Mr. President, I returned on Saturday evening from a trip

to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, and England. The trip was led

by a very dear friend of mine and a great leader of this Senate who

happens to be the Presiding Officer at the moment, Senator Warner of

Virginia, and it included Senator Sessions, Senator Thomas, Senator

Bingaman, Senator Salazar, in addition to myself.

I know if the Presiding Officer was allowed to speak in the position

in which he sits that he would be the first to acknowledge that this

was one of the most extraordinary trips either one of us has ever taken

in the 28 years we have served together in the U.S. Senate.

The focus of the trip was to assess the situation in Afghanistan and

Iraq. We also conveyed to the men and women of our Armed Forces the

extraordinary support for them in the Congress and throughout the

Nation, regardless of our debates and differences over Iraq policy.

In meeting with our troops, including many from my home State of

Michigan, it was they who lifted our spirits. As always, I came away

deeply impressed by the professionalism, dedication, and high morale of

our troops. They are truly America's finest.

The situation in Afghanistan is hopeful. President Karzai has led his

nation with a firm and steady hand. He has successfully, albeit

gradually, neutralized the warlords and demobilized and disarmed their

forces. The Taliban has indeed regrouped to some extent and, together

with a much weakened al-Qaida, are capable of causing casualties among

the Afghan Army and coalition and NATO forces, but they are not a

threat to the Afghan nation.

Meanwhile, the Afghan Army is growing stronger, the training of the

Afghan police is improving, a large number of provincial reconstruction

teams are helping with local governance, and NATO is assuming more of

the burden of providing security throughout the country. Serious work

does remain, including the need to deal with poppy cultivation and the

drug traffickers. But overall the situation in Afghanistan provides

grounds for optimism.

Sadly, the same cannot be said of Iraq. The situation in Iraq is

deeply troubling and threatens to grow worse. Since the recent attack

on the Golden Mosque in Samarra, there has been a huge increase in

sectarian violence. The increase is so significant that our senior

military leaders in Iraq say it has replaced the insurgent attacks on

Iraqi and coalition forces as the No. 1 security problem there.

Although there has been some progress in training the Iraqi Army,

even a stronger Iraqi Army cannot prevent a civil war. Only the

political and religious leaders and the police can do that. The police

are not making significant progress in coming together as a cohesive

force. In some critical areas, including Baghdad, where the militias

continue to dominate, the police are not reliable and are still likely

to respond to the sectarian calls of the clerics and the militias

instead of the government.

Do we need to succeed in Iraq now that we are there? Yes, because the

outcome there will have a major effect on the region and on our own

security. I define success as a stable Iraq with a government of

national unity supported by a reliable national army and police who are

not weakened by sectarian fissures.

To achieve that success, General Casey, the Commander of U.S. and

coalition forces in Iraq, reiterated to us that there is no military

solution to the violence without a political solution.

We need to do everything we can to help the Iraqis achieve a prompt

political solution, which means the quick formation of a government of

national unity involving representatives of the three main Iraqi

factions. It also means a highly sectarian individual would not be

heading up the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of the Interior. The

alternative to a prompt formation of a government of national unity by

Iraqi leaders is a continuation of this drift to all-out civil war.

In Baghdad we met with Prime Minister Jaafari, who was nominated by

the dominant Shiite faction--the United Iraqi Alliance--as their

candidate for Prime Minister in the new government. Although he was

confident that a national unity government would be formulated by the

end of April, his optimism was not widely shared by others we met.

Moreover, his one-vote victory for the nomination to continue on as

Prime Minister is being contested from both within and without the

Shiite coalition. I shared with him the letter to President Bush that

Senators Collins, Jack Reed, and I had written, the bottom line of

which is that:

I told him his ``end of April'' commitment to President Jaafari, in

my judgment, met that test of a prompt political settlement.

We also met with leaders from the two main Sunni Arab parties: Mr.

Hashimi and Mr. Samarai of the Iraqi Islamic Party, and Mr. Mutlak of

the Iraqi Dialogue Council. They were not optimistic about the

negotiations and forcefully advocated a decisional role rather than a

facilitating role for the United States in the negotiations. Mr. Mutlak

argued:

The Sunni leaders were also of the view that Iraq has been in the

midst of a civil war between the militias and the innocent Iraqis for

some time, and they voiced their concern about Iranian influence over

the Shiite parties. I told them, and I know the other members of our

codel, of our delegation told them as bluntly as we know how that their

dictator was removed at a great loss of American blood and treasure and

that the Iraqis and only the Iraqis will decide their own fate, and

that our continued presence should depend on their promptly choosing a

path of reconciliation and unity against violence and terror.

