Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to be here on the House

floor tonight to report to my colleagues and those who may be watching

what I learned over the last long weekend. I was privileged to go with

Chairman Pete Hoekstra of the House Intelligence Committee to Iraq. It

was my first trip to Iraq. It was a very eye-opening experience, Mr.

Speaker and Members, one that I won't soon forget.

Before I get started talking about that trip and some of the lessons

that I learned while we were there, I would like to start with a quote.

And I will come back to this later. The quote is: ``Do not try to do

too much with your own hands. It is their war, and you are here to help

them win it, not win it for them.'' I am going to come back to that

quote later, Mr. Speaker, because I think it says so much about some of

the things that we learned while we were in Iraq. Most importantly, I

will come back and tell you who it was that originally said that.

The first thing I want to say tonight, though, is an enormous thank

you and congratulations to the brave Americans who serve the United

States in uniform.

When you get off the plane in Baghdad, you realize what they have to

put up with, particularly during the summer. When the door opens on

that plane, it is like opening the door of an oven. And there to greet

you are bright young Americans, and they are in full uniform, helmets,

heavy flak jackets. And I don't know what the temperature was, but it

was the hottest I have ever experienced in my life. And those are the

conditions under which our brave Americans do their business every day.

And it is not just that they do it for 8 hours a day with long lunches

and coffee breaks. The folks over there are working 12 hours a day and,

in many cases, 7 days a week. And I don't think there is anything that

we could say here in this Congress which would ever adequately express

the

thanks that we have for the sacrifices that they make for serving this

country.

I should also say a very special thank you to their families. The

ones that I met and the ones that I was able to talk to probably had

more to say about their families and wanted to make sure that they knew

that they were okay and that they were doing their jobs and that they

missed home. But more importantly, many of them said that they really

felt that they were doing something that was important there.

So I want to, first of all, just recognize the professionalism that

we saw every step of the way. When we left Kuwait, we were flying on a

C-130, and I was lucky enough to get the long straw, so I got to sit up

in the cockpit. And the young people who were flying that plane, and I

almost called them kids, because I don't think even the pilot was 30

years old, but they were among the most professional pilots and crew

that I have ever had the privilege to fly with.

As we got closer to Baghdad, all of a sudden this young pilot and all

the crew became very animated and they were paying a lot of attention

to what was happening on the ground. And I quickly figured out what

they were doing. They were looking for any puffs of smoke or anything

that might be fired at the C-130 we were flying in.

Finally, as we got closer to Baghdad, the pilot literally turned that

big, fat C-130 into a dive bomber. And they make a special approach

when they landed at the Baghdad airport. And in spite of that almost

dive-bomb approach, he made an incredibly smooth and soft landing. And

I want to thank him for that.

But as I say, we had an opportunity to meet with a number of the

folks who were serving over there. I am going to talk just a little bit

tonight about one of those units, a National Guard unit from the State

of North Dakota.

What they do every day, Mr. Speaker, Members, is they go out on the

roads, mostly at night, and they look for these IEDs, these improvised

explosive devices. And they told us that since they have been there,

and they have been there 10 months, they have found 562 of those

devices that they were ultimately able to have disposed of so that they

caused no damage to people or to property along the roads of Iraq.

Forty-two of those explosives devices, however, went off while they

were trying to work with them. Forty-two. In fact, I talked to one

young man, I believe his name was Lynch, from North Dakota, and he had

been involved in four incidents where the IED went off. And I really

can't say enough about the people who do that kind of thing every day.

As I say, there is no way that we in Congress, there are no words

that we could offer here in Congress which could repay the debt of

gratitude that I think we and the people of Iraq have to the brave

Americans like that unit from North Dakota.

We also had a chance to visit a field hospital there, and it was kind

of ironic because one of the people that we met there was someone that

I already knew. He was one of the top surgeons at the Mayo Clinic, and

I am privileged to represent Rochester, Minnesota and the Mayo Clinic.

Dr. Mike Yaszemski. And Dr. Yaszemski was there and had been in Iraq

since about the Fourth of July, and he and some of the other surgeons

told me that they had been up since 2:00 that morning, performing

surgery on five folks who were involved with an IED that night.

And later we got to go in and visit in the hospital there with some

of the soldiers who had been treated. And one of them was more than

happy to tell his entire story. And while they were pinning the Purple

Heart on the sheet on his bed, he told his entire story and what it was

like to go through one of these IED explosions. Perhaps the most moving

moment, though, was, as he was telling his story, how the Humvee that

he had been in had essentially been blown about 150 feet off the

ground, and I can't remember whether it was he came down upside down or

the Humvee came down on its side, but the vehicle was on fire, and one

of his buddies, a private, said get out. You have got to get out. You

have got to get out. And he said, well, I am paralyzed from the waist

down. And he couldn't get out of the Humvee himself.

