Mr. President, I had hoped to offer an amendment today to

this year's Defense authorization bill regarding Iraq. I understand the

leadership has decided to act on the Levin-Reed amendment before

considering other amendments to this legislation. Given the existing

parliamentary situation, I am not confident there will be an

opportunity to get an up-or-down vote on my amendment or, for that

matter, any other amendments that meaningfully mandates a change of

course with respect to the administration's policy in Iraq.

It is deeply troubling and it saddens me that in the Senate, on the

most critical issue of our day, we cannot consider, debate or vote on

amendments affecting the lives and well-being of our servicemen and

women and the conduct of U.S. foreign policy in the most troubled spot

in the world today. I believe those who refuse to allow this Senate to

vote on this critical issue do a grave disservice to the American

people by enabling the President to continue with his failed strategy

in Iraq.

Every additional day we ``stay the course'' in Iraq, our Nation is

less safe and the people of Iraq get further away from coming together

to fashion a political and diplomatic solution to their civil conflict.

Our men and women in uniform have served this Nation valiantly in Iraq

and Afghanistan, and they will continue to do so, I am confident, until

our political leaders see the error of their judgment in this case and

begin the process of drawing down U.S. troops in Iraq.

It is imperative, I believe, we change course in Iraq immediately. I

think this is vitally important for our country and the well-being of

that part of the world. Sadly, the President and his allies stand in

the way of that goal. Support for the President's policy erodes as each

passing day unfolds with more violence and chaos in Iraq.

I predict the day will come when Congress will have the courage to

say enough is enough, but, sadly, it would not be before more American

lives are lost or more wanton destruction occurs in the beleaguered

nation of Iraq.

Let me speak briefly about the amendment I had hoped to offer--still

hope to offer--and which I would like to offer at the earliest

opportunity if, in fact, this logjam breaks. My amendment seeks to

accomplish two critical tasks. First, to bring the Iraq war to a close

by ending the financing of combat operations, mandating a phased

redeployment of combat forces from Iraq, and ensuring the

administration actually carries out that redeployment.

Second, the amendment proposes to redirect any savings realized from

a reduced military presence in Iraq, to restore the readiness of our

very war-battered National Guard and armed services. I strongly believe

we must not wait any longer to achieve either task.

Now is the time for us to make difficult choices. Now is the time for

the Senate to enact legislation that, I believe, will hold this

administration accountable to this policy.

I support the Levin-Reed amendment, and I thank both our colleagues,

the authors of that amendment, for demonstrating leadership in trying

to move this body one step closer to bringing this disastrous war to a

close. It is my hope that their amendment will do that, but I remain

concerned about some aspects of that amendment--the extended delay in

commencing redeployment and the absence of any funding linkage to

redeployment. Based on past experiences with this administration, my

concern is the President will simply ignore the legislation proposed by

the chairman of the Armed Services Committee and the senior Senator

from Rhode Island.

It has been quite difficult to track the ever-changing justifications

for continuing our combat operations in Iraq, including the surge, and

there appears to be no end in sight.

First, the administration simply refused to admit there was no

military solution in Iraq or that Iraq was in a State of civil war.

Then, instead of acting upon a unique chance to implement the

bipartisan Baker-Hamilton Commission, which Congress supported,

Secretary Rice explained that the administration was implementing a

surge tactic, but assured us that it was an Iraqi plan. ``Most

importantly,'' she claimed, ``the Iraqis have devised their own

strategy, and our efforts will support theirs.''

Our country was told that despite the catastrophic policy failures of

this administration up until that point, that the surge would take time

to work and that we couldn't judge its success until U.S. forces had

``surged'' to their maximum levels--and that would take up to 6 months.

But that the surge is at full force, and we are told yet again that

the time isn't right to make a judgment about the success or failure of

the administration's policy. Now we are told we must wait until

September to determine the success of the surge. I strongly suspect, as

I stand here in July, that as September draws near the administration

will once again come up with some additional arguments to delay the day

of reckoning on the policy in Iraq.

I do not need any more time, or any more reports and briefings to

confirm what most of us already know. The American people and the Iraqi

people don't need any more time to realize that the administration's

Iraq policy, including the surge, has been a failure. With the

exception of a handful in this body, I have not said anything that most

of my colleagues do not believe themselves. Why, then, are we waiting?

