Mr. President, I start by telling the Senator from

Missouri how much I appreciate his leadership on this issue. As the

ranking member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, he knows

as well as anyone what is at stake in Iraq and in the global war on

terror. I know his son, Sam, is a member of the Marine Corps and has

served in Iraq. I believe he is either back or headed back here very

soon, so this is a matter in which the Senator from Missouri has a

personal investment, in addition to the larger investment all Americans

have in making sure our security is protected to the extent possible.

That is what it boils down to.

Some say we have to do this for the Iraqis. I suggest, as laudable as

that is, we need to do this for us. What do I mean by ``this''? I mean

what the Iraq Study Group--the bipartisan group created to look into

the challenge of the conflict in Iraq--recommended. They pointed out

quite clearly that it is in America's vital security interests to leave

Iraq when we do. Of course, that is the goal we all share. We want to

leave Iraq, but we must leave Iraq based on conditions where Iraq can

sustain itself, defend itself, and govern itself.

It is bewildering to see a vote like we saw last Friday in the Senate

where GEN David Petraeus, the new commander in Iraq, was confirmed

unanimously by this Senate, yet there are those who say: Yes, we are

going to confirm you, General, unanimously. We are going do say nice

things about you and your talents and dedication and patriotism that

you have demonstrated by your service, but the plan that you are the

architect of, we are not going to support it. We are going to pass a

sense-of-the-Senate resolution which, in his own words, undermines his

ability to be successful in America's ability to protect its national

security interests by leaving Iraq in a condition that it can sustain,

govern, and defend itself, and which sends a wrong message to our

enemies.

The consequences of failure in Iraq are best summed up by the Iraq

Study Group on page 34. They said that a chaotic Iraq would provide a

still stronger base of operations for terrorists who seek to act

regionally or even globally. Al-Qaida will portray any failure by the

United States in Iraq as a significant victory that will be featured

prominently as they recruit for their cause in the region around the

world.

It will surely be a failed state if we leave Iraq before conditions

on the ground permit the Iraqis to govern, sustain, and defend

themselves. It will likely lead to a failed state much as Afghanistan

was after the Soviet Union was run out of Afghanistan in 1979.

What was that condition? We know all too well on September 11, 2001,

when America was hit by al-Qaida on our own shores, that what happened

in the interim between the time the Soviet Union left Afghanistan was a

rise of the Taliban and al-Qaida, including Osama bin Laden, who was

plotting and planning and training and then exporting terror attacks

against the United States and against our allies.

It is entirely probable, in my opinion, that if we leave Iraq

prematurely, before it can sustain, govern, and defend itself, Iraq

will become another failed state like Afghanistan, another place where

terrorists can train, recruit, and then export terrorist attacks

against the United States and our allies.

It is also likely that if we leave Iraq prematurely, it would lead to

a broader regional conflict, probably involving Syria, Iran, Saudi

Arabia, and Turkey, and we may have to later return at a greater cost

to our Nation.

This is another matter to which I don't think the people have paid

enough attention: to leave Iraq prematurely would lead to massive human

suffering. The other day, the Judiciary Committee had a hearing on

Iraqi refugees. Of course, there are brave Iraqis who have worked

alongside America and our allies to try to restore democracy to that

country after Saddam's bloodthirsty reign. They are worried, as they

should be, that if America pulls out, along with our coalition

partners, before Iraq is able to sustain, govern, and defend itself,

they will be slaughtered. It will be ethnic cleansing where Shia will

kill Sunni. It will draw in, likely, the Sunni majority nations such as

Saudi Arabia to defend the Sunnis against ethnic cleansing.

We are at a crossroads. The choices are not necessarily good ones,

but they are the choices with which our Nation is confronted. We can

either stay with the status quo which, frankly, I don't know anyone who

believes the status quo is working or, No. 2, we can, as some have

suggested, cut off funding for our troops and result in a precipitous

withdrawal from Iraq or, No. 3, we can devise a new strategy in an

effort to succeed where the current strategy has not in Iraq.

I believe the obvious choice is No. 3. If we are going to confirm a

new Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, as we have done; if we are

going to confirm a new general leading coalition forces in Iraq, like

David Petraeus, as we have done; if we are going to confirm a new

commander of Central Command, Admiral Fallon, as I am confident we will

do; we need to ask for their advice, get their advice, and, frankly,

take their advice. I am afraid this has become far too political and

not focused, as it should be, on a bipartisan basis, on what is in

America's strategic and security self-interest.

The Washington Post summed it up in an editorial this way. They said

legislators need a better way to act on their opposition to the current

policy than passing a nonbinding resolution that may cover them

politically but have no practical impact other than

perhaps the negative one suggested by the general--and they are talking

about General Petreaus. What are the negative impacts? General Petreaus

made that clear in the nomination hearings before the Senate Committee

on Armed Services.

Senator McCain asked:

General Petraeus:

Senator Lieberman:

General Petraeus:

I understand as well as anybody the reservations that Members of the

Senate have about the new plan. The question we all have is, Will it

work? Obviously, there are no guarantees. However, I know there is one

sure plan for failure that will embolden our enemies, undermine our

allies, and demoralize our troops, and that is to pass a resolution of

no confidence in the only plan that has now been proposed for a new way

forward in Iraq: working with the Iraqi Government, Prime Minister

Maliki, making it clear there are benchmarks they need to meet; that it

is their country, and they need to take the lead. We will support them.

We will help stiffen their spine, particularly when it comes to

preventing sectarian violence and taking on the militias which have

ruled the streets in so much of Iraq. But this is the only chance and

the only alternative that has been offered by anyone, so far, as to the

way forward.

I make an appeal to our colleagues on the Democratic side of the

aisle. On November 7, we had an election. As a result of that election,

Democrats no longer were a minority party but became the majority in

the Congress, both in the House and in the Senate. While I understand

that as a minority party frequently we do not have the opportunity to

set the agenda or to provide the leadership and are left with

criticizing what the majority party does, my hope would be that the new

majority would rise to the occasion, would set partisanship aside as

much as possible, particularly with regard to our national security

interests, would not focus on the 2008 election or worry about

individual political outcomes. My hope is the new majority would use

this as an opportunity to work with the new minority to send a vote of

confidence and to provide a plan, support for the plan that has been

drafted by General Petraeus and supported by all our military

leadership for the possibility of a successful way forward in Iraq.

Frankly, for our friends on the other side of the aisle to merely

criticize and offer resolutions of no confidence that are not binding

is not an act of encouragement. It is not an act of patriotism but,

unfortunately, as General Petraeus said, it will undermine our troops'

morale and embolden our enemies. We all owe it to the troops who have

risked their lives, to the families who have paid the ultimate

sacrifice in defense of freedom and to protect our security, to do our

very best to work together to try to support a way forward in Iraq

which has the best chance of success.

My hope is, in the coming days, through this debate, we will agree to

do that, and we will avoid making political statements that have no

binding effect and which serve only to embolden our enemies and

undermine our friends.

I see the distinguished Senator from Arizona on the floor of the

Senate, and I yield to him.