Madam President, as I said late last week, it has been

52 months since military operations began in Iraq. Approximately 3,613

Americans have died and 25,000 have been wounded. More than 4 million

Iraqis have fled their homes, and tens of thousands, at a minimum, have

been killed. We have now been engaged in the war in Iraq longer than we

were in World War II.

With the surge well underway, violence in Iraq has reached

unprecedented levels and American troop fatalities are up 70 percent.

From all angles, the situation in Iraq is an absolute disaster, and the

administration's inability or unwillingness to recognize this reality

is diminishing our international credibility, straining our relations

with many foreign governments, and causing us to neglect weak and

unstable regions that could pose threats to our national security.

The administration's single-minded focus on Iraq is preventing us

from adequately confronting threats of extremism and terrorism around

the globe. The declassified NIE released just yesterday confirms that

al-Qaida remains the most serious threat to the United States and that

key elements of that threat have been regenerated or even enhanced. The

administration's policies in Iraq have also resulted in the emergence

of an al-Qaida affiliate that did not exist before the war--al-Qaida in

Iraq, or AQI. According to the NIE, al-Qaida's association with this

group helps it raise resources and recruit and indoctrinate operatives,

including for attacks against the United States.

Yet, while this report is further proof that the war in Iraq is a

distraction from our core goal of fighting those who attacked us on 9/

11, this administration and its supporters are still calling Iraq the

even though al-Qaida is a

global threat and AQI is one of a number of actors responsible for

violence in Iraq's self-sustaining sectarian conflict.

While our attention has been diverted and our resources squandered in

Iraq, al-Quaida has protected its safe haven in Pakistan and has

increased cooperation with regional terrorist groups. The sooner we

redeploy from Iraq, the sooner we can refocus our efforts and develop a

wide-ranging, inclusive strategy that would deny al-Qaida these

advantages.

I remind my colleagues that last November, our constituents spoke out

against this war in every way they possibly could. And as the situation

continues to deteriorate, they have repeated their call--they were

outside this building last night holding a candlelight vigil, and in

States around the Nation, to show their support for ending this war and

to tell President Bush and Senate Republicans to

I know my colleagues heard their voices last

November, and I am hopeful they heard them last night. It almost goes

without saying that they hear them every time they return home as well.

But, just like last week and the week before that, at the other end

of Pennsylvania Avenue, these pervasive calls are ignored as the

President continues to make it clear that nothing not the voices of his

citizens, not the advice of military and foreign policy experts, not

the concerns of members from his own party--will discourage him from

pursuing an indefinite and misguided war.

We can't put all the blame on the White House, however. An

overwhelming majority of Congress authorized this misguided war, and

now a far smaller but still determined minority

is allowing this war to continue, despite the wishes of the American

people, despite the fact that our military is overstretched, and

despite the fact that our presence in Iraq has been, according to our

own State Department

It is up to Congress to act because the President will not. It us up

to us to listen to the American people, to save American lives, and to

ensure our Nation's security by redeploying our troops from Iraq. We

have that power and responsibility and we must act now.

That is why I support the amendment offered by Senators Levin and

Jack Reed--an amendment with binding deadlines for both beginning and

ending redeployment and the only amendment we are likely to consider

that would take a strong step toward bringing our involvement in this

war to a close.

The Levin-Jack Reed amendment is not as strong as I would have liked,

but it does require the President to bring home our troops, starting in

120 days. I am encouraged that this amendment is bipartisan, and while

I wish it had the support of the entire Senate, the support of Senators

Smith, Hagel, and Snow is nonetheless an important development.

I call on other Republicans to follow their lead; there is no time to

waste. It is not enough to pass something that sounds good but doesn't

move us toward ending the war. Weak, feel-good amendments may give

people up here political comfort but that comfort won't last long we

can fool ourselves, but we can't fool the American people.

It is a tragic truth that the war in Iraq has become the defining

aspect of our engagement in this part of the world. Coupled with this

administration's inconsistent efforts to promote democracy and the rule

of law overseas, the war has alienated and angered those whose support

and cooperation we need if we are to prevail against al-Qaida and its

allies.

