Madam President, I rise in support of the amendment which

we will be voting on at 5 p.m. that would, according to, I believe, the

unanimous consent agreement, strike the language in this bill calling

for a withdrawal of American forces from Iraq. These same provisions

were rejected by the Senate 2 weeks ago by a 48-to-50 vote. Now here we

are debating the same provisions that have the same serious problems. I

hope they will be rejected again by the same, if not a larger, margin.

Supporters of this provision say they want a date certain for a U.S.

withdrawal from Iraq, but what they have offered us is more accurately

described as a date certain for surrender--a date certain for

surrender--with grave consequences for the future of Iraq, the

stability of the Middle East, and the security of Americans at home and

abroad. And they offer it just as the situation in Iraq, though still

fraught with difficult challenges, is beginning to improve.

The new developments argue for more effort in Iraq rather than the

withdrawal advocated by this bill's sponsors. As my colleagues know, I

have been critical of the conduct of this war since 2003, and I very

much regret that only now, 4 years into the conflict, are we beginning

to implement the kind of strategy that was necessary from the start: a

traditional counterinsurgency strategy that emphasizes protection of

the population, economic development, and political progress, all with

troop levels appropriate for the mission.

We are seeing today the emergence of precisely such a strategy. I

would emphasize this point: This new plan is not ``stay the course.''

We are not staying the course in Iraq and I would not support the

status quo any more than I have over the past 4 years. Nor have we

merely deployed a new commander, however capable, and additional

forces. America is engaged today in a fundamentally new strategy, a new

approach to the war, an approach that is already showing encouraging

signs that it might succeed.

Until now, U.S. forces did not attempt to defeat the insurgency and

the terrorists, protect the population, and end the violence so

political and economic progress could occur. Most American troops spent

their days on large forward-operating bases making forays out into

hostile territory in which they were subject to ambush. Today, U.S.

troops, along with Iraqi forces, are out of the FOBs and living in

small outposts. Today, U.S. forces are operating throughout Baghdad,

even in Shiite strongholds such as Sadr City, Sunni areas such as

Mansoor, and mixed districts such as Rashid. As of March 15, 24 joint

security stations were operational, with many more planned. American

forces in these stations are visible every day, living among the

population, building confidence that we--and not the terrorists--will

prevail. Contrary to some predictions, this has not increased U.S.

casualties. And, not surprisingly, our presence has resulted in a

dramatic increase in actionable intelligence about terrorists.

You might not know it from reading newspapers or watching the evening

news, but in Iraq today there are real signs the new strategy is

working. I wish to spend a few moments outlining some of this progress,

not to paint an overly rosy scenario but, rather, to correct what has

become an almost single-minded focus in the Congress on the prospects

of defeat. The debate in Congress has an ``Alice in Wonderland''

quality about it: We are debating efforts to micromanage a conflict

based on what the conditions were 3 months ago, not on what the reality

is today. Conditions have changed in Iraq. The Baghdad security plan--

the ``surge''--is working far better than even the most optimistic

supporter had predicted. The progress is tangible in many key areas

despite the fact only 40 percent of the planned forces are in Iraq.

Allow me to review some specifics.

In Baghdad, the military has reported an increase in real-time,

actionable intelligence provided to U.S. and Iraqi forces by a newly

confident population. Prime Minister Maliki, who prevented U.S. troops

from conducting certain Baghdad operations last year, has given the

green light to American incursions throughout the city, including

Shiite strongholds. All of the Iraqi army battalions called for under

the plan have arrived, many at or above 75 percent of their programmed

manning levels. Bomb attacks and murders are down since the surge

began. Civilians killed in Baghdad numbered 1,222 in December, 954 in

January, and fell to 494 in February. There are reports of Sunni and

Shia moving back into neighborhoods from which they had fled constant

and horrific violence. Markets that have been subject to horrific car

bombings have been turned into pedestrian malls that facilitate

commerce and thwart terrorists.