Now, this was a fairly large guy. I would guess he probably weighed

230 pounds. And he said that the private was a pretty small little guy.

And here this private, when he realized that his buddy was caught in

the Humvee and it was on fire and he hollered out that he was paralyzed

from the waist down, he couldn't get out, this young private got in

there and got him out. I don't know exactly how he pulled him out, but

it was an amazing story. And this young individual wanted to make sure

that before they loaded him on to one of the big transport planes, the

C-17 to fly him to the hospital in Germany at Landstuhl, he wanted to

make sure that he got a chance to say thank you to that private,

because he said he saved his life.

And as he told his story, we were standing around, and I know what I

was thinking. I was thinking, gee, is he going to be paralyzed for the

rest of his life?

Well, thanks to the good work of surgeons like Dr. Mike Yaszemski, I

am happy to report that that soldier is going to be able, as he laid

there, he smiled and he says, ``I can wiggle my toes.'' And what a

happy story it was for all of us in that room.

And we owe such a debt of gratitude to the staff, including people

like Dr. Michael Yaszemski from Mayo Clinic for the magic that they do

and the hard work that they do and the dedication that they have every

single day.

You know, the U.S. military, I think, is unmatched in the world and

perhaps in the history of the world in terms of the execution of

conventional war. There is little doubt that we have no adversaries in

the rest of the world who can match the firepower, the training, the

technology and, most importantly, the professionalism of the Americans

who serve us in uniform. No one can really challenge the United States

in a conventional war.

But as we toured around Iraq and went to several of the bases and,

more importantly, as we spent time in Baghdad, it became obvious to me

that the security situation was not what I had expected. As a matter of

fact, we had to fly in helicopters, Black Hawk helicopters, to fly from

the airport into the Green Zone. And it had been my understanding that

one time people who were coming to visit, like myself and the rest of

our delegation, could actually drive into the Green Zone. But somebody

told us that it is now the most dangerous highway in the world. And

somehow after 3 years and over $332 billion, I guess I was somewhat

surprised that the security situation in Baghdad was as bad as it is.

And, again, I kept coming back to this notion that, indeed, our

military is unmatched and unchallenged, I think, in the world in terms

of conventional warfare. But I think we have to be honest with

ourselves that our military is not well suited to be an occupation

force, and probably even less suited to be involved in the nation-

building business. And I think that is something that I felt and I

believe other members of our delegation felt, that we are really asking

our military to do some things which they are not particularly well

suited to do.

And I just wanted to offer some of those observations because as we

were returning from Iraq, and it is a long flight, one of my colleagues

who was on the trip with us had a copy of an article, and I am going to

submit it for the Record if it is possible, Mr. Speaker, but I would

like to talk a little bit about the article, and I will enter this into

the Congressional Record at the end of my remarks.

What it is is a column that was written by former Secretary of

Defense Melvin Laird, who served as Secretary of Defense from 1969 to

1973. He was also a counselor to the President for domestic affairs in

the Nixon White House. And the article that I am talking about appeared

in Foreign Affairs back in the November/December of 2005 edition. The

title of the article is ``Iraq: The Learning Lessons of Vietnam.''

And in many respects, Melvin Laird is in a very unique position to

talk about both the history of that but, more importantly, what we

should learn from those years and how we could apply them to the

situation the United States finds itself in today.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to read from the article because I think it

says

a lot in a few sentences right here that really illustrate what I think

is a conclusion and the takeaway that I had from this particular visit

to Iraq.

He says: Another great tragedy of Vietnam was the Americanization of

the war. This threatens to be the tragedy of Iraq also. The war needed

to be turned back to the people who cared about it, the Vietnamese.

They needed U.S. money and training but not more American blood. I

called our program Vietnamization, and in spite of the naysayers, I

have not ceased to believe that it worked.''

And he goes on to say in another paragraph: ``We need to put our

resources and unwavering public support behind a program of Iraqization

so that we can get out of Iraq and leave the Iraqis in a position to

protect themselves. The Iraq War should have been focused on

Iraqization even before the first shot was fired.''

