Mr. President, I wish to address recent changes in the

situation in Iraq and the possibility that resolutions of disapproval

to the President's new strategy will be offered in the near future--a

possibility which I believe would be very dangerous to the success of

our military efforts.

I will make three points this afternoon.

The first is that it is important for us to give the newly announced

strategy of the President an opportunity to succeed. That makes sense

not only because everyone recognized that the President needed to

announce a new strategy--he has done that, and it seems to me he should

be accorded that courtesy--but also because, from a military

standpoint, it is the only thing that makes sense.

The key to the new strategy announced by the President is not the

addition of new troops. We have had far more in terms of numbers of

troops in Iraq than the increase that will be provided by this latest

plan. No, the primary change in the strategy is the actions of the

Iraqi Government--in particular, Prime Minister al-Maliki's commitment

to begin doing things we wanted him to do a long time ago but which he

was unwilling to do--to hold people after being arrested rather than

releasing them on the streets, to allow curfews and checkpoints to

work, to allow the control of the Mahdi army, which is under the

leadership of Sadr, the Shiite leader in Iraq, who has confronted al-

Maliki and his government.

It appears this new strategy is beginning to work even after only a

few days of its announcement. People have asked: Can we trust al-

Maliki? The answer is that no one knows. But actions speak louder than

words. Apparently, he has made good--at least initially--on his

commitment to confront the Mahdi army and to stop Sadr and that army

from continuing the sectarian violence against Sunnis in Baghdad.

Apparently, there have been a lot of arrests made, and the United

States is going to be able to now conduct the type of hold operations,

after they have cleared an area, that would be necessary to create

stability for an ultimate peace in Iraq.

So the first point is we do need to give this new strategy a chance

to succeed. The very early returns suggest that it just might be having

that effect.

In addition, it is important for us to be able to regain control of

the Anbar Province. Almost a third of the western part of Iraq is under

attack by al-Qaida and other terrorists who mean to create their own

little fiefdom--called a caliphate--in that part of the country.

Clearly, we cannot allow al-Qaida to have a terrorist base in Iraq. The

additional battalion of marines who are committed to clearing this area

is critical to the stability in Iraq and the defeat of the terrorists

there.

The second reason we should give this strategy a chance is that the

nonbinding resolution which has already been offered and will

apparently be brought before the Senate within a week or so is wrong

for two reasons: First of all, it presents no credible alternative, and

secondly, it is dangerous. It presents no credible alternative, just

mere criticism. Albeit in a nonbinding way, it is still criticism

without any kind of an alternative.

The resolution itself doesn't contain an alternative except the

following: --I am really

listening at this point --I am looking for a verb

here but instead here are the four words

``Should be to have'' them. Well, if I had a magic wand, maybe I

could make this happen. But the reality is that it is not the lack of

political compromise, it is the lack of peace that is enabling them to

make the political compromise. As long as the Mahdi army is controlling

Sadr City and Sadr is confronting al-Maliki and fomenting violence--

Shiite and Sunni and vice versa--the political compromises are going to

be impossible to make. That is why the President and al-Maliki

understood you have to first create peaceful conditions, change the

conditions on the ground. If the Mahdi army is going to have death

squads foment this kind of violence, you will never have those

political compromises. If al-Maliki can control Sadr and eliminate the

threat, political compromise is possible. So there is no alternative to

the President's strategy in the nonbinding resolution that was filed.

Secondly, it would be dangerous. To pass a nonbinding resolution in

the United States is for effect. What is the effect? Well, the effect

theoretically is to try to get the President to change policy. This

strategy isn't going to change in the near term. Troops are on the way.

Al-Maliki made his commitment and is apparently making good on the

commitment, so the new strategy is working out right now. So a

nonbinding resolution passed in a week or two is not going to change

this. Instead, its effect is a pernicious one. What kind of a message

does it send, first of all, to our troops that Congress doesn't support

what the President and they are trying to accomplish here; that the

Congress thinks we should be going in some other direction, albeit

there is no alternative being presented, just in a resolution of

criticism? What kind of a message does it send to the allies that the

President's policy is going to be undercut to the point that it will

not be carried out, and therefore they better begin to hedge their

bets? And most important, what message does it send to our enemies? Can

they simply decide that in a matter of time, support for the

President's policies will have diminished to the point that they won't

have to concern themselves with this new strategy anymore if they can

wait it out, and they will have an opportunity for success? So it is

not going to work, No. 1, and secondly, it is dangerous.

That brings me to the third and final point. It seems to me that

those people in favor of sending a message without presenting an

alternative have an obligation to consider what will occur if the

President's policy doesn't succeed. Almost everybody recognizes that

the Iraqi Army is not able to defend this country and create a peaceful

stability in the country at this point.

So the question is: What would happen if we leave Iraq a failed

state? Most agree, and the intelligence community has recently

testified, that it would be disastrous, not only for the people in Iraq

but for our allies in the region and for our long-term national

security interests, both because of the ability of al-Qaida and other

terrorists to consolidate their gains in the area and use that as a

place from which to operate, and secondly, because all of the momentum

we have gained in getting support, more or less, from countries such as

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Jordan--all of the

countries in the region--that have helped in the war against the

terrorists will switch the other way as they realize America will not

stay in the fight, that they have to begin hedging their bets with the

other powers in the region which include the sectarian killers and the

terrorists.

What is the consequence of a failed Iraq? It seems to me that for

those who present no alternative other than Iraq needs to get its act

together and provide for its own security, a policy which I don't know

of anyone who agrees would succeed at this point in time, if that is

not going to succeed, then what is the consequence of a failed Iraq and

what is the consequence of the President's strategy failing?

It all gets back to what I said in the beginning, and that is, it

seems to me all Americans should want this strategy to succeed. Why

would anyone want the strategy to fail? Just to prove a political

point? That doesn't make sense when we have young men and women in

harm's way and a lot riding on it not just for Iraqis but also for our

national security. We should all want this strategy to work. We should

do everything in our power to help make it work, and that begins by

giving the plan a chance and not criticizing it before the strategy

even has a few days to work out. That is why the possibility of a

resolution, which is highly critical of the President's strategy and

suggests a different course of action, a timeline for leaving, is the

wrong strategy.

What is that alternative in terms of timeline? It simply reads as

follows:

That is the alternative, in an appropriately expedited timeline. That

is no alternative at all. That doesn't direct anybody to provide for

security in Iraq on any faster basis than we are already attempting. I

have heard no one criticize our training of the Iraqi forces or finding

or suggesting there is some other way to train them in a better way, in

a faster way. It takes time. We are doing the best we can.

The general who was in charge of creating that program, General

Petraeus, will be our general in charge again. I think, by all

accounts, he did a terrific job of setting up the program. We know it

takes a certain amount of time to train these Iraqi forces. We know the

country is not in a position to defend itself at this point. Why would

we want to set ourselves on a course to leave when we know they cannot

defend themselves?

The truth is, for the time being, we are going to have to remain

there to help secure the peace in Iraq, and that means we ought to give

the President's policy a chance to succeed, and all of us hope it will

succeed.