As we wait yet another 2 or 3 months to decide what most of us here

have already concluded, while disagreeing about how best to achieve

this result, there is a consensus that has emerged that I think is

probably more than a supermajority. After all the time waiting here,

our servicemen and women and the beleaguered people of Iraq will pay an

awful price indeed, as we fool around and dicker while deciding to come

to the conclusion we have all basically reached already.

The highly respected International Crisis Group recently released a

report on Iraq which examined the complex reasons for the current

political violence in Iraq, and concluded that any surge based on a

purely military operation with a simplistic view of the bloodshed's

origins was destined for failure.

We mustn't sacrifice any more lives, we shouldn't countenance any

more bloodshed, and we shouldn't support the continuation of the failed

escalation of a disastrous policy. The April-May American death toll is

a new 2-month record. The civilian casualty rate in Iraq is at an all-

time high. Overall violence in Iraq is up and, according to the Iraqi

Red Crescent, the number of internally displaced Iraqis has quadrupled

since January. In fact, the Iraqi Red Crescent warns that there is

currently a human tragedy unprecedented in Iraq's history.''

As recent GAO reports have highlighted what we all intuitively have

concluded--that there has been little progress on the key detailed

provisions of Iraq's hydrocarbon law, let alone on reforming the Iraqi

constitution, on debaathification, or on a host of other essential

political components to a functioning Iraqi government, focused on

reconciliation. In fact, Foreign Policy magazine recently released

their ``failed state index'' and Iraq rose to No. 2 on that index,

closely behind Sudan.

The President told the American people that the surge of troops into

key cities in Iraq was being executed in order to provide the Iraqis

with some political breathing space to start the reconciliation

process. Secretary Rice explained that ``the most urgent task now is to

help the Iraqi government establish the confidence that it can and will

protect all of its citizens, regardless of their sectarian identity,

and that it will reinforce security with political reconciliation and

economic support.''

But none of that has happened--and falsely claiming that it has,

won't make us safer, won't secure Iraq, won't secure our interests in

the region, and won't rebuild our military.

As my friend Senator Lugar, the ranking member of the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee said recently

I fully agree with my friend and colleague from Indiana.

That is why my amendment also calls on the administration to appoint

a high-level special envoy to Iraq to engage in a new diplomatic

offensive--exactly what the Baker Hamilton Commission called for over 6

months ago. It is imperative that we engage Iraqi leaders, regional

leaders and international organizations such as the United Nations and

the Arab League to promote reconciliation and stability in Iraq. I know

of no other way this is likely to occur.

This administration has long neglected the key diplomatic and

political aspects of the conflict in Iraq, despite the calls of many of

us, including my good friend Senator Hagel, who recently outlined a

plan to ``internationalize'' our efforts to help Iraqis reach political

reconciliation, including appointing a U.N. Security Council-backed

international mediator.

The amendment offered by Senators Levin and Reed also calls for such

a mediator, which I fully support.

But, despite the fact that there is no military solution to this

conflict, which we have said for now almost 3\1/2\ years, this

administration and too many in the Congress are still wedded to only

military solutions. In fact, these defenders of the Iraq war continue

claim that we are in Iraq to fight al-Qaida, just like they continue to

falsely claim that al-Qaida had links to Saddam Hussein.

But according to a recent article by Michael Gordon, the coauthor of

Cobra II:

Moreover, according to recent media accounts, it is the Mahdi Army, a

Shiite militia led by the radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, not al-Qaida

in Mesopotamia that poses the greatest risk to American troops in

Baghdad. Yesterday, the Washington Post reported that the Mahdi Army's

frequent and brazen attacks on U.S. soldiers also appear to challenge

the idea that the Mahdi Army has been lying low to avoid confrontations

with Americans.

Perhaps most frustrating of all, while feverishly attempting to find

linkages between Osama bin Laden and Iraqi insurgents, the

administration has taken its eye off the ball of the bigger threats

posed by looming terrorists having little or nothing to do with Iraq.

The GAO recently slammed the administration's anti-terrorism efforts

in a report entitled ``Law Enforcement Agencies Lack Directives to

Assist Foreign Nations to Identify, Disrupt and Prosecute Terrorists.''

