to step back for a moment and consider this plan.

When we say that U.S. troops shouldn't be policing a civil war, that

their operation should be restricted to the narrow list of missions,

what does this actually mean? To begin with, it means our troops will

not be allowed to protect the Iraqi people from the insurgents and

militias and terrorists who are trying to terrorize and kill them.

Instead of restoring basic security, which General Petraeus has

effectively argued should be the focus of any counterinsurgency

campaign, it means our soldiers would, instead, be ordered, by force of

this proposed law, not to stop the sectarian violence happening all

around them no matter how vicious or horrific it becomes. I fear if we

begin to withdraw, it will become both vicious and horrific.

In short, it means telling our troops to deliberately and consciously

turn their backs on ethnic cleansing, to turn their backs on the

slaughter of innocent civilians--men, women, and children singled out

and killed on the basis of their religion alone or their ethnicity. It

means turning our backs on the policies that led us correctly to

intervene in the civil war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the principles

that today lead many of us to cry out and demand intervention in

Darfur. To me, this makes no moral sense at all.

It also makes no strategic or military sense. Al-Qaida's own leaders

Have repeatedly said that one of the ways they intend to achieve victory in

Iraq is to provoke civil war. They are trying to kill as many people as

possible, precisely in the hope of igniting sectarian violence because

they know this is their best way to collapse Iraq's political center,

overthrow Iraq's elected Government, radicalize its population, and

create a failed state in the heart of the Middle East that they can use

as a base. That is why al-Qaida blew up the Golden Mosque in Samarra

last February, and that is why we are seeing mass-casualty suicide

bombings by al-Qaida in Baghdad today. The sectarian violence the

majority leader says he wants to order American troops to stop

policing, in other words, is the very same sectarian violence al-Qaida

hopes will take it to victory. The suggestion that we can draw a bright

legislative line between stopping terrorists in Iraq and stopping civil

war in Iraq flies in the face of this reality. I don't know how to say

it any more plainly. It is al-Qaida that is trying to inflame a full-

fledged civil war in Iraq. So we cannot both fight al-Qaida and get out

of the civil war. They are one.

The majority leader said on Monday that he believes U.S. troops will

still be able to conduct targeted counter terror operations under his

plan. Even if we stop trying to protect civilians in Iraq, in other

words, we can still go after the bad guys. But, again, I ask my

colleagues, how would this translate into reality on the ground? How

would we find these terrorists, who do not gather on conventional

military bases or fight in conventional formations?

By definition, targeted counterterrorism requires our forces to know

where, when, and against whom to strike, and that, in turn, requires

accurate, actionable, real-time intelligence. This is the kind of

intelligence which can only come from ordinary Iraqis--the sea of

people among whom the terrorists hide. That, in turn, requires

interacting with the Iraqi people on a close, personal, daily basis. It

requires winning individual Iraqis to our side because they conclude we

are there on their side, gaining their trust, and convincing them they

can count on us to keep them safe from the terrorists if they share

valuable information about them. This is no great secret. It is at the

heart of what is happening in Iraq today and is part of the Petraeus

plan.

In sum, on this point, you can't have it both ways. You can't

withdraw combat troops from Iraq and still say you are going to fight

al-Qaida there. If you believe that there is no hope of winning in Iraq

or that the cost of victory there is not worth it, then you should be

for complete withdrawal as soon as possible.

There is another irony in the Iraq language in this bill. For most of

the past 4 years, under former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, the United

States did not try to establish basic security in Iraq. Rather than

deploying enough troops necessary to protect the Iraqi people, the

focus of our military has been on training and equipping Iraqi forces,

protecting our own forces, and conducting targeted antiterrorist sweeps

and raids--in other words, the very same missions proposed by the

proponents of the legislation before us.

That Rumsfeld strategy failed, and we know why it failed. It failed

because we didn't have enough troops doing the right things to ensure

security, which in turn created an opening for al-Qaida and its allies

to exploit and allowed sectarian violence to begin to run rampant. Al-

Qaida stepped into the security vacuum, as did the sectarian militias,

and through horrific violence created a climate of fear and insecurity

in which political and economic progress became impossible.

