Mr. President, I thank Senator Cardin for his excellent

remarks and for his leadership on this issue. It has been very helpful

during a very tough battle that we have to keep fighting.

We had an interesting debate yesterday on the two bills I have

offered with the majority leader. I know some of my colleagues

expressed concern that we were spending too much time on this issue.

Well I, for one, am pleased we are able to discuss one of the most

pressing problems facing this country. Maybe now that they have allowed

us to have this debate, the Republicans will allow us to actually

consider and vote on these bills.

While I appreciate the chance to have this debate, I would like to

take this chance to respond to some of the statements that have been

made on the other side. I have actually been accused of ``legislating

defeat in Iraq'' or other variations on that theme, and somehow trying

to micromanage the job of the commanders. Actually, we have already

accomplished our military mission in Iraq: Removing Saddam Hussein. I

am interested in achieving victory in the global effort to combat al-

Qaida. We have to make a choice. The Army Chief of Staff has been clear

that ``the numbers of forces we have committed in Iraq now increases

our level of strategic risk.''

So what does that mean? It means we must choose between letting the

Iraqi people resolve their sectarian disputes on their own or, on the

other hand, exhausting our troops in Iraq and losing ground in the

global fight against al-Qaida.

Senator Inhofe said my bill demanding a strategy to defeat al-Qaida

wasn't needed because we already have a plan to defeat al-Qaida. He

failed to explain why, though. If we already have a strategy to defeat

al-Qaida, why is it that al-Qaida has regenerated and reconstituted

itself and is planning more attacks on our homeland? Admiral Mullen has

been quite clear that under our current strategy, Afghanistan is a

second priority where we only ``do what we can''--do what we can. In

other words, we are so bogged down in Iraq, we don't have the forces to

respond to the situation on the ground in Afghanistan. If this is a

strategy, it sure isn't working, which is why the majority leader and I

want to require the administration to develop a plan that prioritizes

the fight against al-Qaida and protecting ourselves at home over an

endless war in Iraq.

Senators Inhofe and Lieberman have claimed that we do already have

political reconciliation in Iraq and that we have seen benchmark

legislation in the Iraqi Parliament. Yes, a debaathification law has

passed, an amnesty law has passed, and the provincial powers election

power law passed. Yes, we have seen movement in the Iraqi Parliament

after waiting for more than 4 years. It is my great hope that the laws

recently passed will bring the Sunnis fully into the political process.

But as we well know, passing a law is one thing, but actually seeing it

successfully implemented is another, particularly given the country's

weak national government.

I think national reconciliation still looks far off. The passage of

what the administration is calling ``benchmark'' laws does not ensure

society-wide sectarian reconciliation. There are still significant

concerns about how the local efforts we have supported to bring about

declining violence will actually be integrated into the national

framework. To illustrate this, the Sunni Awakening has taken tens of

thousands of former insurgent Sunni militia fighters and provided them

with U.S. funding in exchange for helping combat al-Qaida and Iraq. But

to what extent we can rely on the long-term loyalties of these fighters

is a very open question. We do know, however, that this policy actually

risks increasing distrust between the local Sunnis and the national

government, which of course is led primarily by Shiites.

I would just like to ask, if Iraqis have agreed to political

reconciliation, as Senator Inhofe suggested, well then doesn't that

mean we have achieved the objectives of the surge and we can start

bringing the troops home? When does the other side think we can bring

the troops home? They never talk about that. Five years? Ten years?

Twenty years? One hundred years? What kind of success is that?

After more than 4 years of waiting for the Iraqi Government to make

progress, we have lost nearly 4,000 Americans, with no end in sight and

no clear path for a reconciliation that incorporates all aspects and

elements of Iraqi society.

Now, another argument we have heard is it has been suggested that

Iraq would collapse or that genocide would occur if U.S. troops leave.

Of course, that assumes our military presence there is actually helping

the situation rather than simply postponing an inevitable day of

reckoning. If we bring our troops out of this quagmire, Iraqis and

their neighbors would have to confront the crisis head on. Now, I am

not calling for the United States to abandon Iraq, but there is simply

no way we can fix the mess we have made without a legitimate political

settlement.

