Mr. President, last evening President Bush spoke about

Iraq. His speech represented perhaps a change in tone but not a

fundamental change in strategy, and the American people were looking

for a fundamental change in strategy. They were particularly looking

for this change based upon the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group.

These are distinguished Americans who have dedicated themselves to

public service, bipartisan individuals who thoughtfully and carefully

looked at the situation in Iraq and made a series of proposals, most of

which the President apparently ignored.

The American people are deeply concerned about the course of our

operations in Iraq. They are incredibly supportive, as we all must be,

of the soldiers, the marines, the sailors, the airmen and airwomen who

are carrying out this policy, but they are deeply concerned. One of the

things that has characterized the President's approach to Iraq for so

many years has been the discussion of what I would describe as false

dichotomy--false choices. You can recall, in the runup to the conflict

in Iraq, the President said we have two choices--invade the country,

occupy it indefinitely, or do nothing. Of course, those were not all

the choices.

We had the ability to interject U.N. inspectors to do the things

which we thought were important, which is to identify the true status

of weapons of mass destruction--and that was rejected out of hand. We

had diplomatic options. We had limited military options. If, as was

suggested, there were terrorists lurking in the Kurdish areas, we could

have used the same approach as we used a few days ago in Somalia, a

preemptive targeted strike, targeted on those whom we had identified as

terrorists. All of that was rejected.

Then the President undertook a strategy which I think was deeply

flawed, which has led us to a situation now where the emerging threat

of Iran is much more serious. Iran has seen its strategic position

enhanced by the Bush strategy.

Of course, we know now the incompetence of the occupation of Iraq,

the decisions made in Washington about debaathification, about

dismantling the Iraqi Army, about spending so many months in denial of

the spreading insurgency have led us to this day. After all of that,

the American people were looking for something more than a so-called

surge.

I say so-called because this is not a surge. This is a gradual

increase in troops--20,000 troops approximately in the Baghdad area,

and additional Marine forces in Al Anbar Province. It is gradual

because our Army and Marine Corps are so stretched that they could not

generate an overwhelming force in a short period of time. In fact, due

to the policies of this administration, we lack an adequate strategic

reserve. Our Army Forces who are not deployed to Iraq are, in so many

cases, unready principally because of equipment problems, to rapidly

deploy. That I think is a stunning indictment of this administration.

But this gradual escalation is not, I think, going to accomplish the

goal and objective that the President talked about. One of the critical

aspects of this is that even though 20,000 troops will represent

billions of dollars of additional expense and put a huge strain on the

Army and Marine Corps, it is probably inadequate to the task of a

counterinsurgency operation in a city such as Baghdad, a city of

roughly 6 million people. Lieutenant General David Petraeus who has

been nominated to take over the operations in Iraq, replacing General

Casey, spent the last several months coauthoring a new field manual on

counter-insurgency, and one point they make in this field manual is

that counterinsurgency operations require a great deal of manpower.

At a minimum, the manual suggests 20 combat troops for every 1,000

inhabitants. That would mean Baghdad, with roughly a population of 6

million people, would require, according to the manual, 120,000 combat

troops. The additional 20,000 troops the President is suggesting will

hardly make that total of 120,000 combat forces. I know there will be

Iraqi forces there, but those forces have proven to date to be less

than reliable. They are motivated, not so much by a military agenda but

by sectarian agendas. They are often overruled by their political

masters in the Iraqi Government.

So as a result, the increase of forces is probably inadequate to

accomplish the mission the President wants. That is not according to

some subjective view; it is based upon the best thinking of the best

minds in the Army and the Marine Corps. For that reason alone, the

President, I think, has to ask himself after the speech, Why am I doing

it?

The other huge cost is not just in terms of money, in terms of stress

on

the regular Army and Marine Corps, but inevitably we are going to have

to reach out, once again, to our National Guard, those men and women

who have served so well, the citizen soldiers we call upon, again. They

will receive an additional burden to bear. Again, probably not in

sufficient numbers with a 20,000 deployment to achieve and guarantee

success.

The other factor here, too, is it will literally take the pressure

off Iraqi forces and Iraqi political leaders to do the job that they

must do. The issues in Iraq, the issues of counterinsurgency are

fundamentally more political than they are military. That is what we

are seeing today in Iraq. It requires political will. It requires

political competence to succeed. That will and confidence must be the

Iraqis' primarily, not that of the United States.

What I think is happening in Iraq today is this Government is

essentially a Shia government. They feel they are winning. They are

accomplishing the goals they won't articulate but that seem to be

obvious from the pattern of their behaviors: to marginalize the Sunnis

so they never again will be in a position of dominating Iraq,

consolidating Shia power in the south of Iraq, using probably the model

of the Kurds in the north. If you go to Iraq, the area which is the

most successful, prospering, is the Kurdish area. If you look at it and

ask why, they have their own militia, they have their own virtual

autonomy, they have access to oil, and they are doing quite well.

Again, that is what the Shia intend for themselves. That, of course,

leaves the Sunnis in an area where they face an existential conflict.

If things continue as they are today, they will be absolutely and

totally marginalized in Iraqi society. The Shia, still harboring fears

after years and years of domination and horrific tyranny by Sunni

leaders, are unwilling to compromise.

Unless we can forge some type of reasoned compromise, it is very

likely the future of Iraq is one of political fragmentation, if not

formal disintegration. I think the best and perhaps the only leverage

we have as a nation is to suggest to Shia leaders that we are not going

to give them an open-ended commitment.

