If I may, trying to respond to the Senator's question,

the answer is yes. But you don't have to believe me or Senator McCain.

Ambassador Jeffrey, who is our U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, told us back in

June when he was getting confirmed that all civilian movements are

accompanied by American forces, to some extent, a mixture of Iraqi and

American forces.

We are about to pass the baton between the Department of Defense to

the Department of State. The civilian-military partnership that has

been formed over the last decade has been working very well, and the

future of Iraq is in Iraqis' hands, but they do need our help. As

Senator McCain said, we are helping ourselves.

On June 24, 2010, we asked General Odierno, Where are we in terms of

Iraq? How would you evaluate our situation? And since this is football

season----

Yes. This was at a hearing for confirmation for General

Austin. He said, We are inside the 10-yard line.

Well, this is football season. I think most Americans can understand

this great progress. He said, We have four downs. This is first in 10,

on the 10, we have 4 downs. He felt good that we can get it into the

end zone, but getting it into the end zone is going to require a

follow-on presence in 2012.

Having said that, I know most Americans want our troops to come home.

Include me in that group. We are going to go from 50,000 to zero at the

end of this year if something new doesn't happen. I am confident the

Iraqis want our continued presence in a reasoned way.

What do they need that we can provide? Intelligence gathering. We

have the best intelligence-gathering capability of anyone in the world,

and it helps the Iraqis stay ahead of their enemies. And who are their

enemies? The Iranians are trying to destabilize this young democracy.

Ambassador Jeffrey, who is a good man, said the reason we need to get

Iraq right is it helps our national security interests.

Show me an example in history where two democracies went to war.

There is not any. So if he could take Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and

replace it with a representative government, that is a huge advancement

in our national security interests over time.

What do the Iraqis need militarily? They don't have a mature air

force, so General Austin said it would be in our interests not only to

sell them planes, F-16s, but actually train them how to use those

airplanes. They have an infant navy to patrol their coast, to protect

them against threats there. It is in our interests not only to train

and develop the Iraqi police and army but to make sure that our

civilians who are going to help build this new democracy can travel

without fear and without unnecessary casualties, because the Iranians

are going to try to undercut us at every turn. That means targeting

American forces left behind.

What else do they need? Counterterrorism. Al-Qaida and other groups,

other radical groups, are going to try to come back into Iraq and

destabilize what we have done. We have seen some signs of that. We have

had 60 al-Qaida types released from American custody to Iraqi custody,

and some are back out on the streets. So a counterterrorism footprint

would be smart. Vice President Biden is right about this. A CT

footprint in Afghanistan and Iraq makes sense.

When you add up all these missions, intelligence gathering, training,

embedding, counterterrorism, force protection----

That is a very good point, and that is exactly sort of

where I was going to take this. That requires the footprint of

thousands. We don't need 5,000, but I think 10,000 when you add it up

is probably the bare minimum to do this. Because the commanders who are

policing the Kurdish-Arab dispute boundary line in the northern part of

Iraq have come up with a very novel approach, and I want to give the

administration credit and the military credit. What they have done is

they have taken Peshmergas, which are basically Kurdish militia,

integrated them with Iraqi national security forces and American forces

to form companies that eventually go to brigades, where they will get

to know each other and work together as a team. I think any neutral

observer would tell you our presence in Kirkuk has prevented a shooting

conflict in the past. That is what President Barzai is worried about in

the Kurdish areas. That is 5,000, he said. He has said we will need

5,000 troops here for a while to make sure this new concept of

jointness develops over time. So when you add the whole package, you

are somewhere around 10,000 plus.

To the administration, not only is bipartisanship desired in national

security, I think it is required. We can look back and pat each other

on the back or blame each other about Iraq. That is not what I am

trying to do. We are where we are, and we are in a pretty decent place

to the point that the Iranians are going nuts. They are trying to

undercut Iraq's national development, because their biggest nightmare

is to have a representative democracy on their border. That will incite

their own people in Iran to ask for more freedom.

So, please, to the Obama administration, don't make the same mistakes

at the end that the Bush administration made in the beginning. I can

say with some credibility that I argued against my own political party

infrastructure, that Senators McCain and Lieberman and others--we went

there enough to know it was not a few dead-enders, that the whole

security footprint was not sufficient, and the model to change Iraq was

not working.

It was General Petraeus's model that was adopted, to President Bush's

credit. That was a hard decision for President Bush. The war was

incredibly unpopular. People were frustrated. It seemed it was a lost

cause, and President Bush went against what was the political tide at

the moment. I am glad he did.

I ask President Obama to consider the long-term national security

interests of the United States and do what Senator McCain suggested--

not what he suggested, what our military suggested: define missions. Is

it important to have some support to intelligence gathering? I would

say yes. Training the Army and Air Force and Navy? I would say yes.

Having some presence to protect our civilians who are going to be the

largest groups? I would say overwhelmingly yes. Does it make sense to

have some American military support in the Kurdish-Arab dispute area?

Overwhelmingly yes.

We will stand by you. I think most Americans are frustrated and war

weary, but they don't want to lose. We are very close to changing Iraq

by helping the Iraqi people. We can't change Iraq; only they can. They

want to.

We talk about the deaths of Americans and it breaks our hearts. For

every American who has died there have probably been 10 Iraqis. This

has not been easy for people in Iraq. That is why I never lost faith.

