Mr. President, I wish to follow on my distinguished

colleague's remarks regarding the situation in Iraq.

I had the opportunity to visit there a week ago today. I went to Iraq

because I wanted to see for myself, on the ground, the conditions there

in advance of General Petraeus's and Ambassador Crocker's report. I am

happy to report I believe what I saw was significant military progress.

My first stop on the visit was in Tikrit. I got a full briefing there

of the conditions in this area, which was Saddam Hussein's birthplace,

a place that was well known as a place of a lot of al-Qaida and Sunni

insurgent activity.

This area was under control. This area was moving in the right

direction. Significant progress has been made in pacifying and bringing

Tikrit to a better situation.

I had a very interesting visit then to Patrol Base Murray. Patrol

Base Murray is about 12 to 14 kilometers south of Baghdad by the Tigris

River. It is an area that was totally controlled by al-Qaida a few

weeks ago. Our brave men and women in uniform moved in as the last

brigade of the surge. See, the surge began in the middle of February, I

guess, but it did not conclude until the last brigade reported for

duty, and that was in early June, late May. This brigade, the Stryker

force, moved into this area under very difficult circumstances, and

they have had a battle on their hands. But their commanders reported to

us that under the most difficult of circumstances, they have made

incredible progress, and that area is beginning to turn and turn

dramatically. They are working with the locals. I spoke with an Iraqi

gentleman who is cooperating and working with our forces there in

trying to bring a normalcy of life to people who live in this part of

Iraq and is making progress. It is working not without some losses, not

without the grief of losing one of our valued soldiers and many

casualties, but at the same time progress has been made.

Under the most difficult of circumstances and intense heat, their

morale is incredibly high. The fact is that by all measures, this is a

successful outcome to this particular aspect of our surge. The surge is

doing precisely what it was intended to do, to clear and sustain and

work with the locals as partners. All of those things seem to be

working as intended, as General Petraeus laid out.

I had the opportunity to spend some time with General Petraeus and

Ambassador Crocker to hear their assessment of the situation and hear

some indication of what their report might yield. While we certainly

need to allow them to speak for themselves when they come, I did get

the definitive impression that the metric they utilized to sense and

see whether, in fact, progress is being made, all seem to be moving in

the right direction--not evenly, not without setbacks, but certainly

significant progress is being made.

The strategy has shifted dramatically. It so happened that as we were

shifting our strategy, al-Qaida and their excesses had been more than

the local Iraqi communities could stand, and so we have had a

confluence of interests, as many Iraqi leaders and tribal leaders and

provincial leaders have turned against al-Qaida, understanding the way

of al-Qaida is not the way that would be best for the Iraqi people. So

this is a good confluence. This confluence has brought about the kind

of incredible results the Senator from Missouri was speaking of in Al

Anbar Province. So I believe a political reconciliation is ultimately

the only way in which this will be a successful outcome. But the

conditions on the ground are beginning to be such so as to allow the

kind of a peaceful country to then begin the difficult process of

political reconciliation.

There is no question that the Maliki Government has not delivered as

hoped, but at the same time, some hopeful signs are beginning to

emerge. There is no question the political progress lags behind the

military progress. But I would expect it always would be so. The reason

the military surge went ahead is so there could be the conditions for

political progress.

Over the last several weeks, there have been meetings that have

resulted in the beginnings of what I believe to be the political

accommodations that need to take place. I think particularly important

are the debaathification law and also the law that would allow for

local and provincial elections. These

will go a long way toward setting the stage for the kind of political

reconciliation that ultimately will make Iraq a peaceful country.

I wish to touch a moment on the report by General Jones on the

conditions of the Iraqi military. I got a very positive assessment from

General Petraeus. Their casualty rate is 3 to 1 to ours. They are

taking the fight to the enemy, and they apparently are conducting

themselves in stellar fashion.

However, they do need our help and will continue to need our help. I

think it is important we note, as General Jones reports, that while he

sees progress by the Iraqi military, surely they are going to be

needing our help in logistics and air cover and things such as that for

some time to come.

There is a big difference between them taking the brunt of the fight,

which I think they are poised to do in the months to come, and still

continuing to need the kind of backup and support that undoubtedly will

take longer for them to build. It is a big difference for our military

to be assisting in logistics than it is to be at the front of the

battlefield. I think the Iraqis might be in a position to do so. I do

not think there is any question that our goal is a successful Iraq, an

Iraq that will not be a safe haven for al-Qaida, nor will it give Iran

the kind of political control over this country that would be

cataclysmic to the security and stability of the region. That is our

goal.

As a result of that goal being achieved, then we will be able to

withdraw our troops. But the goal ought to not be troop withdrawal at

all costs. That would be a mistake for our country. It would be a

mistake for the region. I believe that while progress is difficult and

the sacrifices are great, that enough progress is being made for us to

understand the way forward is a way of continuing involvement there

until such time as Iraq has reached the point of stability that they

can govern themselves and also provide for their own security.

I yield the floor.