Moqtada al-Sadr has fled, possibly to Iran, and has ordered his

followers not to oppose the new Baghdad security plan. The Madhi army,

purportedly dedicated to the expulsion of Americans from Iraq, does not

today openly challenge either U.S. or Iraqi forces. American troops are

engaged in reconstruction efforts in Saudi City, with the cooperation

of the local mayor. In the western part of Baghdad, our troops are

establishing new outposts in areas--these areas here--that have been

conduits for al-Qaida in Iraq penetration into the capital city, and

have begun to clear these areas of terrorists and insurgents. The net

result of all of this is key Shiite leaders are now claiming the

Baghdad security plan was their idea, and are taking credit for the

increase in security--a development that would have been unthinkable 3

months ago.

There is progress outside Baghdad as well:

Throughout Anbar Province, Sunni sheikhs have banded together to

fight al-Qaida in Iraq, and are pouring recruits into the police

forces. Sixteen of twenty-six tribes in that western province are now

working against al-Qaida. With numerous senior al-Qaida leaders killed

or captured, the younger, less experienced leaders are making mistakes,

such as targeting respected sheikhs and murdering children, that have

alienated Sunnis and their leaders.

In the town of Ramadi, hundreds of Iraqi police last week conducted a

major sweep. In the surrounding areas--all of these surrounding areas--

including Haditha and Hit, U.S. and Iraqis are conducting operations

against al-Qaida and insurgents while protecting the population.

In Diyala Province U.S. forces expelled al-Qaida forces from one of

their major bases in January, seized major weapons caches, disrupted

fighter networks, and cleared cities and villages of al-Qaida fighters.

A U.S. Stryker battalion has reinforced Diyala and is conducting major

operations against AQI forces seeking to reconstitute. At the same

time, other U.S. forces in Diyala are acting against rogue Mahdi Army

leaders in the province and are holding the Diyala and Tigris Rivers to

combat re-infiltration into Baghdad.

On the belt to the south of Baghdad, al-Qaida has come under heavy

U.S. pressure in recent weeks, with American forces destroying car bomb

factories and uncovering major weapons caches in areas such as

Yusufiya, Latifiya, and Salman Pak.

In Mosul, U.S. and Iraqi forces have killed and captured numerous al-

Qaida operatives since December.

In Samarra, American and Iraqi troops have captured al-Qaida

facilitators and north of the city, Salahuddin Province, American

troops have moved off of their forward operating base and into the town

of Bayji, an important hub on the road network.

These developments, which have occurred just 1 month into the new

strategy and with only a portion of the five additional U.S. brigades

having yet deployed, suggest that, at long last, we have a strategy in

Iraq that is succeeding. That is not to say that all is going well in

Iraq; clearly, it is not. Violence continues, the Mahdi Army recently

launched an attack in Basra, and one of Iraq's vice presidents was

gravely wounded in a bomb attack. But we all know the negatives; we

read about them every day and see them flash across our television

screens hourly. The enemy knows how attention-getting car bombs are,

and their strategy reflects this understanding.

We must try to stop such events, and push the Iraqi Government to

move forward with its reconciliation efforts and meet the benchmarks

laid out by the President. What we cannot do, and, for the sake of

America's vital national security interests, we must not do, is give up

just at the moment we are starting to turn things around in Iraq.

Yet in the face of this new reality, the proponents of the

legislation offer one prescription for the future: withdrawal of U.S.

forces. Despite the progress, despite the ongoing need for U.S. troops

to stabilize Iraq and pave the way for a political solution, despite

the moral burdens we have incurred as a result of our decision to

topple Saddam Hussein, and, above all, despite the catastrophic

consequences for vital U.S. interests that would follow a premature

withdrawal from Iraq, the sponsors of this legislation would force

precisely that.

To those who believe that the best course is to withdraw, I ask: Can

you explain to the American people precisely what you believe to be the

consequences of this action? If we follow the timetable included in

this bill--to withdraw troops whether or not we are succeeding or

failing; regardless of whether the country is secured; irrespective of

whether the Iraqis can manage their own affairs alone, or whether the

forces of terror and chaos will triumph--if we follow this timetable we

risk a catastrophe for American national security interests.

