Mr. President, when the United States went to war with

Iraq in 2003, a number of observers feared that a massive humanitarian

crisis could occur if a smooth transition was not successful. Despite

the quick collapse of Saddam Hussein's

dictatorship, the heroic performance of our service members, and the

predictions of some in the administration, the transition was far from

smooth. Nonetheless, we did not initially see a humanitarian emergency

in Iraq.

Four years later, however, this emergency is now unfolding in the

cruelest of ways. With Iraq enmeshed in civil war, the relentless

violence has displaced numerous civilians not only within Iraq but

outside of it as well.

There are a range of possible factors behind the current situation:

as the war is increasingly defined by its sectarian nature, the growing

potential for neighborhoods to be ``cleansed'' by one ethnicity or

another may accelerate displacement patterns; the overall increase in

violence that occurred following the golden dome shrine bombing of

February 2006 may have served as a catalyst that changed the face of

the war and the tactics of those fighting it.

Regardless of the reasons, the results are clear--millions of Iraqis

have been forced from their homes because of entrenched fear and

rampant violence. Basic survival needs such as food, clean water,

shelter, sanitation, and health care are in short supply. The

government infrastructure has collapsed--if it ever truly existed--

taking with it the communities it served.

The U.N. High Commission for Refugees estimates that there are nearly

2 million displaced people within Iraq and close to 2.5 million seeking

refuge in neighboring countries. In total, that is almost 4.5 million

people, Mr. President, 4.5 million individuals or approximately 13

percent of the total Iraqi population. Many of these individuals are

from Iraq's shattered middle class and will be critical to rebuilding

the country. But who can say where they will be when that time comes

and whether they will be willing or able to contribute to that process.

The United States has admitted only a small number of Iraqi refugees

since the beginning of the war. According to the State Department,

there have been just 687 Iraqi refugees admitted to the United States

since the war began in 2003. We have a particular responsibility to

provide aid and safe haven for Iraqis whose lives are threatened

because they worked for us.

Fortunately, many neighboring countries have been willing to step up

to the plate and allow those Iraqis fleeing their homeland to seek

temporary shelter despite the fact that many of their needs are

straining the already weak and overburdened social services. Indeed,

most of Iraq's neighbors are unable to provide adequate assistance to

those living within their borders, citizens and refugees alike. The

introduction of more than 2 million additional people into these

already precarious environments could tip the balance in the wrong

direction.

This humanitarian disaster is emblematic of this administration's

poor planning when it comes to virtually every aspect of the war in

Iraq. The administration's failure to respond adequately to the needs

of these refugees and displaced people will have dramatic consequences

for regional and global stability. We still have a chance to reverse

course in Iraq, however, to refocus our strategy, and regain our

credibility so we can work with the international community and resolve

this crisis appropriately.