Madam President, let me first of all say thank you to

Senator Collins for her work and for her seeking a solution to Iraq and

joining with the other cosponsors of this legislation. As is so often

the case, Susan Collins is part of a group of people in the Senate who

try to find a solution to the problems our Nation faces. So I

appreciate her comments, and I appreciate her being a cosponsor of this

legislation as well.

I rise tonight in this period of morning business to speak in support

of amendment No. 2063, which is the amendment to implement the

recommendations of the Iraq Study Group. I wish to say first of all

that this is probably the most bipartisan amendment we have seen to

deal with Iraq. I thank Senator Alexander for his help and his

leadership in terms of getting this legislation drafted. It is

legislation we have been working on for a long period of time with

members of the Baker-Hamilton Commission, with Secretary Baker and Lee

Hamilton, and we will refer to them later on.

I wish to say a particular thanks to my colleagues who have joined

with us in this effort, including Senator Pryor of Arkansas, Senator

Casey, Senator Lincoln, Senator Nelson of Florida, Senator Landrieu,

and Senator McCaskill, all of whom on this side of the aisle have shown

great leadership in trying to find a new way forward in Iraq.

I also thank my Republican colleagues, including Senator Lamar

Alexander, who has worked tirelessly on this effort for the last

several months, as well as Senator Bennett, Senator Gregg, Senator

Collins, Senator Sununu, and Senator Domenici for being a part of this

effort, wherein 13 Members of the Senate have come together and have

said that if we deal with what is the most difficult national issue we

face today--and that is the war in Iraq and foreign policy in the

Middle East--and how it is that we move forward to try to put together

the Humpty Dumpty that has been created in that part of the world, we

are going to have to do it in a bipartisan way. It is going to require

Democrats and Republicans understanding that we need a new way forward

in Iraq.

Despite all of the debate and rhetoric we have heard on the floor of

the Senate and around the country on the issue of Iraq, the truth is

that there was only one group that has taken a substantive, in-depth,

coherent look at the problem in Iraq and throughout the Middle East and

has created a roadmap on how to salvage stability in Iraq and try to do

our best to create peace in the Middle East. That is the Iraq Study

Group, chaired by Lee Hamilton and Jim Baker, along with distinguished

Americans who served on that Commission for the last year. Their report

came out in December, not long ago. It was the only comprehensive way

forward that has been laid out in a bipartisan way since we began this

effort in Iraq now many years ago.

Madam President, before I speak more about my amendment, I want to

say thank you to Senator Levin and Senator Warner, and others on the

Armed Services Committee, who worked so hard in bringing the Defense

authorization bill to the floor. I admire Senator Levin and the members

of the committee and the thoughtful leadership they bring to us on

national security issues. I have been proud to support Senator Levin in

his call for a change in the policy in Iraq. He recognized long ago

that we need to chart a new course in our Iraq war policy. Now is the

time. This is the place. This is the week, and next week, when we will

hopefully craft that policy. I share Senator Levin's goal, which is

peace and stability in the Middle East and the safe return home of our

troops who are now in harm's way.

As we debate this issue, I hope we will keep in mind the sacrifices

our soldiers and airmen and sailors and marines are making on the

ground today in Iraq. We must be ever mindful that on these fundamental

issues of war and peace there ought to be an American way forward. That

American way forward should not be a Democratic, a Republican, or an

Independent way forward; it ought to be an American way forward because

we have over 150,000 of our men and women in uniform in harm's way

tonight as we debate this issue on the Senate floor.

It is a personal issue. When we think about what has happened to the

men and women who have died in this war in Iraq, we should all think

about the weight we have on our shoulders because it is a significant

weight, but it pales in comparison to the weight and the sacrifice we

ask our men and women in uniform to bear every day in the fields of

Iraq and Afghanistan. So it is to them, who are serving, that we owe

the best policy we can develop in the Senate.

In Iraq, 3,601 Americans have been killed since the beginning of the

war. All of us who have gone to Walter Reed and other hospitals and

visited with the brave men and women who have come home without arms

and legs, those who have suffered from brain injuries and other kinds

of injuries that will stay with them for the rest of their lives--there

are almost 27,000 of them who have suffered those kinds of wounds in

Iraq. From my State of Colorado, we have 51 people who have been killed

in Iraq since the beginning of the war. We have another 443 who have

been wounded. Just from Fort Carson alone, which is the home of many of

our soldiers who served in Iraq, we have had 215 casualties from Fort

Carson in El Paso County.