As long as the President's policies continue, Iraq will continue to

be what the 2006 declassified National Intelligence Estimate called a

``cause celebre'' for a new generation of terrorists. Meanwhile, al-

Qaida has expanded its relations with dangerous regional terrorist

groups.

The newest National Intelligence Estimate indicates that we may now

be facing the worst-case scenario in that our indefinite military

presence in Iraq has both allowed al-Qaida to reconstitute itself while

it has also served as a recruitment tool for a growing and scattered

global network of al-Qaida affiliates. It is becoming increasing

difficult for this administration to argue, as it continues to do, that

our presence in Iraq is doing anything but profoundly undermining our

national security.

Instead, we should be directing our attention and resources to

combating the global threat posed by al-Qaida and its affiliates. The

fight against terrorism is not conventional and requires better

intelligence, better cooperation with friends and allies, stronger

regional institutions, and more comprehensive policies designed to

reverse the conditions that might lead to the creation of safe havens.

We must prevent these safe havens from being established, including by

working to settle regional conflicts and ensuring adequate provision of

economic and development assistance so local populations can reject

terrorist organizations. We need regional strategies that address the

capabilities and policies of all affected countries, both bilateral and

multilateral. We must expand our assistance while ensuring that

corruption and threats to human rights and political liberties do not

undermine these efforts.

By redeploying our troops from Iraq, we can refocus on developing

these vital strategies. And by freeing up strategic and technical

capacity, we can better address other priorities that have not received

adequate attention, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and

Somalia. We can provide real international leadership to combat other

pressing enemies such as endemic poverty, HIV/AIDS, and corruption--all

of which can contribute to the kinds of instability where extremists

thrive. These global battles can't be won if the war in Iraq continues

to dominate our foreign policy and indefinitely drain vital security

resources.

As I have said before and as I will undoubtedly say again, the

administration's policies in Iraq are an unmitigated disaster. But we

can mitigate this disaster, lessen the massive burden imposed on our

troops, regain our credibility with the international community, and

make our Nation more secure. We can and must do that by redeploying our

troops from Iraq. Repairing the damage that has been done to our

national security will be difficult and time-consuming, and we can

start today by passing the Levin-Jack Reed amendment.

There is no reason to wait any longer. Members of this body have

claimed that in September we will have a clearer sense of whether the

``surge'' has succeeded and whether our policy needs to change. But we

already know what that report will tell us. We have heard it from

foreign policy and military experts and could even read it with our own

eyes in the Pentagon's first quarterly surge report or the White

House's Benchmark Assessment Report, which was released last week. The

surge was intended to create a ``window'' for political progress, but

significant political progress is still nowhere to be seen. We already

know there is no military solution to Iraq's problems, so now the

question is how long are we prepared to wait? How long are we prepared

to have our young men and women police a civil war where the struggle

over national identity and the distribution of power has long since

moved out of the Parliament building and onto the streets? How many

more brave young Americans will lose a limb or be killed while we tell

ourselves that another couple months will turn around 4 years of failed

policies? When are my colleagues on the other side willing to say that

enough is enough?

It has been a long night, and we have had some heated exchanges. It

appears that a minority of the Senate is prepared to prevent a majority

of the Senate--and the country--from doing what is long overdue:

putting an end to a war without end. This is not the first time that a

minority has prevented a majority from acting in this body. Indeed, I

have been on the other side of a few of those fights. But this is not a

question of senatorial prerogatives. I am not questioning the right of

Senators to prevent a vote on the Levin-Jack Reed amendment. I am,

however, questioning the wisdom of such a move, of allowing this

terrible mistake to continue for days, weeks, months.

I will continue working to bring this war to a close. As long as so

many of my colleagues refuse to listen to the American people, to

acknowledge that this war is hurting our country and making our Nation

more vulnerable, we will have more debates and more votes. Sooner or

later, we will end this war. And the sooner we do so, the sooner we can

start redeploying our service members from Iraq's civil war and

refocusing on a global campaign against a ruthless, determined enemy

whose reach extends far beyond Iraq.