who caused them to coalesce into getting along better with each other. There were factions in Iraqi that you do not see today.

But Kerry endorsed involvement of U.S. troops in Bosnia and Kosovo, both of which were civil wars. Those were civil wars. This is not a civil war.

In 1995, President Clinton said that ''we must not turn our backs on Bosnia,'' which was echoed by Senator KERRY when he stated that, ''History has taught us that we can't sit idly by while people commit these incredible evil acts against humanity.'' He was talking about Bosnia and Kosovo. I would like to ask him: What evil acts are you talking about when compared to Saddam Hussein, who murdered and tortured to death hundreds of thousands of his own people; where they dropped people into vats of acid; where people were begging, before they were put into the shredders, to put their heads in first so they could die quickly; women being raped and buried alive? We have not seen atrocities such as this since Hitler in World War II. And here he was talking about things that were taking place in Kosovo and Bosnia. It wasn't happening.

Let me tell you what Dr. al-Rubaie said. He said:

> There is . . . an unofficial ''roadmap'' to foreign troop reductions that will eventually lead to total withdrawal of U.S. troops.

The roadmap is there. It is there, and it is one which they have put down in writing.

I am going to deliver to you what Minister of Defense Jasim asked me to deliver to you—to us—in this Chamber today. He said:

> Tell them their sacrifice is for a very noble cause, they have given freedom to 26 million people. I believe they are waging a just war for humanity. The terrorism must be stopped or it will spread all over the world, like a carbon copy of fascism and communism. . . . The American victims have borne the price of a freer world. . . . We are very grateful. . . . The war in Iraq is a just war and we have no option but victory. It is not a war that affects Iraq alone, but is truly a world war.
>
> The terrorists are a sickness that must be eliminated . . . There is great transformation taking place in Iraq but, the international media does not focus on positive things happening.

Here he talks about the only focus being on the negative things.

I will talk against the next amendment later.

I can tell you, after 11 trips to Iraq and the AOR, that every time I come back to this Chamber and talk about the quality of the Iraqi security forces and the successes they have had, I am very proud of them, and they are very proud of us.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Oklahoma for wrapping up close to 20 Senators on this side who have spoken to this issue. I remind my colleague there will be further debate tonight. I am anxious to have as many as possible come over and join me. I commend the Senator on his statement and thank the Senator for his long, hard work on our bill throughout this year.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I yield to the Senator from Illinois 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois is recognized for 10 minutes.

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Michigan for managing this fine amendment.

In October of 2002, I delivered a speech opposing the war in Iraq.

I said that Saddam Hussein was a ruthless man, but that he posed no imminent and direct threat to the United States.

I said that a war in Iraq would take our focus away from our efforts to defeat al-Qaida.

And, with a volatile mix of ethnic groups and a complicated history, I said that the invasion and occupation of Iraq would require a U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences.

In short, I felt the decision unfolding then to invade Iraq was being made without a clear rationale, based more on ideology and politics than fact and reason.

It is with no great pleasure that I recall this now. Too many young men and women have died. Too many have been maimed. Too many hearts have been broken. I fervently wish I had been wrong about this war; that my concerns had been unfounded.

America and the American people have paid a high price for the decision to invade Iraq and myriad mistakes that followed. I believe that history will not judge the authors of this war kindly.

For all these reasons, I would like nothing more than to support the Kerry amendment; to bring our brave troops home on a date certain, and spare the American people more pain, suffering and sorrow.

But having visited Iraq, I am also acutely aware that a precipitous withdrawal of our troops, driven by congressional edict rather than the realities on the ground, will not undo the mistakes made by this administration. It could compound them.

It could compound them by plunging Iraq into an even deeper and, perhaps, irreparable crisis.

We must exit Iraq, but not in a way that leaves behind a security vacuum filled with terrorism, chaos, ethnic cleansing and genocide that could engulf large swaths of the Middle East and endanger America. We have both moral and national security reasons to manage our exit in a responsible way.

I share many of the goals set forth in the Kerry amendment. We should send a clear message to the Iraqis that we won't be there forever, and that by next year our primary role should be to conduct counterinsurgency actions, train Iraqi security forces, and provide needed logistical support.

Moreover, I share the frustration with an administration whose policies with respect to Iraq seem to simply repeat the simple-minded refrains of ''we know best'' and ''stay the course.'' It's not acceptable to conduct a war where our goals and strategies drift aimlessly regardless of the cost in lives or dollars spent, and where we end up with arbitrary, poll-driven troop reductions by the administration—the worst of all possible outcomes.

As one who strongly opposed the decision to go to war and who has met with servicemen and women injured in this conflict and seen the pain of the parents and loved ones of those who have died in Iraq, I would like nothing more than for our military involvement to end.

But I do not believe that setting a date certain for the total withdrawal of U.S. troops is the best approach to achieving, in a methodical and responsible way, the three basic goals that should drive our Iraq policy: that is, (1) stabilizing Iraq and giving the factions within Iraq the space they need to forge a political settlement; (2) containing and ultimately defeating the insurgency in Iraq; and (3) bringing our troops safely home.

What is needed is a blueprint for an expeditious yet responsible exit from Iraq. A hard and fast, arbitrary deadline for withdrawal offers our commanders in the field, and our diplomats in the region, insufficient flexibility to implement that strategy.

For example, let's say that a phased withdrawal results in 50,000 troops in Iraq by July 19, 2007. If, at that point, our generals and the Iraqi Government tell us that having those troops in Iraq for an additional 3 or 6 months would enhance stability and security in the region, this amendment would potentially prevent us from pursuing the optimal policy.

It is for this reason that I cannot support the Kerry amendment. Instead, I am a cosponsor of the Levin amendment, which gives us the best opportunity to find this balance between our need to begin a phase-down and our need to help stabilize Iraq. It tells the Iraqis that we won't be there forever so that they need to move forward on uniting and securing their country. I agree with Senator WARNER that the message should be ''we really mean business, Iraqis, get on with it.'' At the same time, the amendment also provides the Iraqis the time and the opportunity to accomplish this critical goal.

Essential to a successful policy is the administration listening to its generals and diplomats and members of Congress especially those who disagree with their policies and believe it is time to start bringing our troops home.

The overwhelming majority of the Senate is already on record voting for an amendment stating that calendar year 2006 should be a period of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty, with Iraqi security forces