Mr. Speaker, I read this column on the way home, and I want to tell

about where we went after we left that hospital, because we flew up and

we were only the second congressional delegation since 1991 to actually

go up and visit Kurdistan. And we landed there at their airport, and I

was surprised. I was shocked because I, frankly, expected to be greeted

by bearded warriors with AK-47s over their shoulders, and what we were

greeted by were businessmen wearing business suits who were very

friendly, very hospitable, and the first thing you see when you get off

the plane are new buildings going up, high-rise buildings around the

airport there.

And as we drove into town, and I want to emphasize as we drove into

town with minimum security, I asked about those buildings. They said,

These are new condominiums going up. They are luxury condominiums. They

will sell for anywhere from $250,000 to $400,000. This is in Irbil,

Iraq. This is in the Kurdish zone.

And we went into town, and we got to meet with some of the political

leaders including their Parliament. It was interesting to learn that

the Parliament that they have there in the Kurdish area is very

representative. Over 16 percent of the members of the Kurdish

Parliament are women. We even met a Christian who is a member of the

Kurdish Parliament. It is very open and very pragmatic. And we met with

the Prime Minister. And he is coming to Washington here in the next

month or so. I hope all Members will get a chance to meet him. In fact,

I think he is coming in September. He is one of the most charismatic,

articulate leaders that I ever met. He was very candid with us.

First of all, he thanked us. He thanked us for all that America has

done for the Kurdish people. Now, admittedly, the Kurds from a cultural

standpoint are different than many of the other Iraqis, but they are

Muslim. And he told us that they faced all the same problems in 1991

that the southern part of Iraq is facing today. They had

factionalization. They had terrorists. But they adopted what I would

describe as a zero-tolerance policy. In fact, they described one

particular incident where someone had committed an act of terrorism and

then fled to Baghdad. They went after them, and they brought them to

justice.

You see, they have the advantage that they speak the language, they

understand the culture, but, most importantly, they know who the bad

guys are. And as I sort of distilled this story, and I was surprised by

the wealth of the Kurdish region, one of our colleagues said, Well, but

you have oil.

And the Prime Minister smiled, and he said, The whole country has

oil. He said, The difference is we have decided to work together to

develop our resources so that we can have an economic future of

prosperity for all of our people, whether they happen to be Christians

or whether they happen to be Shiia or whether they happen to be Sunnis,

whatever. And the only thing they have said is that they will not

tolerate terrorism in their territories.

And there are two things that they demand from the national

government: One is they will not tolerate a religious state. Even

though they are Muslims, they tolerate other religions, and it makes an

enormous difference in the way people are living and working together

in the northern portion of Iraq.

The second thing that they said they demanded is an equitable

distribution of oil royalties. And when you see what they have

accomplished up there, you can understand why now that they have done

all the work, they do not want to share all of their revenues with the

people of the rest of Iraq.

But, most importantly, we asked him, Don't the Kurds really want to

be independent?

And again he smiled and he said, Well, if you polled my constituents,

I suspect that almost universally they would be in favor of

independence. But, he said, that is not practical. In fact, he said, we

Kurds have decided that we have our best opportunity to work with the

rest of the people of Iraq and be part of a strong and united and

economically prosperous Iraq.

We all sat there and listened to this, and we met with the members of

the Parliament. They threw an enormous feast for us of some of the

finest food I have ever had in my life. And as we sat and listened and

visited and learned from them, I said to myself, and it is one of my

favorite expressions, I said, Success leaves clues, and if you really

want to know what Iraq can look like, you would have to visit the

Kurds.

And it is unfortunate that too many of our colleagues have not had

the chance or taken the chance when they visited Iraq to go up and

visit the Kurds. But it is an enormous success story, and I think it is

the model that if we can somehow imprint on the rest of the country and

if the new Prime Minister, Mr. Maliki, will take that as the model,

adopt it for the rest of Iraq, then I think that Iraq can have a very

bright future.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that the leader of our

delegation, Pete Hoekstra, the chairman of the House Intelligence

Committee, was good enough to invite me along and, more importantly,

get me into some of the most interesting meetings I have ever been at.

So I would like to yield to the leader of our congressional delegation,

the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. Hoekstra).

I was talking about the Kurds, and I think every part

of the trip, in my opinion, was a highlight. I hate to say one was more

important than the other.

But what I had said before you came in, Congressman Hoekstra, was

that I was so impressed with the Kurds and what they have done in

taking responsibility for their own area, of having essentially a zero

tolerance policy. I said that I think that may be the example that

Maliki can use for the rest of the country. You mentioned, and this is

what I think is the good story.