I was pleased last evening to hear for the first time the President

say something my colleague Carl Levin has been stressing for almost 2

years now, a simple statement by the President to the effect that there

is not a blank check to the Iraqi Government. I fear those perhaps are

just words because in the same speech he is talking about increasing

our military forces there, increasing our support to the Iraqi security

forces. That is where we have our leverage. I don't think the President

is quite yet willing to use that leverage. More importantly, until we

do exert that leverage, the milestones the President talked about--the

milestones which were announced months ago by the Iraqis and still are

unfulfilled--will remain unfulfilled.

The political issues have not yet been resolved by the President.

Without political cooperation and political commitment by the Iraqi

Government, the number of forces we have in the country is a secondary

matter. What I think the Iraqi political leaders--the Shia government

and the Maliki government, with Hakim and the Badr organization and

Moqtada al Sadr and Maahdi army, all part of this government--what they

would be quite willing to do is to have us conduct operations in Sunni

neighborhoods in Anbar Province, but what will be left undone is

confronting, in a serious way, the Shia militias which are also part of

the problem.

If you go to Iraq, as many of my colleagues have, as I have, and you

talk to the Prime Minister or the Minister of the Interior, they

recognize there is an insurgency. It is a Sunni insurgency. They would

be very happy for us to conduct operations against the Sunnis. But they

are very unwilling to take the steps that are necessary to provide a

check on Shia militias and Shia operations in that country.

There is another long-term consequence of the President's speech

which may be, in the longer term, the most important. Any strategy of

the United States--increasing troops, redeploying troops, training

Iraqi forces--requires as an essential element, public support of the

people of the United States. The people spoke last November and in a

very convincing way said they need to see a change in course in Iraq.

They continue to speak--not just in the formal polls, but go out to the

coffee shops, walk the streets of this country, all across this

country, and you will discover the great concern and disquiet the

American public has about the President's policy in Iraq.

Nothing changed last evening, fundamentally. In fact, the President

actually predicted that this increase in troops is likely to create

more chaos in Baghdad, more casualties. That is the nature of

committing more troops to intense combat operations in an urban area.

The American public will have a very difficult time squaring that with

the assertion this is the way forward. I fear they might abandon

support for any type of significant commitment to the region.

This is a very dangerous precedent that could be emerging today. The

President, in disregarding popular opinion, is running the risk of

alienating that opinion in a way in which we cannot conduct serious

operations there for limited missions in Iraq and elsewhere.

We have a very difficult situation. We have a situation in which we

have to begin to manage the consequences of the administration's

failures. This is not a question of winning or losing. This is a

situation of managing a situation that is deteriorating rapidly and,

some fear, irreversibly. In doing that, we have to adopt a strategy

that is consistent with our resources--our military personnel, our

diplomatic resources, our economic resources, and the political support

of the American people.

That strategy rests in the context of a phased withdrawal of our

forces from Iraq, a refocusing of our mission to specific areas which

is more consistent with our national interests than trying to arbitrate

and settle the sectarian civil war. These missions would be training

Iraqi security forces so the country does not collapse because of chaos

and anarchy; focusing attention on those small elements of

international terrorists who are there, many of whom came after the

fall of Saddam--not before; of indicating to the regional powers that

we would not tolerate gross violations of the borders of Iraq or gross

intervention in the political affairs of Iraq. These are missions that

can and should be done, and they don't require an increase of troops.

In fact, I would suggest they require a redeployment of our troops.

The real challenge is--and the President alluded to it without

indicating to the American public confidently and surely that these

milestones are being accomplished--that the Iraqi Government, the

Maliki government, must undertake serious reconciliation. I think the

temper of that Government at the moment is not to do that because they

feel they do not have to.

Second, they have to begin to spend their own money. I was aware of

the significant money--upwards of $13 billion that the Iraqi Government

is sitting on--they are not spending. I hope the American people were

paying attention when the President announced the Iraqis are promising

to spend $10 billion for their own benefit. We have been pouring

billions of dollars into Iraq for reconstruction and economic

revitalization and the Iraqis have been sitting on billions of dollars

when their survival and the integrity of the country is at stake.

Something is wrong. They have suggested they will spend the money, but

only time will tell because so far they have been extremely reluctant

to spend resources unless they benefited their own sectarian community.

If that continues, this will be another idle promise.

There is one issue, too, that the President did not talk about which

is essential to progress in Iraq. It is not democracy and freedom--all

the buzzwords--because, frankly, what democracy means in Iraq to the

Shia is Shia control. What democracy means to the Sunni is Sunni

control. That is one of the reasons they are having sectarian struggle.

What we need now more than democracy and freedom and elections is

governmental capacity, ministries that actually can serve the people of

Iraq so they feel they have a stake in their Government and the

Government can respond to their basic needs. They have ministers in

Iraq today who are political operatives. The Minister of Health is a

devotee of Moqtada al Sadr and the

Maahdi army and will refuse to adequately supply hospitals in Sunni

areas. We have repeated examples where the ministries of Iraq are not

only nonfunctional but deliberately so. Until they help them, or

someone helps them, there won't be a government to rally around for the

Iraqi people because the Government provides nothing to them.

This is a long list of items that has to be accomplished. I am not

confident, after the President's speech, that any of this will be done

by the Iraqi Government, nor am I confident at all that an additional

20,000 troops in Baghdad will make a decisive military difference. I

believe the President has to go back to the drawing board to craft a

truly changed strategy that will be consistent with our strategic

objectives in the region, consistent with our resources, and consistent

with the will and desires of the American people. I hope he does that.