Mr. President, no matter we will debate this year is as

important as the future of America's involvement in Iraq. The decisions

we make will shape the future of the Middle East, the conduct of

American foreign relations, the security of our Nation, and the lives

of our countrymen.

Just as each of us will use our best judgment to find answers to the

problems we face in this war, so too must we heed the moral

implications of our judgments regardless of the political

ramifications. Matters of war and peace impose responsibilities on us

that mock our other less solemn obligations in which partisan or

personal considerations may be expected to have a less injurious

effect.

I must admit to some bewilderment at the way in which the proponents

of the resolution authored by the majority leader have chosen to

proceed. They do not support the President's plan to send additional

troops to Iraq as one element of a broader effort to stabilize that

violence-torn country. They believe the Senate should be on record as

opposing the plan to augment our forces. Fair enough. Let's have this

debate, and if any Senator believes our Nation is embarking on a

misguided approach, he or she has not just the right but the obligation

to oppose it vigorously. Such is our responsibility as elected

officials in a Congress that possesses the constitutional power of the

purse.

Yet we debate today not legislation that would defund the war but,

rather, a new resolution authorizing again the use of military force in

Iraq. Having authorized the President to use military force in Iraq in

2002, the sponsors of this new resolution would attempt to legislate

our troops' mission in midstream. They would not declare war, nor end

it, as the Constitution provides, but micromanage it. I ask my

colleagues: Is such micromanagement of warfare the responsibility of

this body? The Supreme Court has said in the past that the conduct of

campaigns is the province of our Nation's executive branch, not a task

for lawmakers. Yet S.J. Res. 9, by choosing particular

missions for U.S. forces in Iraq and forbidding others, would attempt

to exercise the power properly reserved for the Commander in Chief of

our Armed Forces.

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

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.

Now it is only right that we, the elected officials entrusted with

overseeing the future of our soldiers' involvement, 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 she or he 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 and coupled with

critical political and economic benchmarks to be met by the Iraqi

Government, provides a better--and perhaps the last--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.

Mr. President, allow me to turn to the substance of this resolution.

After stating, twice, that the conflict in Iraq requires principally a

political solution, it would legislate the withdrawal of U.S. forces in

Iraq. Let me ask the sponsors of this resolution precisely what

assumption is behind this construction. Is it that all hope is lost in

Iraq, that we have lost the war and thus must bring our troops home? Or

is it the proponents' contention that by withdrawing troops we will

actually maximize the chances of success?

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?

General 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 is today. Security is the precondition for political and

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

settlement all of us agree is necessary.

Until the government and its coalition allies can protect the

population, the Iraqi people will increasingly turn to extra-

governmental forces, especially Sunni and Shiite militias, for

protection. Only when the government has a monopoly on the legitimate

use of force will its authority have meaning, and only when its

authority has meaning can political activity have the results we seek.

The presence of additional forces could allow the Iraqi government to

do what it cannot accomplish today on its own--impose its rule

throughout the country. Toward that end we have begun executing a

traditional counterinsurgency strategy aimed at protecting the

population and controlling the violence. In bringing greater security

to Iraq, and chiefly to Baghdad, our forces can give the government a

fighting chance to pursue reconciliation.

This does not imply that reconciliation is the inevitable outcome of

a troop surge. 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. It gives America and the

Iraqis a better chance to avoid the catastrophic consequences of

failure.

Catastrophic failure is, on the other hand, what many of us fear is

on offer should the proponents of this resolution prevail. They would

shift the focus of our commanders and troops from establishing security

in Iraq to three limited objectives: protecting coalition personnel and

infrastructure, training and equipping Iraqi forces, and conducting

targeted counter-terrorism operations.

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 Madhi Army attacks

government police stations, are they acting as terrorists or as a

militia? 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, and that is one reason why

progress has been so difficult. To say that targeting terrorist

violence is allowable while stopping sectarian violence is illegal

flies in the face of this reality.