What kept me going with Iraq and Afghanistan is I have been there

enough to know there are people in those countries who want the same

thing for their children as most people in this body want for theirs.

To be a judge in America, one can get criticized. It is a tough job.

One can lose their life in Iraq and Afghanistan, and I have personally

met people who decided to step to the plate--to be lawyers, be judges,

be policemen--who got killed. They knew what was coming their way.

It is in our national security interest to help this infant

democracy, and that is what it is. Corruption still abounds, there are

tons of problems in Iraq, but they are on the right trajectory.

I am asking the administration: Listen to your commanders. And

25,000, in my view--I am not a commander, but I could understand why

the President would say that is a bridge too far. I know what the

generals have recommended. It goes from the midteens to the

midtwenties. But somewhere to the north of 10, given my understanding

of Iraq, I think it will work. But I know we are broke. One thing I can

tell you is, we cannot afford to lose after all this investment. The

price and cost of losing in Iraq now would be devastating for years to

come.

If we do not see this through, who would help us in the future push

back against extremism, knowing that America left at a time when they

were asking us to stay? I am confident Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds want us

there in reasonable numbers to make sure they can have the help they

need to get this right.

Apparently, the decision has not been made yet. I am urging the

administration to look at the missions, be reasonable, understand that

we cannot give the military all they want all the time.

This is the decision of the Commander in Chief. He is a good man. It

is his call. But the one thing I offer and I think the three of us

offer in these very difficult times when America is under siege at home

is to be supportive voices for the idea we cannot retreat and become

fortress America.

Look what happened when a few people from Afghanistan, in far away

places, for less than $1 million--what havoc they wreaked on our

country. This Sunday is the 10th anniversary. I am hopeful as we get to

the 10th anniversary we can look back and say we have defended America

in a bipartisan way. It is not just luck that has prevented us from

being attacked. The President deserves a lot of credit for going after

bin Laden, a lot of credit for adding to troops in Afghanistan when

people were ready to come home.

I urge this administration to listen to our military leaders and

finish this right. It would be a tragedy upon a tragedy for us to be

inside the 10-yard line and fumble at a time when we can score a

touchdown--not only for our national security but for fundamental

change in the Mideast. If we get it right in Iraq, the Arab spring is

going to get the support it needs and deserves. If we fail in Iraq, it

will be just repeating history's mistakes.

The Bush administration did change. Thank God they did because they

did not get it right early on. We are so close to the end now. Let's be

cautious, let's be reasonable, let's err on the side of making sure we

can sustain what we have all fought for. I tell you this: History will

judge everybody well, including President Obama--and that would be OK

with me--if we can turn Saddam Hussein's dictatorship into a

representative government that would be aligned with us and be a voice

of moderation for the rest of the 21st century.

I would like to get Senator Lieberman's thoughts. It is one thing for

me to talk about this in South Carolina. But even in South Carolina, a

very red State, people are war weary and they are not excited about

having to stay in Iraq in 2012. I think they will listen to reason. But

during the darkest days of this effort in Iraq, Senator McCain went the

road less traveled by saying we need more at a time when the polls said

everybody is ready to come home. I do not question anybody's

patriotism. It was a hard call. It was a tough fight, and there were no

easy answers. But I am glad we chose to do what we did. I am glad

President Bush adjusted.

But Senator Lieberman, above all of us quite frankly, literally

risked his political career because he believed that what happened in

Iraq mattered to the United States.

The Senator was right. I want to thank him on behalf of all those who

served in Iraq for giving them the time and resources to prove we could

get it right.

I would like the Senator to, if he doesn't mind, to share his

thoughts with the body about how we should finish Iraq.

I will add, if I may, the 3,000 number does not allow the

missions that are obvious to most everybody who has looked at Iraq to

be performed in a successful manner. That is the bottom line. That is

why no one has thrown out 3,000 before. Can you do it with 10,000? That

is where you are pushing the envelope. The Kurdish-Arab boundary

dispute almost went hot. This new plan we have come up with to

integrate the Peshmurga, the Iraqi security forces with some Americans,

will pay dividends over time. Mr. President, 5,000 is what the American

commander said he needed to continue that plan. We have a plan to even

wind down that number. It is just going to take a while. When it comes

to Iraq, I can tell you right now I would not want our American

civilians to be without some American military support, given what I

know is coming to Iraq from Iran.

If the Senator will yield for a second, that is a good

point. We have been asked to go by both administrations. The Iraqis

have a political problem. That is not lost upon us. Most people in most

countries don't want hundreds of thousands of foreign troops roaming

around their country forever. So the Iraqis have been upfront with us.

We want to continue the partnership, but it needs to be at a smaller

level. They are absolutely right. I don't buy one moment that there is

a movement in Iraq saying we will take 3,000, not 1 soldier more. I

think what is going on here is there is, as Senator McCain suggested, a

number drives the mission, not the mission drives the number. At the

end of the day, this 3,000 doesn't get any of the essential jobs done.

It leads to 3,000 exposed. It leaves the thousands of civilians without

the help they need. It leaves the Iraqi military in a lurch. There is

no upside to this.

I would end with this thought: Let's get the missions identified and

resource them in an adequate way, and I think the country will rally

around the President. I cannot think of too many Americans who would

want our people to be in harm's way unnecessarily. If you leave one,

you have some obligation to the one. Well, if you left one, you would

be doing that person a disservice. Leave enough so we can get it right,

and that number is far beyond 3,000.