A U.S. redeployment would actually put new pressure on Iraqis and on

countries in the region to engage productively and to make the decision

as to whether a full-fledged civil war is really in the interests of

Iraq or its neighboring countries. I suspect--I really do feel strongly

about this, having looked at this issue for many years in both the

Foreign Relations Committee and the Intelligence Committee--that if

these countries were faced with that decision, they would actually try

harder to reconcile their differences peacefully rather than further

ignite tensions.

Some Members of this body seem to believe the war in Iraq is between

U.S. troops on the one side and al-Qaida on the other. That is not what

is going on. In fact, that is dangerous, wishful thinking. The recent

patterns of violence in Iraq actually confirm what the intelligence

community has said all along: that the war in Iraq is sectarian and

intrasectarian and far from the oversimplified ``us versus them'' that

proponents of an endless military engagement in Iraq continue to

describe. Moreover, in mixed areas such as Mosul, violence is actually

increasing. And in the south, the increased violence is among Shiites,

and reduction in areas such as Anbar, which is almost entirely Sunni or

in Baghdad, where sectarian cleansing has already occurred, do not

represent a diminishment of the underlying tensions that could explode

at any time.

Contrary to what we heard yesterday, Iraq simply is not the central

front on the war on terrorism. To the extent to which there is such a

front in this very global conflict, it is clearly Pakistan and

Afghanistan. No rational reading of press reports, independent studies

or our own intelligence could possibly conclude otherwise. While the

administration has focused on Iraq, al-Qaida has reconstituted itself

along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. That sounds like a big mistake.

That sounds like a real strategic error in an international battle

against terrorism. Yet far too many people in the administration and my

colleagues somehow believe Iraq is what it is all about. What a

terrible strategic mistake.

Early this month, the DNI testified before Congress that the central

leadership based in the border area of Pakistan is al-Qaida's most

dangerous component. And a few months ago, the DNI again repeated the

intelligence community's assessment that over the last 2 years ``Al

Qaeda's central leadership has been able to regenerate the core

operational capabilities needed to conduct attacks in the Homeland''--

in the homeland, our homeland, our country, the United States of

America.

The DNI also testified that al-Qaida ``is improving the last key

aspect of its ability to attack the U.S.: The identification, training,

and positioning of operatives for an attack in the Homeland''--in this

country.

Meanwhile, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas--or FATA region--

in Pakistan is serving as a staging ground for al-Qaida in support of

the Taliban and providing it with a base similar to the one it used to

have across the border in Afghanistan.

Over the past year, as we all know, we have seen an unprecedented

rise of suicide bombings in Pakistan. The Taliban is gaining ground in

Afghanistan, and while we may be sending an additional 3,200 marines to

Afghanistan in the near future, we have been fighting for far too long

there with too few soldiers and too few reconstruction funds. The price

of that neglect is a dramatic resurgence of militants that must be

urgently addressed.

Yesterday, a Washington Post article noted that:

With the Joint Chiefs saying: ``In Iraq we do what we must and in

Afghanistan we do what we can,'' it is no wonder Afghanistan is

teetering on the edge. It has been neglected, shoved to the back burner

so the President can pursue an open-ended war in Iraq.

I remind my colleagues it was from Afghanistan, not Iraq, that the 9/

11 attacks were planned, and it was under the Taliban regime, which is

once again gaining ground, that al-Qaida was able to flourish so

freely. This is the actual position, this is the actual situation in

terms of this global fight against those who attacked us on 9/11. It is

not all about Iraq.

Al-Qaida affiliates from Africa to Southeast Asia pose a significant

terrorist threat. While we have been so myopically fixated on Iraq, the

threat from an al-Qaida affiliate in North Africa has grown and now,

according again to the testimony of the Director of National

Intelligence, ``represents a significant threat to the United States

and European interests in the region.''

Since its merger with al-Qaida in September 2006, it has expanded its

targets to include the United States, United Nations, and other

interests, and it likely got a further boost when al-Qaida leadership

announced last November that the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group united

with al-Qaida under AQIM's leadership. Its possible reach covers

Tunisia, Morocco, Nigeria, Mauritania, Libya, and other countries.

Meanwhile, it is using deadly tactics that suggest it is acquiring

knowledge and help from the war in Iraq, basically a training ground

for those who get exported to attack us.

Al-Qaida has affiliates around the world--in Saudi Arabia, United

Arab Emirates, Yemen, Lebanon, where al-Qaida poses a ``growing

threat,'' the Horn of Africa, and Southeast Asia. And a few weeks ago,

there were more arrests in Europe. None, not one of these developments

has been prevented by the war in Iraq.

