Mr. President, next week marks the 5-year anniversary

of the war in Iraq. Although Saddam Hussein's brutal authoritarian

regime no longer exists, the war has been nothing less than a disaster

for that country, for others in the region, and unquestionably for our

own, as well.

Four million Iraqis are displaced from their homes and Iraq's

profoundly weak central government cannot provide its citizens with

sufficient basic services like food, water, and electricity or protect

them from savage violence, disappearances, or kidnappings. Tensions

continue to rise throughout the Middle East and, as the war triggers

internal unrest in many countries, it has caused our own credibility to

decrease significantly.

The war continues to undermine our top national security priority--

the fight against al-Qaida, which has strengthened itself in Pakistan

and reached out to new affiliates around the world. According to the

Congressional Research Service, the war costs us over $10 billion a

month in direct costs. The war saps our military, which is stretched

too thin to keep us safe here at home. In short, the war is making us

weaker, not stronger, and that trend is not likely to change.

America continues to be mired in a conflict that has no end in sight.

As of the beginning of this week a total of 3,974 American soldiers had

been killed and 29,320 wounded. While the administration touts a recent

decline in violence as an indication that the surge is ``working,''

there is little political progress that might indicate the decrease in

violence will result in genuine national reconciliation. As the region

remains particularly fragile and our international credibility

profoundly damaged, Americans ask each other just how many more

billions of dollars will be spent and how many more of our brave troops

will die or be injured while we wait for national reconciliation in

Iraq--which is the only way to end the violence.

Just 2 weeks ago, many of my Republican colleagues stood on the

Senate floor to sing their praises of the surge, but now we may be

witnessing a reemergence of the brutal violence that was said to have

dissipated. Early last week, two car bombs exploded, killing 24 people

and wounding 56, while later in the week two bombs exploded in downtown

Baghdad, killing nearly 70 people and wounding over 120. Yesterday a

suicide bomber approached five American soldiers in Baghdad and

detonated a bomb--killing all five soldiers and injuring three more.

This attack has been labeled the worst attack on U.S. forces in months

and it comes only days after a female suicide bomber blew herself up in

the home of a Sunni leader who was reported to have been working in

collaboration with U.S. forces.

Similarly, another political impasse in Parliament may result in

little tangible results from recently passed and supposedly key

legislation. Yes, a de-baathification law has passed but it may usher

in renewed sectarian tensions as former officials from Hussein's regime

try to reclaim their old jobs. A provincial powers election law was

sent back to the Parliament by the President's Council--requiring

another round of drafting before it is able to move forward. As we well

know, working on a law and even passing it is one thing--seeing it

successfully implemented is another.

National reconciliation still looks far off. The passage of what the

administration is calling ``benchmark'' laws does not ensure society-

wide sectarian reconciliation; in fact, there are significant concerns

about how the local efforts we have supported to bring about this

decline in violence will be integrated into the national framework. The

Sunni Awakening has taken tens of thousands of former-insurgent Sunni

militia fighters and it is unclear to what extent we can rely on their

loyalties. It is not hard to see, however, that this policy risks

increasing distrust between the local Sunnis and national government,

which is led predominately by Shi'ites.

Without a legitimate political settlement at the national level, any

decline in violence in Iraq is likely to be tenuous. Recent news from

Iraq seems to indicate that any gains in security are already slipping

and without a strategy for safe redeployment, it is inevitably our

brave men and women who will pay the price.

The war in Iraq drags on while al-Qaida has reconstituted and

strengthened itself. The Director of National Intelligence, DNI,

recently testified before Congress that al-Qaida's central leadership

based in the border area of Pakistan is its most dangerous component.

And just a few months ago, the DNI again repeated the Intelligence

Community's assessment that, over the last 2 years, ``[al] Qaida's

central leadership has been able to regenerate the core operational

capabilities needed to conduct attacks in the Homeland.''

Let me remind my colleagues, that it was from Afghanistan, not Iraq,

that the 9/11 attacks were planned and it was under the Taliban

regime--which is once again gaining ground--that al-Qaida was able to

flourish so freely. With a recent report warning that we are not

winning in Afghanistan, we need to rethink our current Iraq-based

strategy so we can counter the threat posed by al Qaida around the

world.

As we approach the 5th anniversary of the US-led invasion in Iraq, it

is clear that continuing the current open-ended military policy doesn't

make sense. The American people certainly know that this war doesn't

make sense and they expect us to do everything in our power to end it.

We in Congress cannot in good conscience put Iraq on the backburner,

and we cannot turn a blind eye or feign helplessness as the

administration keeps pursuing its misguided policies.

This Congress has no greater priority than making right the mistake

it made over five years ago when it authorized the war in Iraq. I do

not want the American people to lose faith in their elected leaders for

pursuing a war that they rightly oppose. I do not want to watch a

failed strategy perpetuate regional turmoil any longer and I do not

want any more American troops to die or get injured for a war that is

not in our national security interest.