The bad story, from my view, is that Baghdad is far less secure than

I thought it was. Maybe that is my fault. Maybe I had a different

impression. Maybe I had been led to believe. I am not sure, and I am

not really in the blame game.

But clearly Baghdad is still a very dangerous place. In fact, I think

the phrase that some of them used is the road from the airport to the

international zone is the most dangerous highway in the world. Maybe

that is an exaggeration. But those are Americans who are serving there

that used that term.

My takeaway is probably somewhat different than yours, but my

conclusion and my takeaway is we need to press and continue to press

for the Iraqis and exactly what you are talking about, where we have

some of our Special Forces embedded and working with and training

Iraqis. We trained, I think the number is 262,000 Iraqis so far. We

need to really push them to step up, as they have in the northern parts

of the country, to take responsibility for policing their own streets.

I think you said it exactly right. When I left, there

was progress. I was looking for progress. I think it is a three-legged

stool. I think you have to have military or security progress.

Exactly. That is where I really was disappointed. I

thought Baghdad would be much more secure than what we saw or learned

about it. But you have to have military security progress, and you have

to have economic progress, and you have to have political progress.

Let me say, and I talked to the speaker today and I

know you are working on this as well, one of the things we would like

to do is invite at least a dozen of them to the United States. We may

smile about our meetings with the parliamentarians, and they all had

own political points of view and so forth, but, first and foremost,

every Member of Congress, and I think Americans need to understand, if

you are a member of the Iraq parliament, you are a hero. You are

someone who has enormous courage.

Exactly. And not only are you a potential target, your

family is a potential target. Most of us at one time in our political

lives have had some goofball who has issued some kind of a death threat

against us. Usually we don't even take it all that seriously.

Fortunately, the FBI takes it very seriously, and I appreciate what

they do for us every day. But in Iraq, it is a different ball game.

No. I was very impressed with the character of the

parliamentarians. Hopefully, with the help of our Speaker, we can get

some of them over here so that more Members of Congress can actually

get a chance to visit with them, to learn from them, to talk to them

and perhaps to ask them some questions.

What I was talking about earlier as well is from an article that I

think we both read on the plane on the way home that was written by

Melvin Laird. If anyone would like a copy, they can just send me an e-

mail. We will send you a copy of this article.

I think from my perspective it actually put into perspective a lot of

the things we saw on our visit and why it is so important as soon as we

can and as much as we can, we need to turn more of the authority, the

responsibility for managing the affairs of the Iraqi people, back to

the Iraqis themselves.

That is exactly what Melvin Laird said about Vietnam.

That is why it was important to turn Vietnam, as soon as possible, back

to the Vietnamese people. He said the greatest mistake was the

Americanization of the Vietnam War.

I think that is something we have to be very aware of when we look at

where we are today.

What I said also, Congressman Hoekstra, is because the Maliki

government is now in place and they have a Minister of Defense, they

have a Minister of the Interior, which are the two key ministries I

think in terms of domestic security, now that they have those people in

place, and my impression of them was they are very strong people, my

impression was they understood the risks, they understood what needed

to be done, and I think the next two months are going to be critical.

They have to demonstrate, in my opinion, that they really are

serious, that they will deal with these militias that are out of

control, they will deal with the radicals and the others who have come

in from out of country.

I think it is important that our perception, and we had very good

briefings, I know that sometimes it is a little like the blind men

describing the elephant, but all the terrorists are not the same. Some

of them are religious fanatics. Some of them are just thugs that Saddam

released from prison, and they are thugs trying to create a territory

and using terror and using violence, much as Al Capone in the St.

Valentine's Day Massacre did, used violence in a certain way to gain a

certain amount of power in a neighborhood. So it is not as simple as

sometimes we would like to pigeon hole what the violence is all about.

It is about a lot of things.

But, most importantly, I think the Iraqi government now has to

demonstrate, as the Kurds did, that they have a zero tolerance policy.

They will hunt people down and bring them to justice.

You said something else earlier about the advantage that the Iraqis

have when they are doing the heavy lifting. You said they understand

the culture. One thing you didn't mention, I want to add, they

understand the language. That is incredibly important. That puts our

forces sometimes at a huge disadvantage, because they really don't

understand.

You can't really understand a culture if you weren't raised in it. So

in many cases we were asking our soldiers sometimes to do some things

that are very difficult. Not that they aren't very professional and

they do it very well, but there is no question that Iraqis out there

policing the streets can do a much better job than Americans.