For years, many Members of Congress saw this and spoke to it. We

talked about it. We called for more troops and a new strategy--and, for

that matter, a new Secretary of Defense. Yet now, when President Bush

has come around, when he has acknowledged the mistakes that have been

made and the need to focus on basic security in Iraq and to install a

new Secretary of Defense and a new commander in Iraq, now his critics

in Congress have changed their minds and decided that the old failed

strategy--the Rumsfeld strategy--wasn't so bad after all, because that

is what would be adopted in the language on Iraq in this bill. What is

going on here? What has changed so that the strategy we criticized and

rejected in 2006 suddenly makes sense in 2007?

The second element in the plan outlined by the majority leader on

Monday is the phased redeployment of our troops no later than October

1, 2007. Let us be absolutely clear what this means. The legislation

would impose a binding deadline for U.S. troops to begin retreating

from Iraq. That withdrawal would happen regardless of conditions on the

ground, regardless of the recommendations of General Petraeus--

in short, regardless of reality, on October 1, 2007. As far as I can

tell, none of the supporters of withdrawal have attempted to explain

why October 1 is the magic date, what strategic or military

significance this date holds. Why not September 1? Why not January 1 or

April 1? October 1, 2007, is a date as arbitrary as it is inflexible.

It is, I contend, a deadline for defeat.

How do proponents of this deadline defend it? On Monday, Senator Reid

gave several reasons. First he said a date for withdrawal puts

``pressure on the Iraqis to make desperately needed political

compromises.''

But will it? According to the legislation now before us, the

withdrawal will happen, regardless of what the Iraqi Government does.

How, then, if you are an Iraqi Government official, does this give you

any incentive to make the right choices? On the contrary, there is

compelling reason to think a legislatively directed withdrawal of

American troops will have exactly the opposite effect than its sponsors

intend.

I ask the Chair, how much time have I used?

I thank the Chair.

This, in fact, is exactly what the most recent National Intelligence

Estimate on Iraq predicted. A withdrawal of American troops in the

months ahead would ``almost certainly lead to a significant increase in

the scale and scope of sectarian conflict, intensify Sunni resistance,

and have adverse effects on national reconciliation.''

That is the NIE, broadly supported and embraced by proponents of the

Iraq language in this legislation.

Second, the majority leader said withdrawing our troops will ``reduce

the specter of the U.S. occupation which gives fuel to the

insurgency.''

My colleague from Nevada, in other words, is saying the insurgency is

in some measure being provoked by the very presence of American troops.

By diminishing that presence, presumably the insurgency will diminish.

But I ask my colleagues, where is the evidence to support this

theory? I find none. In fact, all the evidence I find supports the

opposite conclusion. Since 2003, and before General Petraeus took

command and began implementing our new strategy there, American forces

were ordered on several occasions to pull back from Iraqi cities and

regions, including Mosul, Fallujah, Tel'Afar, and Baghdad. What

happened in these places? Did they stabilize when the American troops

left? Did the insurgency go away? Of course not.

On the contrary, in each of these places where U.S. forces pulled

back, al-Qaida and sectarian warriors rushed in. Rather than becoming

islands of peace, they became safe havens for terrorists, islands of

fear and violence.

So I ask advocates of withdrawal, on what evidence, on what data have

you concluded that pulling U.S. troops out will weaken the insurgency

there when every single experience we have had since 2003 suggests that

withdrawal, the kind of withdrawal mandated by this legislation, will

strengthen the terrorists and insurgents and increase violence?

I ask my colleagues to consider the words of Sheikh Abdul Sattar, one

of the leading tribal leaders in Anbar Province, who is now fighting on

our side against al-Qaida because he is convinced we are on his side.

This is what he told the New York Times when asked last month what

would happen if U.S. troops withdraw? He said:

This is a man whose father was killed by al-Qaida, who risks his life

every day to work with us, a man who was described by one Army officer

as ``the most effective local leader in Ramadi I believe the coalition

has worked with . . . since 2003.''

