Defense doctrine on how to defeat an insurgency. His expertise was much noted when we confirmed him to go take charge of the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines who would effectuate this effort. Nowhere in his manual did he ever suggest an insurgency could be defeated in 50 days, or 90 days, or 120 days.

Victory, we must admit—if you read his manual—takes time, diligence, determination, and smart application of politics, weaponry, and forces. His manual sets out methods for how to achieve victory against an insurgency, the methods for victory.

There is simply no basis at this point to conclude that our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines have failed in executing this policy. In fact, they are moving out with vigor. After seeing a reduction of sectarian violence in Baghdad by two-thirds. This is the sectarian violence, the murders that were occurring between hit squads, Shia and Sunni, as a result of the violence kicked off by the attack by al-Qaida on the Samara mosque, and their determined, effective policy to create violence between the Shia and the Sunni. That is what al-Qaida set out to do, and they succeeded last year.

We have seen that drop by two-thirds, although bombings still occur, and the bombings are suicidal, many times with large bombs that kill large numbers of civilians in shopping areas. But today some of our troops are moving out of Baghdad into the toughest areas outside Baghdad, such as the Dyala Province, and making, it appears, progress there.

As our soldiers confront enemy strongholds, some of which have never before been cleared, they demonstrate professionalism and courage that reflect the finest qualities that have ever been demonstrated by American soldiers.

Nor, let me add, has anything occurred that suggests this new strategy is flawed and will not succeed and should be abandoned 53 days since we agreed to see it forward.

So with respect, I conclude it would be irresponsible in the extreme to have this bunch of politicians sitting in air-conditioned offices in Washington reverse a strategy we approved 53 days ago. But that is exactly what the Levin-Reed amendment would do.

I have tremendous respect for Senator LEVIN. He is a superb chairman of the Armed Services Committee. But I do not agree with him on this point. I do not believe this is right.

If you were a soldier or a marine and you had just moved into a tough terrorist neighborhood in Iraq, following the directions given to you by your President and your Congress, and you saw your comrades take casualties, maybe killed in the course of executing that policy, all in the belief that somebody up there back in Washington had finally settled on a workable plan for victory, and then before your work is half done, in less than 2 months, you learn the folks up there had now changed their mind again, how would you feel? Wouldn't you think we do not take our mission of our soldiers and what they are doing seriously?

We owe our military better than that. We owe them the same courage and character they are displaying right now. On the birthday of our Army, I was at a celebration and met a young soldier. I thanked him for his service and began to explain my concern about the long deployments we were asking them to undertake. He cut in, saying, ''Senator, we just want to win.'' Before all that is just, this Congress must not fail such men.

The Levin amendment is pernicious in more ways than I am able to discuss at this time. It must not pass. We know a full review of our policies will occur in September. We agreed on that in May. That is critically important and valuable. I support such a review. I am open minded about what we will decide to do in September.

I hope and pray we will be able to reduce the number of our soldiers and begin a mature, effective way to reduce that deployment in Iraq, but we will decide our next step then. To execute a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq now, regardless of the conditions on the battlefield, and regardless of the advice of our commanders in the field, is unthinkable. It would be a stain on this Senate for years to come.

Has anybody bothered to express an interest in what General Petraeus has to say about it? Things don't always go well. My favorite statue in Washington is one that conveys the most historical import, I think, the one of General Grant right down here in front of the Capitol. He sits astride his horse, his campaign hat pulled down, his coat wrapped around, his head tilted slightly forward, a perfect picture of determination in the face of great difficulty.

It is said 600,000 died in that war on both sides. Over 440,000 Americans died in World War II. This Nation has seen dark days before, days darker than these. So let's keep our poise and our wits about us. Let's give General Petraeus and his courageous military personnel a chance to effect the strategy we agreed on and asked him to effect.

There are other important issues I will suggest to my colleagues as we discuss the Levin amendment. I will note a few briefly.

The surge report. The language in our affirmation of the surge in May called for a report that had benchmarks for improvements in Iraq. Those benchmarks have been much commented upon, but these benchmarks for improvement did not declare that all or any of the benchmarks must be met by September or even by July 15, the time of our interim report. They were to be objective markers by which we could judge progress and lack of it, and they were surely not exhaustive of every issue and challenge we faced in Iraq.

The fact that progress has been made in only half of those benchmark areas does not mean, of course, we should now up and declare the new operation a failure and that we should now cut and run. How could anyone conclude this July 15 report that shows limited early progress in only some areas means General Petraeus has failed? All the extra soldiers arrived there only 3 weeks ago.

It is also important to note that the benchmarks seemed to focus on the performance we wish to see by the central government, and they have not been meeting their responsibilities, in my view. I had my sixth visit there this spring. I was able to share that view and that frustration of the American people with the top leaders in Iraq, including Prime Minister Maliki. We believe they need to do more in the central government.

But, for example, the benchmarks provided no credit at all for the stunning progress that has occurred in the al-Anbar region, progress that has resulted at the ground level where Sunni tribal leaders have partnered with the marines to rout whole groups of al-Qaida operatives.

Similar progress, though smaller, it appears, seems to be occurring in other areas at the local level. So the benchmarks do not consider those events and whether progress is being made, but they are important as we evaluate what our situation truly is. We must remember that while sectarian violence continues, and it has occurred in large part as a direct result of al-Qaida's strategy to foment it, safety and security in the capital city is important in furthering political reconciliation.

I wish I could agree with the idea of my able colleague Senator LEVIN when he declared that peace and security in Iraq can only come as a result of a political settlement. Thus, he would suggest if a parliament cannot settle all of the difficult political issues on the timetable we set, we must leave, because this is the only thing that will make them agree on policy, our threatening to leave, and our actual leaving, it appears, because his amendment would require an actual departure from much of Iraq.

Well, I wish it were so easy. But, in truth, our commanders believe, our State Department believes, and I believe, it is far more complicated than that. Of course, a political settlement and reconciliations are critical to any long-term stability. But will not a reduction of violence and a more secure Baghdad be an event that will make political progress more possible? That is what the generals are telling us, that when the capital city is in a constant state of violence and disorder, how can we expect the Parliament to be able to function and to provide a peaceful settlement of the disputes that need to be settled long term for a healthier Iraq?

I think we have a new strategy. We voted on it 53 days ago. We agreed to