The report found that there is a tremendous deficit of communication

and coordination among key U.S. agencies, which in turn severely

hampers our efforts at fighting international terrorism and aiding

foreign governments in doing so.

Six years after 9/11, this administration has singularly focused on

Iraq, while failing to effectively fight international terrorism. It

may be true that for the Bush administration that Iraq is the central

front in their ``war on terror'', but this misplaced focus has made

America less secure as a result.

Simply put, we must stop the downward spiral in Iraq, and refocus our

efforts at effectively and robustly combating extremism and terrorism

around the world--and my amendment would begin to do just that. Why is

that the case?

Because my amendment sets clear timelines for the phased redeployment

of our troops out of Iraq, with three specific exceptions for

activities that are critical to our national security interests and the

interests of Iraq: First, conducting counterterrorism operations in Iraq,

targeted at al-Qaida in Mesopotamia; second, training and equipping

Iraqi forces; and third, force protection for U.S. personnel and

infrastructure.

This amendment also provides a specific timeline for all combat

forces to redeploy out of Iraq, aside from the three exceptions I just

mentioned, by April 30, 2008.

To ensure that this process gets underway without any stonewalling by

the administration or anyone in his administration, my amendment sets

an interim deadline of December 31, 2007, at which point at least

50,000 troops must have been redeployed out of Iraq.

Failure to meet this initial milestone will result in a funding

penalty. The amendment would withhold 25 percent of the fiscal year

2008 military budget for Iraq-related activities until the President

certifies that he can meet the overall April 30, 2008, deadline.

Ultimately, this amendment calls for the redeployment of

approximately 90,000 combat troops within the next 9 months, leaving

about 70,000 to complete the three non-combat missions that I have

already outlined.

The redeployed forces would be comprised of a majority of the

deployed Army brigade combat teams and the Marine Expeditionary Force

currently in theater.

Now, some may say that such redeployment is not logistically

achievable within the timeframes laid out in the amendment.

However, I want to remind my colleagues that in the ramp up to the

first gulf war, the Department of Defense coordinated the movement of

over 500,000 troops and 10 million tons of cargo and fuel in the same

timeframe that this amendment grants to redeploy a force one-fifth the

size.

In January 1991, alone, the Transportation Command moved

approximately 132,000 troops, 1 million tons of cargo, and over 1

million tons of fuel. If it is possible to coordinate the logistics to

go to war, it is certainly possible, in my view, to get our troops out

of harm's way and bring our military involvement in this civil war to a

close.

Of course, there is always a concern about the cost of conducting a

redeployment. Senator Conrad, now chairman of the Budget Committee,

asked this very question to the Congressional Budget Office in 2002,

requesting an assessment of the costs of the Iraq war; including the

eventual redeployment of our forces. The CBO concluded that the

redeployment of our forces to their home bases would cost approximately

$7 billion, less than the cost of 1 month of ongoing operations in

Iraq.

Can we trust this figure? The very same report notes that monthly

costs for the war would run between $6 billion and $9 billion per

month--that was in 2002; which is exactly what we saw until the

incursion of additional surge related costs.

Up until now, the cost of the war in Iraq has been mainly measured in

the number of lives lost and U.S. Treasury spent--and rightly so. Mr.

President, 3,600 brave American service members have been killed, tens

of thousands of Iraqis have lost their lives, and Congress has approved

approximately $450 billion.

But there is yet another cost of war--our military's readiness.

While long, arduous deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan are testing

the morale of our troops in the field and their families, they are also

taxing critical stocks of aircraft, vehicles and equipment that our

military needs to prepare for other challenges in the 21st century.

According to recent military reports, two-thirds of the U.S. Army is

unable to report for combat duty, and the Army's top generals have said

that if the administration continues to fail to meet these needs, the

situation could further deteriorate.

The situation for our National Guard is even worse. According to

National Guard Bureau Chief, LTG Steven Blum, ``88 percent of the force

that are back here in the United States are very poorly equipped today

in the Army National Guard.'' Such a statistic is unconscionable to

me--and it affects the National Guard units in every State of every

last Senator in this Chamber.

My amendment will take steps to remedy this dire situation and begin

to rebuild our military. This debate is

about priorities. Will we continue to fund a failed strategy, in my

view, in Iraq that is leaving us less secure and that is hollowing out

our military?

