

for its armored Humvees. About 5,200 MRAPs had been approved for the other services. Now, Pentagon officials decline to say exactly how many MRAPs they need.

One official says they'll build MRAPs as fast as possible, then recalibrate the military's needs as they assess operations in Iraq, a tacit acknowledgment that they may need fewer MRAPs as U.S. troops are withdrawn.

During another news conference late last month, Gates worried that the companies building the MRAP—not only Force Protection but BAE Systems, General Dynamics, Oshkosh Truck, Armor Holdings, International Military and Government and Protected Vehicles—won't be able to get the vehicles to Iraq fast enough.

"I didn't think that was acceptable," Gates said. "Lives are at stake."

THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT: "SAFEST VEHICLE EVER"

As the sun began to bake the Iraqi countryside last month, Marine 2nd Lt. George Saenz headed back to his base on the outskirts in Fallujah. He felt oddly joyful.

Saenz had just spent hours leading his platoon through one of the most excruciating battlefield jobs—inch-ing a convoy along the crumbling streets of Fallujah, searching for homemade bombs planted in the asphalt or dirt.

The night before had proved dangerous. Two bombs had blown up underneath Saenz's convoy, including one beneath his vehicle.

As Saenz turned through the gray blast walls protecting the base, he says he couldn't help but think: If I had been riding a Humvee, I wouldn't be here right now.

Saenz knew why he was alive. His platoon in the 6th Marine Regiment Combat Team had replaced its Humvees with MRAPs. The two blasts produced just one injury, a Marine whose concussion put him on light duty for a week.

"We're probably in the safest vehicle ever designed for military use," Saenz says, recalling his platoon's record: Three months. Eleven bomb attacks. No one dead.

MRAPs have become legendary in Anbar since Marines began using them on dangerous missions clearing roadside bombs. Tank commanders, radio operators and others drop by Saenz's platoon every day to do what Rep. Hunter had done three years earlier—inspect the small fleet of MRAPs, knock on the armor, sometimes crawl inside.

Scores of MRAPs are scheduled to arrive in Anbar this summer. That means they'll be available for the first time to the Marines for tasks other than clearing IEDs, says Marine Col. Mike Rudolph, logistics officer for U.S. forces in western Iraq. No one has decided how MRAPs will be used, but "everybody wants one," Rudolph says.

To be sure, the vehicle isn't perfect. Saenz's team warns that MRAPs drive like trucks, plodding and heavy. Some models are so bulky they have blind spots for troops peering over the boxy hood and so noisy a driver has to shout at someone 2 feet away. "They're just so heavy," Sgt. Randall Miller says. "These are virtually designed off a semi-truck platform."

After substantial testing, the military also has concluded that MRAPs are vulnerable to explosively formed projectiles, the newest and most devastating variation of the IED. More armor has been developed for the MRAPs the Pentagon ordered this spring.

Miller isn't complaining. On his first tour in Iraq in 2004-05, Miller searched for land mines in a Humvee. His detection technique was simple: "Go real slow, cross your fingers." He still drives slowly but feels safer knowing the MRAP's V-shaped hull will deflect a bomb blast. "I've seen our guys get

hit and walk away," Miller says. "They're awesome, awesome vehicles."

THE WIDOW: "THEY SHOULD'VE DONE IT" SOONER

Whom or what is to blame for the delay in getting safer vehicles for the 158,000 U.S. troops in Iraq?

Jim Hampton, now a retired colonel, questions why the Pentagon and Congress didn't do more to keep the troops safe. "I have colleagues who say people need to go to jail over this, and in my mind they do," Hampton says.

Hunter, now running for president, blames the Pentagon bureaucracy, which he says "doesn't move fast enough to meet the needs of the war fighter. We have a system in which the warfighting requirements are requested from the field and the acquisition people say, 'We'll get it on our schedule.'"

Other members of Congress blame Rumsfeld and his vision of transforming the military into a leaner, faster fighting force.

Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa., wonders if Rumsfeld's forceful personality silenced some of the generals. "Rumsfeld so intimidated the military that I've lost confidence in them telling us what they really need" in Iraq, Murtha says.

"They all knew the Rumsfeld rule: Your career is over if you say anything contrary" to his policies, Murtha says. "It's much better now that Rumsfeld is gone. The military is being much more honest."