On our second day in Iraq we met with the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq,

Zalmay Khalilzad. One constant theme we found in Iraq and elsewhere in

the region was the high regard with which all hold our Ambassador, Mr.

Khalilzad. Unfortunately, although the parties are finally talking,

more than 3 months after the elections, Ambassador Khalilzad was not

encouraging that a political solution is in sight. He is putting modest

pressure on the Iraqis. For instance, he told the Iraqis our response

to continued deadlock of Iraq's political leaders might not be to their

liking. He has told the Iraqi political leaders: It is your decision,

and after you make it, we will make our own decision in response.

Although his statement is on the right track, it is still too subtle.

It is too oblique. The political leaders of Iraq are deadlocked,

feuding while Iraq descends toward all-out civil war. There is little

chance of achieving a government of national unity without our

pointedly and forcefully persuading the parties to make the compromises

necessary to achieve it.

But what is the leverage that could be used to pointedly persuade the

Iraqi leaders to make those needed compromises? We can't dictate to

them

who should be their leaders. That would undermine the President's

belatedly arrived at explanation for his decision to attack Iraq, which

is replacing a brutal dictator with a democracy. Yes, there should be a

need to apply pressure. The prospect of sectarian clashes and the

specter of civil war should be sufficient incentives on their own to

end the deadlock. But, so far, they don't appear to be.

To help break the political gridlock, a combination of carrots and

sticks is required. The carrot is the provision of economic development

funds, particularly from neighboring wealthy countries, on the

condition that a national unity government is created and produces a

coherent economic plan. The biggest stick is clearly telling the Iraqis

that our continued presence in Iraq is dependent upon their promptly

putting together a government of national unity.

Sadly, the rhetoric of the President and the administration has often

worked against the pressure which needs to be applied against the Iraqi

leaders.

The President recently asked the American people, for instance, for

their patience. I believe instead he should be telling the Iraqi

leaders bluntly and openly that the American people are understandably

downright impatient with Iraqi leaders fiddling while Baghdad is

burning.

The Secretary of State has said we are in Iraq as long as needed. I

believe she should be telling the Iraqi leaders that our continued

presence is dependent upon their doing what only they can do: reach an

agreement on a government of national unity. That political settlement

is not only the best hope, it is the only hope of ending the insurgency

and the sectarian strife. The pressure to reach an agreement on a

government of national unity needs to be applied clearly and

forcefully, pointedly and publicly, not just by President Bush but also

by the leaders of Iraq's neighbors.

In our meeting with the Prime Minister of Turkey, Mr. Erdogan, we

urged him to do just that, and he said he would. The leaders of all of

Iraq's neighboring countries need to do the same because an unstable

and civil war-torn Iraq threatens them even more than us.

Is there a risk in this course of forcefully pressing Iraqi leaders

to agree on a national unity government? Is there a risk in following

that course? The answer is yes. But there is a greater risk in

continuing on the current course of political gridlock while sectarian

fires threaten to burn out of control.

The President needs to act based on the reality that we confront in

Iraq. He recently said if there were a premature departure of American

troops that

Would become? Iraq is a place of grave instability, and to use the

words of Ambassador Khalilzad in an interview he gave with a London

newspaper:

My conclusion is this: President Bush needs to forcefully transmit a

message to the Iraqis in plain and simple language: your survival as a

nation depends on your working things out together. Your survival as a

nation is in the hands of your political leaders, not our military.

Along with Senator Collins and Senator Jack Reed, as I indicated, we

wrote the President on March 10, 2006, and ended with the following

thoughts:

We ended:

We all want to succeed in Iraq, regardless of the positions we took

going in. Whether we favored or opposed our intervention, and whether

we are critics or supporters of the administration's policies since

then, we all want to succeed. We all want to try to leave Iraq in

better condition, obviously, than we found it. But to maximize the

chances of success, we need to maximize pressure on the leaders of Iraq

to end their political deadlock. The insurgents and outside terrorists

are not going to be defeated and civil war is not going to be averted

if Iraqi leaders are at war with themselves. They should know that if

they squander the chance to bring political unity to Iraq, we cannot

and will not protect them from their own folly.

Let me close by thanking our Presiding Officer for leading, again,

one of the most extraordinary visits to a foreign country that I have

ever participated in. His leadership was essential to making the visits

that we were able to make and for all of us to come back with greater

information and with thoughts about where the future lies.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent at this time that the letter

that I referred to from the three Senators be printed in the Record.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in

the Record, as follows: