Mr. President, I wish to take this opportunity to talk a

little bit about what I think is a very important debate, and that is

about Iraq war policy. Next week, I believe, General Petraeus and

Ambassador Crocker will be coming to the Congress to brief us about the

situation as they see it. I think most of us in the Senate are very

anxious to hear what our Ambassador has to say and our leading general

in Iraq. There are GAO reports about benchmarks. The idea that we are

trying to evaluate performance and progress in Iraq is a good thing.

Some of the benchmarks have not been met, apparently, some have. It

depends upon how you measure. The one thing I would caution my

colleagues to not forget is that the biggest benchmark is whether our

presence in Iraq should be maintained in terms of our national security

interests or should we leave. If we do leave, how does that affect our

long-term security interests?

I think the biggest issue facing each Senator is how they view the

war in Iraq. This is a legitimate debate. There are two different ways

of looking at the engagement in Iraq. Some Senators believe our

military presence in Iraq at such levels is propping up the Iraqi

Government; they are relying too much upon us, they are putting off the

hard decisions because we are doing the fighting and they can kind of

take their time, and that we should put more pressure on the Iraqi

Government by beginning to withdraw troops.

There is another view that any presence in Iraq is creating more

terrorism than it is preventing, that our presence in Iraq is creating

instability and problems for the Mideast as a whole, and that we should

basically get our eye back on the ball, Afghanistan, al-Qaida

operations in other areas.

Those are a couple of views. I hope I fairly summarized it. I do not

want to put words in people's mouths. But I think there are a couple of

ways of looking at Iraq.

There is another way. It is my way--it does not mean it is right, it

is just the way I have come out on this--that Iraq, to me, is part of a

global struggle, not just an isolated event.

Whether we should have gone into Iraq is sort of a moot question. The

question for the country is: What happens in Iraq in terms of our

national security interests? Does it really matter? I would argue that

the enemy we are facing in Iraq is threefold. There is sectarian

violence within the country. There is Sunni-Shia violence, or people

within the Shiia community using violence to try to get the upper hand

politically.

There are people, Sunni insurgents, who do not want to have a

democracy. They do not want to have a representative government. They

are trying to achieve power by the use of violence. So there is

definitely some sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shias. That is

very real.

But there is also an element in Iraq called al-Qaida. Their goal is

not to dominate the Shiia population in Iraq. Their goal is much

broader. It is to make sure that representative government does not

take hold in the Mideast in a way that would allow religious tolerance.

Their goal is to make sure no representative government would spring up

where a woman would have a say about her children.

You know, we are all over the world militarily. You can see what is

going on in Germany today. But al-Qaida chose to come to Iraq, I

believe not because of what we are doing there or the fact that we are

there, but because of what the Iraqi people may try to do. I do believe

al-Qaida's international leadership has gone to Iraq to organize

extremist forces within that country, religious extremists, because

they fear more than anything else another Muslim nation, Islamic

nation, Arab nation, being able to come together and live through

representative democracy. That is why they are there.

If they can defeat this effort at moderation, destabilize this

government and drive us out, I think our worst days lie ahead. No

matter how we wish to view Iraq, there is no doubt in my mind what that

enemy would say, al-Qaida international would say: They beat America in

the Land of the Two Rivers. Bin Ladin has called on all of those who

believe as he does: Go to Iraq, join the fight, because now is the time

to win a battle in the third world war and America must be defeated,

not the Iraqi Shiia population but America.

Now the Iranian involvement in Iraq. I have been on an 11-day tour

over there as a Reserve lawyer. That was a wonderful experience, a very

small contribution on my part. I learned how hard people work and how

smart they are. I am awed by our military. I think every Senator shares

that view. But one of the things I have learned from working on rule-

of-law programs is how deeply involved the Iranian Quds force and other

organizations are in funding militia groups.

The question for us all is why should Iran be involved in trying to

fund groups dedicated to killing Americans? The Lieberman amendment

that passed without objection in the authorization debate in July was a

damning indictment of the Iranian involvement in Iraq. The question

must be asked and answered: Why? Why does Iran want to destabilize this

government? Why are they supporting extremist groups, mostly in the

Shia community but not exclusively, designed to kill Americans? Why are

they providing aid and comfort to those groups who wish to destroy our

forces?

I argue they view Iraq as a threat, just as al-Qaida does, if the

Iraqi Government is able to stabilize itself. The Sunni and Shia Arabs

coming together, along with their Kurdish colleagues, to form a

representative government that will allow the people to elect their

leaders is the biggest threat to Iranian theocracy. They are involved

in Iraq from their own self-interest, not the interests of the Iranian

people, but the self-interest of the radical leadership within Iran.

They understand clearly if Iraq is able to stabilize itself and create

a moderate form of government, representative in nature, their

nightmare just begins. That is why they are trying to drive us out.