In his remarks earlier this week, Senator Reid also observed there is

``a large and growing population of millions--who sit precariously on

the fence. They will either condemn or contribute to terrorism in the

years ahead. We must convince them of the goodness of America and

Americans. We must win them over.''

On this I completely agree with my friend from Nevada. But my

question to him and others supporting this language is this: How does

this strategy you propose in this bill possibly help win over this

population of millions in Iraq who sit precariously on the fence?

What message, I ask, does this legislation announce to these people

who are the majority in Iraq? How will they respond when we tell them

we are not longer going to make an effort to protect them and their

families against insurgents and death squads? How will they respond

when we declare we will be withdrawing our forces, regardless of

whether they are making progress in the next few months toward

political reconciliation? Where will their hopes be for a better life

when we withdraw the troops that are the necessary precondition for the

security and stability and opportunity for a better life that the

majority of Iraqis clearly yearn for?

Do my friends believe this is the way to convince Iraqis and the

world of the goodness of America and Americans? Does anyone in this

Chamber believe that by announcing a date certain for withdrawal we

will empower Iraqi moderates, the mainstream, or enable Iraq's

reconstruction, or open more schools for their children or more

hospitals for their families or provide more freedom for everyone? With

all due respect, this is a fantasy.

The third step the majority leader proposes is to impose ``tangible,

measurable, and achievable benchmarks on the Iraqi government.''

I am all for such benchmarks. In fact, Senator McCain and I were

among the first to propose legislation to apply such benchmarks on the

Iraqi government.

But I don't see how this plan will encourage Iraqis to meet these or

any other benchmarks, given its ironclad commitment to abandon them--

regardless of how they behave.

We should of course be making every effort to encourage

reconciliation in Iraq and the development of a decent political order

that Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds can agree on.

But even if today that political solution was found, we cannot

rationally think that our terrorist enemies like al-Qaida in Iraq will

simply vanish.

Al-Qaida is not mass murdering civilians on the streets of Baghdad

because it wants a more equitable distribution of oil revenues. Its aim

in Iraq is not to get a seat at the political table.

It wants to blow up the table--along with everyone seated at it. Al-

Qaida wants to destroy any prospect for democracy in Iraq, and it will

not be negotiated or reasoned out of existence. It must be fought and

defeated through force of arms. And there can be no withdrawal, no

redeployment from this reality.

The fourth step that the majority leader proposed on Monday is a

``diplomatic, economic, and political offensive . . . starting with a

regional conference working toward a long-term framework for stability

in the region.''

I understand why we are drawn to ideas such as those that are in this

legislation on Iraq. All of us are aware of the justified frustration,

fatigue, and disappointment of the American people with Iraq. All of us

would like to believe there is a better solution--quicker, easier--to

the challenges we face in Iraq. But none of this gives us an excuse to

paper over hard truths of which I have tried to speak. We delude

ourselves if we think we can wave a legislative wand and suddenly our

troops in the field will be able to distinguish between al-Qaida

terrorism and sectarian violence or that Iraqis will suddenly settle

their political differences because our troops are leaving or that

sweet reason alone will suddenly convince Iraq and Syria to stop

destabilizing Iraq, stop enabling the terrorists and insurgents who are

killing too many Americans and Iraqis there today.

What we need now is a sober assessment of the progress we are

beginning to make and a recognition of the significant challenges we

still face. There are many uncertainties before us, many complexities,

many challenges. Barely half of the new troops General Petraeus

requested have even arrived in Iraq.

In following General Petraeus's path, there is no guarantee of

success, but there is hope and a new plan for success. In rejecting

General Petraeus's path, as this legislation would do, there is a

guarantee of failure and, I fear, disaster. The plan embedded in this

language contains no reasonable prospects for success. It is a strategy

based on catch phrases and bromides rather than military realities and

all that is on the line for us in Iraq.

It does not learn from the many mistakes that have been made in Iraq.

Rather, it promises to repeat them. Let me be absolutely clear. In my

opinion, Iraq is not yet lost, but if we follow the plan in this

legislation, it will be lost and so, I fear, will much of our hope for

stability in the Middle East and security from terrorism here at home.

That is why I will vote no.