They have been up performing surgery since 2 o'clock

in the morning. I mentioned that Dr. Mike Yaszmenski from Mayo Clinic,

he did not take the credit for it, but the story that we were all

standing there when they pinned the Purple Heart on that young man. He

had had several broken vertebrae, which is the reason he could not get

out of his HUMVEE, and could not walk.

At the end of his little presentation, he told the whole story, he

sort of smiled. He said, I can wiggle my toes. Now, Dr. Yaszmenski did

not take credit for this. I am piecing this together. Because he is a

spinal surgeon my sense is that he had something to do with it.

He wanted to see that private that pulled him out.

I think the real progress that we are all looking for

is for the Iraqis. Now that Prime Minister Maliki has got a government,

and I think he needs to know that America is going to be there to

support him.

You know, I was misquoted that I was in favor of immediate

withdrawal. That is simply not true. What I have said consistently is

America needs to be there for quite some time to come. We still have

troops in Germany. We still have troops in Japan. We still have troops

in South Korea. But our real role has to begin to change, so that we

provide the umbrella of security.

If, for example, some militia being to mass and begin to directly

confront the government or other forces, then I think from a

conventional standpoint, we are in a strong position to make sure that

that gets dealt with quickly and effectively. And nobody can do it

better than our military.

But in terms of some of the sectarian things and the thugs who are at

large in some of the neighborhoods, since we cannot speak the language

and we do not understand the culture, it is just much more difficult

for us to get to the bottom of that. That is where the Iraqis need to

step up. That is the progress we are looking for.

When that happens, when people start to feel as secure in Baghdad as

they do in Erbil, then you will see the economy begin to improve.

Because, it is obvious to me that the overwhelming majority of Iraqis

want what most Americans want. They want to live in peace. They want to

be able to raise their families in a secure neighborhood. They want to

look forward to an economic future that is worth living.

They can do that. And that is why, again, I hate to refer too much to

what we saw up in northern Iraq. But it was like night and day. It was

like going to a different universe.

We will always remember the North Dakota boys.

Especially one young man, I think his name was Lynch. He had been

involved in four of these explosions. And, yes, it is true the

equipment they have is specially designed to sort of take the explosion

and the concussion in a ``V'' section so that the folks inside are

protected.

The concussion of it and what it did to those heavy

vehicles, it is amazing that they have only had one KIA. Again, let me

join you in sharing our sympathies to that family and that unit,

because they were obviously a very close knit unit from North Dakota.

They went to war together. They do their jobs together. They live

together. They pray together. And it was inspiring to meet those young

men.

I mentioned earlier, we also need to say thank you and

kudos to the families. You cannot help but think about what the

families in North Dakota must feel every day. I am sure they do not

know all that that group does in terms of going out and looking for

these IEDs.

But not only do the folks in uniform, they pay quite a price for us,

but their families, just worrying about what is going to happen today,

what is going to happen tomorrow. You just really have to admire the

families. And we need to say a special thank you to them. Because, you

know, the guys that are over there, they are working hard all of the

time. In fact, one of the things they said was we do not mind working

long days and long hours because it helps the time go faster.

I am going to close up here. If you have any closing

thoughts, Chairman Hoekstra, go ahead. Then I am going to close up and

yield it back here in just a few minutes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to mention, and I

am glad you did bring up the fact that we stopped in Bosnia

Herzegovina.

Sarajevo. I was in Sarajevo 10 years ago, and at that

time the city was essentially in, the center city, essentially rubble.

Many buildings had large pockmarks. Some of them are still there. Many,

though, have been fixed; and it now is a vibrant city.

If I had predicted 10 years ago that we would see the life in the

city that we saw, a lot of people said it cannot happen.

Yes, Sniper Alley.

I think we should share the story that the general

told us about the man who worked at the military facility there. Every

day, when he would come to work, he would stop, and this is a Bosnian

individual, he would stop and salute the American flag.

Then he would say a prayer. When he would leave work that night, he

would again salute the American flag. They had a special ceremony that

finally, the general said, we need to do something for that guy. So

they presented him with a U.S. flag, one of these little wood cases

that we have around here.

When they presented it, he literally, with tears running down his

cheeks, he said, I thank God every day for America and what America did

to bring peace to this city, because it was America that saved us from

that war.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think there are reasons to

be optimistic. But I want to close with this quote. I started with this

quote tonight:

``Do not try to do too much with your own hands . . . It is their

war, and you are to help them, not win it for them.'' That quote is

from T.E. Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia.

In some respects, I think it is prophetic. We can only do so much in

Iraq. We are doing our share. Our military is doing a marvelous job.

The next step, Mr. Chairman, is up to the Iraqis.