Or will we meet our commitments to our service members and our

Nation, by restoring the readiness of our forces which have been

severely damaged by this administration's policies?

In my view, the answer is simple. Our military's top generals and

admirals have submitted to Congress lists of critical military

priorities that would not be funded under the President's fiscal year

2008 budget proposal.

Billions of dollars a week are being squandered in Iraq, while our

Nation's military is calling out for additional resources to repair the

damage caused by the administration's policies.

My amendment therefore reprioritizes our defense budget to rebuild

our military. It stops financing combat missions in Iraq and redirects

funding to meeting priorities for the armed services.

Savings made available by downsizing our force in Iraq would be

invested in items identified by each of our military's Service Chiefs.

Funding levels for these items would not exceed the amounts specified

in their official fiscal year 2008 unfunded requirements lists

submitted to Congress earlier this year.

The Army Chief of Staff has found over $10 billion in critical

shortfalls, including funding for specially armored trucks known as

MRAPs or mine resistant ambush protected vehicles; night vision

goggles, and bomb disposal gear.

The Marine Corps' ``unfunded requirement list'' submitted by the

Commandant includes over $3 billion for similar priorities as well as

new helicopters; communications gear and training equipment.

The Navy's list totals over $5.6 billion, including helicopters,

sailor housing, and aircraft maintenance.

The Air Force's unfunded priorities, totaling over $16 billion,

includes much needed resources to modernize radar systems and restore

our fleet of cargo aircraft to help redeploy our troops and their

equipment.

The National Guard Bureau Chief has identified over a billion dollars

needed to begin rebuilding Guard forces across the United States--to

replace and repair vehicles, aircraft, and personal gear, necessary for

homeland security missions.

The amendment I would like to offer would allow for funding to

restore National Guard equipment readiness. Due to the administration's

mismanagement, the National Guard is facing a $38 billion equipment

shortfall, according to General Blum.

A recent report by the U.S. Commission on the National Guard and

Reserves disclosed that the administration's policies have actually

endangered the Guard's abilities to perform both their overseas and

homeland defense missions. Under orders by the administration, the

National Guard troops have been forced to leave their State's equipment

in Iraq and Afghanistan for our troops rotating into combat theaters.

Many of their military vehicles and aircraft are being worn down or

destroyed in battle, but any critical equipment that may have survived

is simply being transferred to other units coming into Iraq and

Afghanistan.

In my home State of Connecticut, the adjutant general, MG Thaddeus

Martin, recently reported that equipment shortages exceed $200 million

in my State. This includes more than 200 humvees, 21 large support

vehicles and tankers and heavy-cargo vehicles, over 600 personnel and

crew-served weapons systems, over 1,500 night-vision devices, and even

one medium-lift helicopter.

What does all of this mean? It means that we are short of equipment

to respond to natural or manmade disasters here at home, short of

equipment for training, short of equipment to maintain the standard of

maintenance rotation for equipment currently in the field, short of

equipment for units deploying into harm's way--short of equipment to

protect the American people themselves.

The Government Accountability Office highlighted this very important

point in testimony released on October 20, 2005, and I quote it. It

stated:

This data alone should demonstrate to everyone unequivocally that

each of us has to fulfill our obligations to our warfighters. Now is

the time to begin the rebuilding process. In my view, the sooner we

redeploy out of Iraq, get our military out of that situation, the

sooner we can redirect these vital funds to rebuild our forces here at

home.

None of our choices are easy. I don't suggest by my remarks here that

they are. But they are clear choices. It is about time we made them. To

govern is to choose the policy that is best for our Nation, even in the

face of extreme difficulty. So I call on my colleagues here today to

make those choices which experience, commonsense, and overwhelming data

compel; that is, to force the President to redeploy, to rebuild our

Armed Forces, and to end this disastrous involvement in the civil war.

The last several months have been a story of squandered chances. We

have paid for them in American lives. Again, to delay another 2 or 3

months to arrive at a conclusion most of us have already arrived at is

something I think is unacceptable. And that lives which may be lost or

damaged because we waited 2 or 3 months to arrive at a conclusion that

most here already believe to be the case, is certainly a sad day for

this body. We cannot even have votes, we cannot even consider the

various ideas we bring to the Chamber that might bring this war and our

involvement in it to a close.