Mr. President, my distinguished colleague from Arizona is

speaking about a very important issue and one that we certainly will

have a discussion about and a debate about in this Congress in the

coming days, and that is as it should be. We are a democracy with

divided branches of Government, separation of powers. We have a

President, a legislative branch, a judicial branch, and there is a role

here for the legislative branch.

My colleague suggested this was a circumstance where some were simply

willing to criticize the President but offer no plan of their own. Then

he subsequently said the resolution that some of my colleagues will

offer in the Senate will advocate a different course of action. That is

a plan, I guess, isn't it? If one advocates a different course of

action than the President is advocating, it seems to me that is a plan.

I don't disagree with much of what those who have a different view

would say about these issues. Most of us want peace in Iraq. We want

the Iraqis to control their own destiny. We want the Iraqi troops to be

sufficiently trained so they can provide their own security. We all

share that goal. We all want our country to succeed in the missions.

Let me make one very important point. My colleague alluded to it in a

way different than I would respond to it. During the debate on the

floor of the Senate I don't think there will be a single Senator who

stands up and in any way says he wants us to withdraw support for

American troops. Speaking for myself--and I think for most other

Senators, perhaps every other Senator--I think Members who serve in

this Congress believe it is critically important to support our troops.

When we send men and women in our uniform to go to war, we are

obligated, it seems to me, to do everything to support them in their

mission.

So this debate is not about whether we will support those troops whom

we have asked to go to war in behalf of our country; we certainly will

do that. The debate will be about the President's

plan for a surge in troops or a deepening involvement in Iraq. It is a

worthy debate for us to have because I think this is obviously a

conflict that has gone on a long while, longer now than the Second

World War. We have had a lot of discussion with the military leaders in

the field about training Iraqi troops to provide for their own

security.

Let's review what has happened in Iraq.

Saddam Hussein ran Iraq. We now know he was a butcher. We knew it

then; we know it now. There are hundreds of thousands of skeletons in

mass graves, of the victims murdered by Saddam Hussein. But Saddam

Hussein doesn't exist anymore. He was executed. He has been buried.

There is a new constitution in Iraq, voted for by the Iraqi people.

There is a new government in Iraq selected by the Iraqi people. This

country belongs to Iraq, not to us. It is their country, not ours. The

security for their country is their responsibility, not ours. The

question for all of us is: When will the Iraqi people decide they are

able to provide for their own security?

My colleague says it is a matter of being patient with training the

Iraqi troops. Perhaps today there is going to be a young man or woman

who is going to enlist in the Marines and the Army and they will go to

training. It won't be very many months before they are fully trained

and maybe committed to the battlefield--6 months, 7 months, 8 months.

The question is: How long does it take to train an Iraqi army and Iraqi

security forces to provide security for their own country? Years? Can

they be trained, as American troops are trained, in months rather than

years? The answer, at least in the last several years, seems to have

been no.

It is very important for us to debate this question of our deepening

involvement in Iraq. We all know what is going on there. It is

sectarian violence, Shia on Sunni, Sunni on Shia. Seventy-five more

people were killed today in Shia neighborhoods, multiple bombings, we

are told by the news today, 160 wounded. The day before, dozens of

Iraqis were killed, and 25 American troops were killed in numerous

attacks. Our hearts break for all of them, particularly the American

troops, but also for everyone who is losing their life in this

conflict.

Suicide car bombers, simultaneous car bombings, beheaded bodies

floating in the Tigris River, bodies with holes drilled in the heads

and knees with electric drills, tortured, tortured bodies swinging from

lampposts in Iraq, we read. It is a cycle of grim violence, unlike any

most of us have ever seen. It is unbelievable.

Let me tell you what General Abizaid, who is in charge of CENTCOM,

said about 6 weeks ago. He came to the Congress--and this relates to

what my colleague had said and the debate we will have. General Abizaid

said this:

This isn't an approximation of what the top general said; it is

exactly what he told the Congress: I met with all of my top generals,

and I asked them the question, if we were to bring in more troops now,

does it add to our ability to achieve success? They said no. That's

what General Abizaid said.

Let me describe to you what General Abizaid said following that

comment. Again, this is 2 months ago in testimony before the Senate:

Less than 2 months ago, the top general said his top commanders in

Iraq all said no to bringing in more troops. Why? Because it will say

to the Iraqis: We will do the job. We will do what we would expect you

to do.

As we talk about deepening the American involvement in Iraq and the

issue of how many troops we are going to have in that battlefield, let

me turn to another issue. If we have 20,000-plus troops to send to

Iraq, what about Afghanistan?

Our military is, as all of us know, fairly overstretched. We are

calling up guardsmen and reservists and some of them second

deployments, some of them third deployments all across this country.

But in Afghanistan, which was the home of al-Qaida, where the Taliban

ruled and where we went first to route the Taliban and create a

democracy in Afghanistan, the Taliban, by all accounts, are now taking

hold once again and creating an even greater threat.

They are fighting hard to destabilize the Government of Afghanistan.

That was our first battle, to go into Afghanistan and kick the Taliban

out. We need more troops in Afghanistan now, not less, and yet my

understanding is the President's plan would divert troops we have in

Afghanistan to go to Iraq.

Let me read something that Mr. John Negroponte, the Director of

National Intelligence said last week. He testified before the Select

Committee on Intelligence, and here is what he said:

Al-Qaida is what poses the greatest threat to our interests,

including our homeland. Then he went on to say this. This is again John

Negroponte, Director of National Intelligence.

Let me reemphasize:

What does that mean? Osama bin Laden, do we know him? Yes. He is the

person who ordered--claimed and boasted--he ordered the attacks against

this country, killing thousands of innocent Americans. He still lives,

apparently, in a secure hideout, according to the top intelligence

chief in this country, in Pakistan. It seems to me the elimination of

the leadership of al-Qaida, the organization that attacked this

country, that murdered thousands of innocent Americans, ought to be the

primary interest of this country. That is why moving away from

Afghanistan and the related activities that ought to exist in Pakistan

to deal with what are called ``secure hideouts,'' the secure hideout

from which al-Qaida operates, that ought to be job No. 1 for this

country.

I don't understand. My colleague Senator Conrad and I offered an

amendment to the Defense appropriations bill last year on this subject.

Does anybody hear anybody talking about Osama bin Laden anymore? Or

perhaps better described ``Osama been forgotten'' these days? Nobody

wants to talk about it.

Finally, last week the Director of our intelligence in this country

said al-Qaida is the most significant threat to this country. The most

significant terrorist threat to this country is al-Qaida, and it

operates from a secure hideout in Pakistan. If that is true, what are

we doing, deciding to find 20,000 troops by pulling some of them out of

Afghanistan and moving them to Iraq? If those troops are available,

they ought to be dedicated to dealing with al-Qaida and bringing to

justice those who committed the attacks against this country. I will

have more to say about that at some point, but I did want to make note

of what the Director of Intelligence said last week that seems to be

almost ignored in this debate about Iraq.

I am going to be talking as well this week about the minimum wage. We

will have an aggressive discussion about that. That is going to be the

pending issue of the day.