Note that American national security interests are directly at stake.

Not just Israeli interests, though Prime Minister Olmert has said that

defeat in Iraq could be devastating for his country. Not just for our

Arab friends and partners in the region, though they fear the

consequences of massive humanitarian displacement, growing Iranian

influence, and wider bloodshed. Not just for the Iraqis themselves, for

whom genocide is a real prospect should sectarian violence spiral out

of control. But for America. Success or failure in Iraq is the

transcendent issue for our foreign policy and our national security.

People say they want to defeat the terrorists. But if we withdraw

from Iraq prematurely, it will be the terrorists' greatest triumph.

Withdrawing before there is a stable and legitimate Iraqi authority

would turn Iraq into a failed state, in the heart of the Middle East.

We have seen a failed state emerge after U.S. disengagement once

before, and it cost us terribly. In pre-9/11 Afghanistan, terrorists

found sanctuary to train and plan attacks--including attacks against

America--with impunity. If we leave Iraq based on an artificial

timetable, al-Qaida will be free to plan, train for and conduct

operations from Iraq just as they did from Afghanistan. We cannot make

this fatal mistake twice.

If Iraq descends into chaos, the power vacuum there will invite

further Iranian interference, at a time when Tehran already feels

emboldened. Iraq's neighbors, from Saudi Arabia to Egypt to Turkey,

would feel their own security eroding, and may intervene on the side of

particular factions. This uncertain swirl of events could spark

regional war severely damaging to America's fundamental security

interests. And we would then face a terrible choice: watch the region

burn, watch the terrorists establish new bases, with profound

implications for the safety of Americans and their economic well-being,

or send troops back into Iraq once again.

The proponents of withdrawal state that they envision no such

catastrophe; they are not advocating a precipitous withdrawal but

something more gradual, and they would leave American troops in place

to focus on three limited objectives: protecting coalition personnel

and infrastructure, training and equipping Iraqi forces, and conducting

targeted counter-terrorism operations. But if these three missions

sound familiar, that's because they formed the centerpiece of the

strategy that was failing up until the beginning of this year. They

would forbid counterinsurgency operations, protection of the

population, and the other elements of our new strategy that are

directly responsible for the successes we have seen this year. This

legislation is a plan for failure. But neither failure nor success is

the objective of its sponsors. They wish to get out of Iraq, whatever

the consequences for America. They conceive no failure as worse than

remaining in Iraq and no success worthy of additional sacrifice. They

are wrong, terribly, terribly wrong.

These provisions draw a false distinction between terrorism and

sectarian violence. Let us think about the implications of ordering

American soldiers to target ``terrorists,'' but not those who foment

sectarian violence. Was the attack on the Golden Mosque in Samarra a

terrorist operation or the expression of sectarian violence? When the

Mahdi Army attacks government police stations, are they acting as

terrorists or as a militia? When AQI attacks a Shia village along the

Diyala River, is that terrorism or sectarian violence? What about when

an American soldier comes across some unknown assailant burying an IED

in the road? The obvious answer is that such acts very often constitute

terrorism in Iraq and sectarian violence in Iraq. The two are deeply

intertwined. To try and make an artificial distinction between

terrorism and sectarian violence is to fundamentally misunderstand al-

Qaida's strategy which is to incite sectarian violence. To say that

targeting terrorist violence is allowable while stopping sectarian

violence is illegal flies in the face of this reality, and would make

it impossible to fight this war against terrorism, let alone prevail in

it.

Some Senators have taken a different tack, arguing that Iraq is still

winnable but that, by withdrawing troops, we will actually maximize the

chances of success. They concede that a withdrawal will encourage

insurgents and terrorists to unleash greater violence on the Iraqi

people, but believe that such violence might induce Iraqi politicians

to make the political decisions necessary to end it. Could this

possibly be true? Can we, by withdrawing our troops from Iraq, actually

increase the stability in Iraq rather than risk catastrophe, and induce

a political solution rather than make it less possible? Is success in

Iraq as simple as issuing redeployment orders, a move blocked only by

stubborn commanders and civilian authorities?