If the Pentagon "had just listened to the guys in the field" who wanted MRAPs, Murtha says, "we'd have them in Iraq right now."

USA TODAY could not determine what role, if any, Rumsfeld played in MRAP deliberations. A spokesman for Rumsfeld, now running a foundation in Washington, said last week that the former Defense secretary would not comment.

Aaron Kincaid's widow, Rachel, doesn't know who should be held accountable. She is haunted by whether getting MRAPs to Iraq earlier might have saved her husband's life. The bomb that blew apart his Humvee lay along the path he and his unit took, and no one noticed.

Today, she wonders: Was his death really about the path that he took, or about the path the Pentagon spent years avoiding, the path that, in May, finally led them to the vehicle that might have saved her husband's life?

You think there is always something that could've been done to prevent it," Rachel Kincaid says of her husband's death.

"If that's been around for that many years," she says of the MRAP, "why hasn't it been used? They should've done it at the beginning of the war. They should've done it three years ago, four years ago."

IRAQ

Ms. FEINGOLD. Madam President, as I said late last week, it has been 52 months since military operations began in Iraq. Approximately 3,613 Americans have died and 25,000 have been wounded. More than 4 million Iraqis have fled their homes, and tens of thousands, at a minimum, have been killed. We have now been engaged in the war in Iraq longer than we were in World War II.

With the surge well underway, violence in Iraq has reached unprecedented levels and American troop fatalities are up 70 percent. From all angles, the situation in Iraq is an absolute disaster, and the administration's

inability or unwillingness to recognize this reality is diminishing our international credibility, straining our relations with many foreign governments, and causing us to neglect weak and unstable regions that could pose threats to our national security.

The administration's single-minded focus on Iraq is preventing us from adequately confronting threats of extremism and terrorism around the globe. The declassified NIE released just yesterday confirms that al-Qaida remains the most serious threat to the United States and that key elements of that threat have been regenerated or even enhanced. The administration's policies in Iraq have also resulted in the emergence of an al-Qaida affiliate that did not exist before the war—al-Qaida in Iraq, or AQI. According to the NIE, al-Qaida's association with this group helps it raise resources and recruit and indoctrinate operatives, including for attacks against the United States.

Yet, while this report is further proof that the war in Iraq is a distraction from our core goal of fighting those who attacked us on 9/11, this administration and its supporters are still calling Iraq the "central front in the war on terror," even though al-Qaida is a global threat and AQI is one of a number of actors responsible for violence in Iraq's self-sustaining sectarian conflict.

While our attention has been diverted and our resources squandered in Iraq, al-Qaida has protected its safe haven in Pakistan and has increased cooperation with regional terrorist groups. The sooner we redeploy from Iraq, the sooner we can refocus our efforts and develop a wide-ranging, inclusive strategy that would deny al-Qaida these advantages.

I remind my colleagues that last November, our constituents spoke out against this war in every way they possibly could. And as the situation continues to deteriorate, they have repeated their call—they were outside this building last night holding a candlelight vigil, and in States around the Nation, to show their support for ending this war and to tell President Bush and Senate Republicans to "stop obstructing an end to the war." I know my colleagues heard their voices last November, and I am hopeful they heard them last night. It almost goes without saying that they hear them every time they return home as well.

But, just like last week and the week before that, at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, these pervasive calls are ignored as the President continues to make it clear that nothing not the voices of his citizens, not the advice of military and foreign policy experts, not the concerns of members from his own party—will discourage him from pursuing an indefinite and misguided war.

We can't put all the blame on the White House, however. An overwhelming majority of Congress authorized this misguided war, and now a far smaller but still determined minority

is allowing this war to continue, despite the wishes of the American people, despite the fact that our military is overstretched, and despite the fact that our presence in Iraq has been, according to our own State Department, “used as a rallying cry for radicalization and extremist activity in neighboring countries . . .”

It is up to Congress to act because the President will not. It is up to us to listen to the American people, to save American lives, and to ensure our Nation's security by redeploying our troops from Iraq. We have that power and responsibility and we must act now.

That is why I support the amendment offered by Senators LEVIN and JACK REED—an amendment with binding deadlines for both beginning and ending redeployment and the only amendment we are likely to consider that would take a strong step toward bringing our involvement in this war to a close.