The President of Iran, a questionable character at best, said, I

think, last week, they stand ready to fill the vacuum created when we

leave. I argue that we need not leave a vacuum that Iran can fill.

There are three enemies: al-Qaida, sectarian violence, and the

Iranian elements trying to destabilize the Iraqi Government. One of the

biggest problems we have had since the fall of Baghdad is we didn't

have enough troops to provide security. After about five or six visits,

it was clear to me that the situation was deteriorating in Iraq. Before

the surge, I came back more depressed after each visit. The level of

violence grew and the secure environment deteriorated.

Now we have a new strategy. We have put more combat power in place.

It has made a real difference on the security front. Anbar Province,

the western part of Iraq where the Sunnis dominated 6 months ago, was

declared lost. It was an al-Qaida safe haven. We have heard the story

time and time again. The news of Anbar is not so much that we beat al-

Qaida military, not so much that the Sunni Arabs turned on al-Qaida,

joined the fight with us against al-Qaida. That is understandable given

the way that al-Qaida treated the population in Anbar. What is the most

exciting and encouraging is that in 2007 over 12,000 people have joined

the local police force in Anbar. The sons of Anbar were called upon by

the sheiks to take up arms by joining the police. This new police

presence, once it is trained and equipped, will allow Anbar Province to

be held by Iraqis.

More encouraging than that, not only are people in Anbar beginning to

join institutions that would allow al-Qaida to be defeated in a

permanent fashion, they are beginning to reach out to Baghdad, and

there is a movement going on between the Maliki government and

leadership in Anbar to try to find a relationship where Baghdad is seen

by the people of Anbar as a place you can do business. There is a lot

of money being spent now by the central government on rule-of-law

projects in Anbar. There is an old palace of one of the sons of Saddam

that is going to be converted into a legal center where you can have

terrorism courts, basic civil trials. You will have housing for judges

that will be secure so they won't be assassinated. You will have a

police training center there. There is a lot going on in terms of a

relationship between Baghdad and Anbar that could lead to

reconciliation.

It is very true the political progress we had hoped for at the

national level has not yet transpired. But what has astounded me is the

amount of local reconciliation going on. Better security has led to

better choices. People now feel more secure. They are telling us where

al-Qaida operatives are hiding. They are giving us more information

than we have ever received before about how al-Qaida operates, and

other extremist groups. People are getting more confident to speak out.

More than anything else, they are just war weary.

The one thing I have learned on this trip that was more abundant than

any other is that Iraqis at the local level, in provinces all over the

country, are very war weary. They are trying to bring the country

together, their local communities together. They are tired of the

killing and the dying.

So as we listen to what Ambassador Crocker has to say, and General

Petraeus, we should be mindful of the challenges. To me, the successes

are obvious, but the challenges are equally obvious. I never said, for

the last 3\1/2\ years before the surge, that things were going great in

Iraq because, to me, they weren't. Things were getting worse. It was

obvious they were. But I do see a turnaround. I think the surge has

accomplished some things militarily that have led to better choices,

and there is an effort to reconcile the country from the bottom up. It

is very real.

The big pressure being applied to Baghdad is not what Senator Graham

says or what any other Senator from the United States may say about the

Maliki government. The pressure I see on the ground is coming from the

people themselves. The people are war weary. They would like their

representatives in Baghdad to come together and create a stability that

they haven't known for 4 years.

I am hopeful there will be political breakthroughs. Sunday a week ago

the five major players in Iraq recommitted themselves to a plan to come

back together, reform the government, and reconcile the Iraqi people,

passing major legislation. Debaathification, the ability of Sunnis to

hold jobs in the government, is a big piece of legislation that would

transform Iraq. Local elections, allowing local people to pick their

governors and representatives rather than Baghdad politicians making

those appointments, if there were local elections, the Sunnis would

participate in large numbers. In 2005, they boycotted the election. Now

they are ready to engage in politics.

I predict that based on the success of the surge militarily, the

efforts of local reconciliation are real, that they are going to move

up to the national level, and soon, very soon, we will have some

breakthroughs in Baghdad in terms of political benchmarks that will

transform the country. That is my hope, my desire. The way we can

achieve that is to pour it on, continue the surge, let it run its

course. It has been in place now, I think, since April. Let's keep

pouring it on militarily, politically, and economically. We have the

enemy on the mat. Let's don't let them up. Morale is sky high. Now is

the time for America to exercise good judgment, long-term thinking, and

reinforce Iraq instead of withdrawal.

The message to withdraw, no matter how well intended, will not push

Iraqi politicians to do anything faster. It will encourage an

insurgency that is not being diminished.

Those are the issues that face the Senate as we await news from Iraq.

Let's concentrate on the long term. The year 2008 will be here before

we know it, but the decisions we make about Iraq will have consequences

long after the election of 2008.

I yield the floor.