Madam President, yesterday, we learned from media reports

the Obama administration has made a decision to sharply reduce the

number of U.S. forces it is proposing for a post-2011 security

agreement with Iraq to roughly 3,000 troops. That media report has not

been contradicted yet by anyone in the administration, so one has to

assume that is the direction which the administration is headed.

As is well known, 3,000 troops is dramatically lower than what our

military commanders have repeatedly told us, on multiple trips to Iraq,

would be needed to support Iraq's stability and secure the mutual

interests our two nations have sacrificed so much to achieve. Our

military leaders on the ground in Iraq have told us, in order to

achieve our goal--which is a stable, self-governing Iraq, and as a

partner in fighting terrorism and extremism--they need a post-2011

force presence that is significantly higher than 3,000 troops.

We continue to hear that the Iraqis are to blame because they haven't

asked for a new agreement. The fact is, in early August, Iraq's major

political blocks reached agreement to begin negotiations with the

United States on a new security agreement. This week, Massoud Barzani,

the President of the Kurdistan regional government and one of the most

respected men in Iraq--and, in my view, one of the finest--called for a

continued presence of U.S. troops, saying Iraqi security forces are

still not prepared to secure protection for Iraq.

Perhaps significantly the inspector general for Iraq reconstruction,

Mr. Stuart Bowen, recently reported:

And, by the way, we continue to hear these quotes from various

administration officials about absent a request from the Iraqis, it is

difficult to settle on any one thing. Victoria Nuland stated that if

they come forward with a request, we would consider it. That is

assuming it is only in Iraq's national interests to have additional

troops here. It is in America's national security interests not to lose

Iraq after the sacrifice of some 4,500 brave young Americans, and the

consequences of failure are obvious.

Who is it that opposes the continued presence of the U.S. troops most

vociferously, strenuously, and sometimes in a very subversive way? Iran

and the Sadrists. Iran and the Sadrists want the United States out. It

is not a matter of Iraqi national security interests, it is a matter of

American national security interests.

What do 3,000 troops do? I don't know what 3,000 troops do, but I

know they are required to have certain force protection numbers, which

would be significant, and then how many troops would be left to carry

out the mission of protecting the United States civilians, contractors,

and personnel who remain there.

I guess you can sum this up, this decision making process, best, and I

quote from a New York Times article, ``Plan Would Keep Small Force in

Iraq Past Deadline'':

I can assure my colleagues that is the view of the majority of

members of the military, many of whom have had multiple tours in Iraq,

that is their view of this process we are going through.

I would point out that my friends Senator Graham and Senator

Lieberman, who are coming--and I have been to Iraq on many occasions

since the initial invasion. We have had the opportunity to watch the

brave young Americans serve and sacrifice. We have had the ability to

see as the initial military success deteriorated into a situation of

chaos, beginning with the looting and unrest in Baghdad to very

unfortunate decisions that were made in the early period after the

victory in Iraq. And we watched. We watched the situation where many of

our military leaders, but also those who are now in the administration,

say that if we employed a surge, it would fail. The President of the

United States, the Vice President of the United States, the Secretary

of State, the President's National Security Adviser, all of them said

the surge would fail; it was doomed to failure.

The fact is the surge succeeded. The fact is we now have an Iraq that

has an opportunity to be a free and independent country, but, maybe

more importantly, one that would never pose a threat to the United

States of America and, most importantly, a chance for the Iraqi people

to enjoy the fruits of the sacrifice that thousands and thousands and

thousands of Iraqis have made on their behalf and approximately 4,500

brave young Americans have.

The Senator from South Carolina, the Senator from Connecticut, and I

recall meeting with military leaders in 2006, where we were told that

everything was going fine. The Senator from Connecticut, the Senator

from South Carolina, and I recall meeting with a British colonel in

Basra who told us that unless we turned things around, we were doomed

to failure. We remember the summer of 2007, when we were lonely voices,

along with that of General Petraeus, General Odierno, and other great

leaders who have been saying the surge could, and must, succeed.

I will leave it up to historians to decide whether our venture into

Iraq was a good one or a bad one, whether the sacrifice of young

Americans' lives was worth it, whether a stable and democratic Iraq,

which can be the result of our involvement there, was the right or

wrong thing to do. But what we should not do, and in deference to those

who have served and sacrificed we must not do, is make a decision which

would put all of that sacrifice and all that was gained by it in

jeopardy because of our failure to carry out the fundamental

requirement of contributing to Iraqi security in this very difficult

transition time.

I would ask my friend from South Carolina, to start with, perhaps he

remembers when we went to Baghdad, I believe it was 2007, and went

downtown with General Petraeus and were mocked and made fun of in the

media as I came back and said that things had improved in Iraq. Perhaps

the Senator from South Carolina recalls when we had that almost

triumphant visit in downtown Fallujah, a conflict that was won with

great cost in American blood and treasure. Perhaps the Senator from

South Carolina recalls going into downtown Baghdad and going to a

bakery in an environment not of complete security but dramatically

improved. All of it was purchased by the expenditure of America's most

precious asset, young Americans' blood. And now we place all of that at

great risk in the decisions, I say with respect, made by the same

people who said the surge couldn't succeed.

I urge the administration and the President to reconsider what

apparently is a decision and listen to our military leaders once, and

employ a sufficient number of troops to provide the Iraqis with--as

Barzai said, a sufficient number of troops to secure. As Barzai said,

Iraq security forces are still not prepared to secure protections for

Iraq.

I would ask my colleagues from South Carolina and Connecticut, aren't

there plans for us to have a large amount of American civilians there,

contractors, to protect them? Probably the most expensive form that we

could do rather than American troops. Is it not a flawed strategy to

not have enough American troops there to ensure that the lives of

Americans who are serving there in various capacities are protected?

This was at a hearing?

Could I ask the Senator, are you leaving out the

necessity for peacekeeping in the north between the Kurdish and the

Arabs?

Could I say to my colleague, no events in history are

exactly similar. But I think we learned in Lebanon and again in Somalia

that forces that are too small and do not have sufficient force

protection--and I am not saying they are exact parallels, but certainly

it puts whoever is there, whether they be military or civilian, in some

kind of danger. As that progress has been made--and it has been

significant progress in a country that has never known democracy--we

have now Turkish attacks on the PKK up in the Kurdish area. We have

continued tensions in the areas to which the Senator from South

Carolina referred, which at one point, I believe, last June almost came

to exchange of hostilities, between the Peshmerga and the others, and

there is also increased Iranian interest in Basra. There continues to

be the export of arms and IEDs from Iran into Iraq. They have no air

force. They have no ability to protect their airspace.

Isn't it true their counterintelligence is dependent on our technical

assistance, which means personnel?

So the argument seems to be that if we want this experiment to

succeed, we should not put it in unnecessary jeopardy.

Could I mention one fundamental here? The question is: Is

it in the United States national security interest to have these

10,000-plus American troops carrying out the missions we just described

or is it not? If it is, then it is pure sophistry to say: Well, we

would only consider this if the Iraqis requested it. If we are waiting

for the Iraqis to request it, then it means it doesn't matter whether

the United States is there.

I think the three of us and others--including General Odierno,

General Petraeus, and the most respected military and civilian

leadership--think it is in our national interest. The way this should

have happened is the United States and the Iraqis sitting down

together, once coming to an agreement, making a joint announcement that

it is in both countries' national security interest. If it is not, then

we should not send one single American there, not one.