Mr. President, I thank my colleague from

Missouri for being so understanding. I will make my comments quite

brief.

The entire success of the President's plan of escalation is

predicated on the fact that the Iraqi Army is, in fact, reliable.

Therefore, in every one of our hearings in our committees--be it the

Armed Services Committee, be it the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,

be it the Senate Intelligence Committee--I have asked that question of

the various witnesses, most of whom are representatives of the

administration or representatives of our U.S. military. Up to this

moment, not one of the administration witnesses can tell us that the

Iraqi Army is, in fact, reliable in a plan that is essential that they

are, which is to clear the area, hold the area, and then rebuild the

infrastructure. In the clear phase, it is not only the Iraqi Army and

the U.S. military--by the way, not in a single unified command but in

dual commands of which the Iraqi Army will be the most force in

personnel--and I have heard that 60/40 is the ratio; maybe it is more

than that--60 percent Iraqi Army and 40 percent U.S. Therefore, it is

essential that the Iraqi Army is reliable.

Yet every witness has not been able to tell us that, including up to

today's witness, the Secretary of Defense, Secretary Gates, who I think

is doing an excellent job. But when I laid this out to him in front of

our committee--in this case, the Senate Armed Services Committee--

today, his answer was, as of this morning, that we have to wait and

see.

Well, I am just a little country lawyer, but doesn't it seem logical

that if the President's whole plan is predicated on the reliability of

the Iraqi Army, and at this moment we still have to wait and see on the

reliability of the Iraqi Army, then is that reason for us to escalate

our troops in Baghdad out of 21,000, with some 17,500 going into

Baghdad, on a plan that we do not know is going to work?

It is on that basis that this Senator from Florida opposes this troop

increase. I have said on this floor several times that the Marine

generals in the west of Iraq, in Anbar Province, convinced me that an

escalation of troops there would help them, since that is all Sunni,

and since the main enemy there is al-Qaida. But that is western Iraq;

that is not Baghdad where the sectarian violence is.

Mr. President, I will just conclude my remarks by saying that I think

it is our only hope of stabilizing Iraq, that it depends on three

successful initiatives: No. 1, an aggressive diplomatic effort led by

the U.S. with Iraq and its neighbors to quickly find a political

settlement between Iraq's warring factions; two, Iraqis taking

responsibility for providing for their own security; three, a massive

and effective international reconstruction program.

With regard to the first of these initiatives, an intense diplomatic

effort aimed at helping Iraq with a political settlement has been

discussed many times by most of our Senators. This Senator believes it

must include sufficient autonomy for Iraq's various regions and

communities but a stake for all in the central government; an oil

revenue sharing law; a reversal of debaathification--partial reversal--

and a revised constitutional amendment process.

The lack of a major diplomatic effort to build an international

coalition to support a political settlement is truly baffling. Iraq is

in a full-blown crisis.

So we need at least one, if not several, high-level special envoys

empowered by the President and endorsed by congressional leadership.

Working together, they need to be on the ground every day, throughout

the Middle East, in Europe and Asia, and at the United Nations.

The goal should be--within a month--to assemble an international

conference at which all of Iraq's neighbors and other key nations would

endorse the framework of a political settlement.

It became painfully evident to me during my last trip to Iraq that

Prime Minister al-Maliki either lacks the will or the nerve to take on

the Shiite militias on whose backing he depends for power. For example,

his rushed execution of Saddam Hussein--certainly justified, but

horribly carried out--spoke

volumes about his insensitivity to the concerns of the Sunnis.

Initiative No. 2: As for Iraqis taking responsibility for their own

security, this will only take place if U.S. troops begin to pull back

from the primary combat role they now play and shift to an advisory

capacity.

Where are those words ringing familiar, Mr. President? From the Iraq

study commission, Jim Baker and Lee Hamilton's commission. They offered

this recommendation.

Rather than increasing our forces in Iraq, as the President has

proposed, we should be transitioning the troops to training and

advising Iraqi troops, training and advising antiterrorism missions and

border security.

Finally, the third initiative: The massive reconstruction effort

requires a reconstruction czar, a person of the highest integrity who

will cut through the redtape, demand our agencies produce the results

working together and deliver construction assistance quickly and

directly to Iraqi communities.

Concurrently, this official should convene a donors conference to

elicit pledges of assistance from our international partners and to

hold them accountable for delivering this aid quickly.

In short and in summary, the cost of failure in Iraq will be

catastrophic in growing threats to us and to our allies and in more

American and Iraqi lives lost if we do not awaken to the reality that

diplomacy, not a military solution, is what is needed to end the

sectarian violence in Iraq.

I wish to paraphrase what the President of the United States, when I

was a student in college, President Kennedy, said in 1961: We must

always be ready and willing to bear arms to defend our freedoms, but as

long as we know what comprises our vital interest or our long-range

goals, we have nothing to fear from diplomacy.

I thank the Chair.