Mr. President, I thank my long-term friend, the

distinguished Senator from Mississippi. We came to the Senate together

some 29 years ago. I commend him for the leadership he has provided

throughout his many years and, particularly, on this coming vote, which

is most important--not just to the Senate but to the whole Congress and

to the people of the United States and to the world. I strongly support

the amendment of the Senator from Mississippi, Mr. Cochran.

Some many weeks ago, shortly after January 10, when the President

announced his new strategy for a surge, I was among those few voices on

this side that expressed concern about that initiative. I believed that

this Nation had invested so heavily in Iraq, in life, in limb, and an

extraordinary amount of money, much of that having been spent on the

training of the Iraqi security forces, and that the time had come for

those security forces to bear the brunt of the battle. Our group,

having drawn up a resolution, endeavored to try to get it debated, but

the record shows that opportunity, and the opportunity to vote on it,

was not given. But that is history.

At this time, however, I believe the operations of our troops under

the new strategy are well underway. We have many men and women of our

Armed Forces in harm's way, and we must be very cautious as to the

message we send at this time.

Mr. President, I say most respectfully that with this current draft

we are trying to strike out the language that, if allowed to stand,

would send a sound all over the world. It would be the bugle of

retreat; it would be echoed and repeated from every minaret throughout

Iraq: The coalition forces have decided to take the first step

backward.

We cannot send that message at this time. I will be among those who

will constantly challenge any aspect of the policies of this

administration which I believe are not in the best interest. I have two

amendments that, hopefully, will be considered in the context of the

pending bill. One calls for an independent investigation--independent

of the Department of Defense and all entities of the Federal

Government--of the Iraqi security forces, principally the army and, to

some extent, the police, to determine what the status is of those

forces today.

What has been the result of the billions of dollars we have expended

over 2 1/2 years to train and equip them? Are they now, or in the

immediate future, able to carry the burden of this fight to enable the

people and the Government of Iraq to have greater security and

eventually achieve the goals and the full reins of a democracy?

The other amendment I have calls for a table of benchmarks and a

reporting sequence from our administration as to whether the Iraqis are

or are not meeting those benchmarks because any option laid down is

dependent on the capability of the Iraqi security forces. Early reports

in the engagements thus far indicate that, in some measures, they have

met the commitments they made to have sent battalions, to have engaged

with such limited aggression that has been brought against them in the

course of this surge and against the coalition forces. Nevertheless, it

is the American forces that are primarily in the lead, primarily in the

support role and carrying the greater burden of this battle.

So at this time I do not think it is wise to sound that bugle, that

sound of retreat. Think of the consequences if that nation implodes and

fractures and the Government and all of the gains that we have gotten

thus far are lost. Think of the consequences on, for example, the

potential for other energy sources to be developed in that region--

energy that is vital to the world, energy that must flow from that

region through the Straits of Hormuz that could be jeopardized if there

is a convulsion among the border states and the spreading of the

anarchy that could simply flow from this most distressed land of

uncertainty we call Iraq, this situation that is so fragile at this

time.

So I urge my colleagues, with no disrespect to those who put this in

the bill, to support the Cochran amendment.

Mr. President, while I have the floor, I simply ask unanimous consent

to send a modification to the desk for an amendment filed, No. 698.