GEN David Petraeus, for one, believes that it is not. Of course the

dire situation in Iraq demands a political solution. That is undeniably

true. But a political solution among the Iraqis cannot be simply

conjured. It is impossible for meaningful political and economic

activity to take place in an environment as riddled with violence as

Baghdad has been. Security is the precondition for political and

economic progress, and without security, we will not see the political

progress all of us agree is necessary. In this regard, there are

positive indications. Prime Minister Maliki went to Ramadi to reach out

to Sunnis, and the Iraqi Government is pushing through a new de-

Baathification law. The oil revenue sharing law has been approved by

the Council of Ministers and should be approved by parliament soon.

Reports indicate that Iraqi officials are in discussions with a number

of non-AQI Sunni insurgent groups, while fighting has broken out

between AQI and Sunni insurgents.

Reconciliation is not the inevitable outcome of the new strategy. On

the contrary, there is no guarantee of success. What the situation

demands is not a guarantee, but rather a strategy designed to give us

the best possible chance for success. This, I believe, is what the new

plan represents.

The provisions our amendment would strike would force redeployments

of U.S. forces within 120 days, and nearly all troops would have to

leave Iraq by March 31, 2008. This does not incentivize the Government

of Iraq to make tough decisions on reconciliation; it sets the stage

for the Government's collapse. This arbitrary deadline informs our

enemies when they need no longer fear American military power. It

signals to the population that their best bet for security really does

rest in the hands of militias, rather than the Government. It

demonstrates to the Government that they cannot rely on us--after all,

we are pulling out regardless of the situation or the consequences. And

it tells the terrorists that they--not we--will prevail.

All of us want to bring our troops home, and to do so as soon as

possible. None of us, no matter how we voted on the resolution

authorizing this war, believes the situation that existed until

recently is sustainable. But there is a new situation, a new reality in

Iraq. This amendment ignores that reality and ignores the consequences

that would flow from its adoption. When Congress authorized this war,

we committed America to a mission that entails the greatest sacrifice a

country can make, one that falls disproportionately on those Americans

who love their country so much that they volunteer to risk their lives

to accomplish that mission. When we authorized this war, we accepted

the responsibility to make sure they could prevail. When we voted to

send them into battle we asked them to use every ounce of their courage

and fortitude on behalf of us.

This body unanimously confirmed General Petraeus. Why would we now

deprive him of the opportunity to pursue the strategy he helped design

and believes can work? Why would we hand our enemies a victory when we

have finally taken the initiative and they are on the defensive? Let us

give him and the soldiers he has the honor to command, Americans who

are risking everything so that this new plan can succeed, the time

necessary to achieve its objectives.

And let us elected officials who have the honor of overseeing the

conduct of our soldiers' mission in Iraq exercise a lesser magnitude of

courage--our political courage on behalf of them and the country they

serve. If any Senator believes that our troops' sacrifice is truly in

vain, the dictates of conscience demand that he or she act to prevent

it. Those who would cut off all funding for this war, though I disagree

deeply with their position, and dread its consequences, have the

courage of their convictions, and I respect them for it.

If, on the other hand, you believe, as I do, that an increase of U.S.

troops in Iraq, carrying out a counterinsurgency mission, provides the

best chance for success in Iraq, then you should give your support to

this new strategy. It may not be popular nor politically expedient, but

we are always at our best when we put aside the small politics of the

day in the interest of our Nation and the values upon which they rest.

Those are the only responsible, the only honorable choices before us.

There are no others. I wish there were. But here we are, confronting a

political, military and moral dilemma of immense importance, with the

country's most vital security interests and the lives of the best

Americans among us at stake. May God grant us the wisdom and humility

to make this difficult judgment in our country's best interests only,

and the courage to accept our responsibility for the consequences that

will ensue.