It is to these men and women that we have a solemn obligation to make

sure we develop the kind of policy they deserve to have as they fight

on behalf of a mission for the United States of America. They deserve a

policy that changes their role in Iraq from combat to a much more

limited role, focused on training and on equipping the Iraqi forces.

They deserve a policy that includes a major and new diplomatic

offensive led by the United States but aimed at gathering all of Iraq's

neighbors around the table. They deserve a policy that underscores the

need for a comprehensive diplomatic approach, which is critical to

creating the conditions necessary for a troop withdrawal so that we can

bring our troops home safely and back to their families. They deserve a

policy that conditions U.S. political, economic, and military support

on Iraq's progress in meeting specific benchmarks. The Government of

Iraq simply must take on a greater responsibility for the fate of their

country. It is foremost their responsibility.

These are the broad principles which I believe should guide us as we

consider

the various amendments to the bill. I hope we can come together across

party lines--Democrats and Republicans--to support a change in strategy

in Iraq.

I have been pleased to join with colleagues from both sides of the

aisle in crafting an amendment that I believe will result in that

constructive change. Our amendment is simple. It implements the

recommendations of the Iraq Study Group. I believe the work of that

group is a model for how we can come together in good faith. The Iraq

Study Group was comprised of our finest and most experienced public

servants in America, equally drawn from both political parties. They

worked together for months to reach consensus on a comprehensive set of

recommendations as required by the U.S. Congress in legislation that

funded and created the Iraq Study Group. I appeal to my colleagues on

both sides of the aisle to take a fresh look at the group's report and

consider how we can use it as part of the solution in creating a

successful policy in Iraq.

We will have much more to say about our amendment at a later point in

the debate. But as we consider Iraq's policy, I hope we can agree that

we must change course. I hope we can agree that the brave men and women

serving in Iraq deserve our best effort to reach common ground. I hope

we can agree on a path forward that will create a better future for

Iraq, for the Middle East, and a better and more peaceful future for

the United States of America.

Madam President, to recap, our bipartisan amendment, which now has 13

cosponsors, would essentially do three things.

First, it would require a mission change for our country in Iraq.

This would be our national policy and our national law if our proposed

legislation becomes law and is signed by the President. That change, as

set forth in the Iraq Study Group Report and in our legislation, would

remove our troops from a combat mission over to a training mission and

a mission that is specifically defined to chase al-Qaida. That more

limited mission is an appropriate one for us here, and that limited

mission is one that I believe has the bipartisan support of most

Members of the Senate.

Secondly, this legislation also conditions, for the first time, the

efforts of the United States of America and Iraq on the progress that

is made by the Iraqi Government in terms of meeting the benchmarks

identified in our legislation. It conditions, for the first time, the

Iraqi Government stepping up to the plate and doing what they should be

doing, which is providing the functional government that brings about

security for their own people. It ought not to be the responsibility of

the U.S. Government to be in the middle of policing a civil war in

Iraq.

Third, the legislation sets forth a comprehensive, diplomatic

approach to deal with the issues not only in Iraq but also in the

region. The fact is, as those of us who have been in that region over

the last several years know, there are places in that region--countries

that have been sitting on their hands and have not been helping bring

about stability in Iraq. We also know Iran and Syria and other

countries have been playing a negative role in terms of achieving the

goal of stability in Iraq. At the end of the day, it will take an

international effort and a regional peace plan to bring about the

stability we all want not only for Iraq but for the Middle East.

In conclusion, I will say this about the Iraq Study Group and their

recommendations. Some Members of the Senate have characterized this

amendment as not doing much. Some Members of the Senate will probably

come to the floor at some point in the debate and say this legislation

is too prescriptive; it tells the President too much what to do. Well,

we will handle those particular criticisms.

The one I wish to deal with briefly is this sense that we have gotten

from some Members of the Senate that the Iraq Study Group

recommendations happened a long time ago and they are no longer

relevant today. I know of no one who spent as much time studying these

issues of Iraq and the challenges we face there than former Congressman

Lee Hamilton, the Chairman of the Commission. This is what Lee Hamilton

had to say with respect to this legislation:

Madam President, I hope that my colleagues open their hearts and

their minds to the direction set forth in the Iraq Study Group Report

and that they join the bipartisan effort with the Presiding Officer and

the Senator from Tennessee and other colleagues who are cosponsors of

this amendment to this legislation.