The three limited missions contained in this resolution would

prohibit intervention to stop genocide, should that terrible

consequence unfold as a result of our withdrawal. Can we really expect

American soldiers and Marines to turn their backs while ethnic

cleansing on a Rwanda-like level of violence occurs in Baghdad? I don't

think it is realistic or right to expect Americans to observe another

Srebrenica on a truly epic scale occur, and do nothing to stop it. And

I don't think it is realistic to think that we can somehow ameliorate

its catastrophic consequences for the rest of Iraq and the region by

continuing to chase insurgents and al-Qaida terrorists on search and

destroy missions or stretching our forces along its borders to prevent

other nations from intervening more forcefully to support whichever

side they find their interests aligned with.

I've heard some argue that Iraq is already a catastrophe, and we need

to get our soldiers out of the way of its consequences. To my

colleagues who believe this, I say, you have no idea how much worse

things could get, indeed, are likely to get, if we simply accede to the

sectarian violence in Baghdad. It is a city of six million people, two

million of whom are Sunni. Without U.S. forces there to attempt to

prevent it from descending further into the sectarian warfare, and all

of its citizens turning to the militias and insurgents to protect them,

the bloodshed and destruction we have witnessed to date will be but a

suggestion of the humanitarian calamity to come.

The President, under this legislation, would have to begin

redeployments within 120 days, and nearly all troops would have to

leave Iraq by March 31, 2008. Why were these dates chosen? Why these

and not others? Why dates for withdrawal, rather than conditions? Such

mandates are a retreat, not a strategy, and we should be honest about

the character of such a proposal.

Iraq is not Vietnam. We were able to walk away from Vietnam. If we

walk away from Iraq now, we risk a failed state in the heart of the

Middle East, a haven for international terrorists, an invitation to

regional war in this economically vital area, and a humanitarian

disaster that could involve millions of people. If we walk away from

Iraq, we will be back--possibly in the context of a wider war in the

world's most volatile region.

All of us want to bring out 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. None of us can say we have proposed a course

of action that will achieve certain success. The hour is late. The

situation is, indeed, dire.

But all of us have a responsibility to withstand despair to make

sound, informed judgments about how to proceed from here, and to defer

our own interests and political considerations to considerations of

what is in the best interests of our country. Presidents don't lose

wars. Political parties don't

lose wars. Nations lose wars and nations suffer the consequences. Those

consequences are far graver than a lost election.

When a nation goes to war, a million tragedies ensue. None are more

painful than the loss and injury of a country's finest patriots. It is

a terrible thing, war, but not the worst thing. The men and women we

have sent into harm's way understand that. They, not us, have endured

the heartache and deprivations of war so that the worst thing would not

befall us, so that America might be secure in her freedom, The war in

which they fight has divided Congress and the American people. But it

has divided no American in their admiration for them. We all honor

them. We are all--those who supported the decision that placed them in

harm's way and those who opposed it--we are all humbled by their

example, and chastened in our prideful conviction that we, too, in our

own way, have offered our country some good service. It may be true or

it may not, but no matter how measurable our own contributions to this

blessed and beautiful country, they are a poor imitation of theirs. I

know we all know how little is asked of us compared to their service,

and the solemn and terrible sacrifice made by those who will never

return to the country they loved so well.

In the last few weeks some of those brave men and women have learned

their tour in Iraq will last longer than they were initially told.

Others have learned that they will soon return to combat sooner than

they had been led to expect. It is a sad and hard thing to ask so much

more of Americans who have already given more than their fair share to

the defense of our country. Few of them and their families will have

greeted the news without feeling greatly disappointed and worried, and

without offering a few well deserved complaints in the direction of

those of us who have imposed on them this additional hardship. Then

they will shoulder a rifle and risk everything--everything--to

accomplish their mission, to protect another people's freedom and our

own country from harm.

May God bless and protect them. And may we, their elected

representatives, have the political courage to stand by our

convictions, and offer something more than doubts, criticism, or no

confidence votes to this debate. They deserve more than that.

I know that every Member of this body is united in our regard and

concern for them. I know every Member of this body is struggling to

understand the best way forward to avoid complete failure in Iraq. But

whether this resolution carries or not, these soldiers and marines are

going to deploy to Baghdad. If we are certain that despite their

courage and devotion they cannot succeed, then take the action the

Constitution affords us to prevent their needless sacrifice. If we are

not prepared to take that action, then let us do everything in our

power to help them succeed. 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 which will ensue.

I yield the floor and reserve the remainder of my 5 minutes.