We cannot ignore the rest of the world to focus solely on Iraq. Al-

Qaida is and will continue to be a global terrorist organization with

dangerous affiliates around the world. The administration claims al-

Qaida in Iraq may be on the run, but al-Qaida has not abandoned its

efforts to fight us globally. In fact, we are watching al-Qaida

strengthen and develop its affiliates around the world, while we remain

bogged down in Iraq. How foolish can we be to allow them to

reconstitute all over the world as they watch us unable to extricate

ourselves from a mistake which was, of course, going into Iraq the way

we did.

We need a robust military presence and effective reconstruction

program in Afghanistan. We need to build strong partnerships where al-

Qaida and its affiliates are operating--across North Africa, in

Southeast Asia, and along the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and

we need to address the root causes of the terrorist threat, not just

rely on military power to get the job done.

I would like to turn now briefly to the impact of the Iraq war on our

military and National Guard. There is nobody in the Senate who cares

more about this than the Presiding Officer. I will start by repeating

what GEN George Casey, the Chief of Staff of the Army, said yesterday

in congressional testimony:

Many U.S. troops currently in Iraq, as we all know, are now in their

third or fourth tours of duty. Approximately 95 percent of the Army

National Guard's combat battalions and special operations units have

been mobilized since 9/11.

Mr. President, 1.4 million Americans have served in Iraq and over

420,000 have served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. As I said

before, nearly 4,000 of our men and women have been killed in Iraq, and

over 27,000 have been wounded.

The Army cannot maintain its current pace of operations in Iraq

without seriously damaging the military. Young officers are leaving the

service at an alarming rate.

Readiness levels for the Army are at lows not seen since the Vietnam

war. Every active Army brigade currently not deployed is unprepared to

perform its wartime mission.

More than two-thirds of Active Duty Army brigades are unready for

missions because of manpower and equipment shortages, most of which, of

course, can be attributed to Iraq.

There are insufficient Reserves to respond to additional conflicts or

crises around the world.

This failure to prioritize correctly has left vital missions

unattended. Natural disaster response, U.S. border security, and

international efforts to combat al-Qaida are all suffering due to the

strain on military forces caused by poor strategy and failed leadership

in Iraq.

In addition, thousands of our troops have, as we well know, returned

home with invisible wounds, such as PTSD and TBI, traumatic brain

injury, which will have a long-term impact on veterans and their

families. These invisible wounds are not counted in the casualty

numbers, but we will be struggling with them for generations.

I haven't even touched on the massive debt we are running up to pay

for this war. We are spending approximately $10 billion a month in

Iraq. Congress has appropriated over $525 billion for this war, and the

debt keeps mounting.

We heard eloquent floor statements yesterday on this side about how

these costs are affecting our ability to address other priorities. I

will not repeat all of what was said, but I do want to note that the

war in Iraq keeps us from adequately addressing critical gaps in our

homeland security and law enforcement. While we had 92,000 more troops

to the Army and Marine Corps, the city of New York has 5,000 fewer

police officers on the beat than it did on September 11, 2001.

This year, we will spend a fifth of our $740 billion ``national

security budget'' on Iraq, twice what the Federal Government spends

defending our Nation.

Meanwhile, the administration wants to cut grants for first responders,

and the Coast Guard is struggling with an inadequate force size.

It doesn't make sense. It simply doesn't make sense. The American

people know that, which is why they voted the way they did last

November. More than 60 percent of Americans are in favor of a phased

withdrawal. They don't want to pass this problem off to the next

President and another Congress, and they sure don't want another

American service member to die or lose a limb while elected

representatives put their own political comfort over the wishes of

their constituents.

Polls continue to show voters strongly oppose the war in Iraq, and

that is one of the top issues on which they will be voting. A recent

Washington Post/ABC poll found that 65 percent of Americans disapprove

of the situation in Iraq and 56 percent disapprove strongly. The same

poll also found this is the second most important issue to voters in

November, behind the economy and jobs. And a recent Gallup poll showed

a majority of Americans, 56 percent, do not believe the surge is

working and want a timetable to get out of Iraq. Those Americans need

to be heard, and that is what we are trying to do with this important

debate.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.