I know my colleague from Tennessee, Senator Alexander, is on the

floor. I yield to him.

Mr. President, I want to respond to some of the concerns

and comments from my distinguished friend, the great Senator from

Virginia. He and I had the opportunity to travel to Iraq and to

Afghanistan about a year or so ago. There is no one on this Senate

floor that I respect any more than the Senator from Virginia. I

consider him to be a colleague and a role model in the working

relationship that he and the chairman of the Armed Services today,

Senator Levin, have. It is, I think, an example of how we ought

to do things on the Senate floor more often. The fact that we have a

Department of Defense authorization bill, which is a very good bill, in

front of the Senate today is a manifestation and a testament to the

great work and the bipartisan spirit of Senator Warner and Senator

Levin. It is with great respect I offer these comments on some of the

concerns that he raised.

First, with respect to the Iraq Study Group report being simply a

snapshot of what was happening in December, I respectfully disagree

with that assessment of what they did. It was not as if on December 15

or the day that the Iraq Study Group delivered their recommendations

that they said this is a picture of what is happening in Iraq today.

What the Iraq Study Group did is they took a look at the history of

what had happened in Iraq. They took a look at the regional conflicts

and at the dynamics that were driving the conflicts in that region and

they reached a number of different conclusions which were as true in

December as they are today, and which were as true, frankly, a year

before December as they are today.

So it was not a snapshot, it was taking an assessment of the historic

conflict in the region, some of which has gone on not for 4 or 5 years

but 10 years, 100 years, 1,000 years, in some cases, in terms of the

sectarian conflict we see today in Iraq.

It was out of that history that they came up with what they perceived

to be the best way forward for the country in terms of how we dealt not

only with the issue of Iraq but the very integrated issue of the Middle

East conflict with respect to the whole future of not only Iraq but

also the neighbors in that region.

So it was not a snapshot, from my point of view. In our dealings with

both Congressman Hamilton and Secretary Baker, as we came forward and

fashioned this legislation, it was their view that this legislation

was, in fact, the best way forward. It was written in consultation with

input from Senator Alexander. I reached out to both Congressman

Hamilton as well as Secretary Baker. This amendment was written with

their best thoughts in mind on how we could faithfully implement the

recommendations of the Iraq Study Group.

So I daresay that the characterizations that cochairman of the

commission, Hamilton, had to say yesterday about the importance and

current relevancy of this recommendation of the Iraq Study Group are

still as relevant today as they were in December. In fact, Congressman

Hamilton said the Baker-Hamilton Commission recommendations today were,

in fact, as relevant as they were in December and that the urgency of

the implementation of those recommendations, if I may paraphrase him,

was even more urgent today than it was back in December as we continue

to drift sideways, spiral downward frankly, in the conditions in Iraq.

I do not argue it was a snapshot. It was a recommendation that came

out after an in-depth study by some of the best experts in the world,

including our military advisers. Secondly, my friend from Virginia also

says that circumstances have changed in Iraq, that the Iraqi Government

may not be as functional as any of us would want the Iraq Government to

be.

Well, the fact of the matter is that no one has sent the clear

direction by law to the Iraqi Government that support from America to

the Iraqi Government and to the Iraqi people is dependent on them

making progress on the ground. This legislation does that specifically,

as the Iraq Study Group recommends.

Thirdly, there were lots of military advisers that were involved in

providing advice, counsel, and guidance to the Iraq Study Group. It

included ADM James Ellis, GEN John Keane, GEN Edward Meyer, GEN Joseph

Ralston, LTG Roger Schultz and hundreds of other people who were

consulted for their expertise in the formulation of the recommendations

that went into the Iraq Study Group.

Finally, I would say that of all the debate we have had on Iraq, the

fundamental reality still remains the same. There is only the one group

chartered, in part because of the leadership of the Senator from

Virginia, that took a comprehensive look at the situation in Iraq and

the Middle East and came up with a set of recommendations that were

comprehensive in nature.

When you look at the bipartisan composition of that commission, they

spoke on what is in the best interests of America based on the best

information they were able to acquire from around the world and the

best military and foreign policy experts we have. So, in my view, the

Iraq Study Group recommendations are still as relevant today as they

were in December.

I would urge my colleagues to join us in this bipartisan effort.

I yield the floor.