The Levin-Jack Reed amendment is not as strong as I would have liked, but it does require the President to bring home our troops, starting in 120 days. I am encouraged that this amendment is bipartisan, and while I wish it had the support of the entire Senate, the support of Senators SMITH, HAGEL, and SNOW is nonetheless an important development.

I call on other Republicans to follow their lead; there is no time to waste. It is not enough to pass something that sounds good but doesn't move us toward ending the war. Weak, feel-good amendments may give people up here political comfort but that comfort won't last long we can fool ourselves, but we can't fool the American people.

It is a tragic truth that the war in Iraq has become the defining aspect of our engagement in this part of the world. Coupled with this administration's inconsistent efforts to promote democracy and the rule of law overseas, the war has alienated and angered those whose support and cooperation we need if we are to prevail against al-Qaida and its allies.

As long as the President's policies continue, Iraq will continue to be what the 2006 declassified National Intelligence Estimate called a “cause celebre” for a new generation of terrorists. Meanwhile, al-Qaida has expanded its relations with dangerous regional terrorist groups.

The newest National Intelligence Estimate indicates that we may now be facing the worst-case scenario in that our indefinite military presence in Iraq has both allowed al-Qaida to reconstitute itself while it has also served as a recruitment tool for a growing and scattered global network of al-Qaida affiliates. It is becoming increasingly difficult for this administration to argue, as it continues to do, that our presence in Iraq is doing anything but profoundly undermining our national security.

Instead, we should be directing our attention and resources to combating

the global threat posed by al-Qaida and its affiliates. The fight against terrorism is not conventional and requires better intelligence, better cooperation with friends and allies, stronger regional institutions, and more comprehensive policies designed to reverse the conditions that might lead to the creation of safe havens. We must prevent these safe havens from being established, including by working to settle regional conflicts and ensuring adequate provision of economic and development assistance so local populations can reject terrorist organizations. We need regional strategies that address the capabilities and policies of all affected countries, both bilateral and multilateral. We must expand our assistance while ensuring that corruption and threats to human rights and political liberties do not undermine these efforts.

By redeploying our troops from Iraq, we can refocus on developing these vital strategies. And by freeing up strategic and technical capacity, we can better address other priorities that have not received adequate attention, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Somalia. We can provide real international leadership to combat other pressing enemies such as endemic poverty, HIV/AIDS, and corruption—all of which can contribute to the kinds of instability where extremists thrive. These global battles can't be won if the war in Iraq continues to dominate our foreign policy and indefinitely drain vital security resources.

As I have said before and as I will undoubtedly say again, the administration's policies in Iraq are an unmitigated disaster. But we can mitigate this disaster, lessen the massive burden imposed on our troops, regain our credibility with the international community, and make our Nation more secure. We can and must do that by redeploying our troops from Iraq. Repairing the damage that has been done to our national security will be difficult and time-consuming, and we can start today by passing the Levin-Jack Reed amendment.

There is no reason to wait any longer. Members of this body have claimed that in September we will have a clearer sense of whether the “surge” has succeeded and whether our policy needs to change. But we already know what that report will tell us. We have heard it from foreign policy and military experts and could even read it with our own eyes in the Pentagon's first quarterly surge report or the White House's Benchmark Assessment Report, which was released last week. The surge was intended to create a “window” for political progress, but significant political progress is still nowhere to be seen. We already know there is no military solution to Iraq's problems, so now the question is how long are we prepared to wait? How long are we prepared to have our young men and women police a civil war where the struggle over national identity and the

distribution of power has long since moved out of the Parliament building and onto the streets? How many more brave young Americans will lose a limb or be killed while we tell ourselves that another couple months will turn around 4 years of failed policies? When are my colleagues on the other side willing to say that enough is enough?

It has been a long night, and we have had some heated exchanges. It appears that a minority of the Senate is prepared to prevent a majority of the Senate—and the country—from doing what is long overdue: putting an end to a war without end. This is not the first time that a minority has prevented a majority from acting in this body. Indeed, I have been on the other side of a few of those fights. But this is not a question of senatorial prerogatives. I am not questioning the right of Senators to prevent a vote on the Levin-Jack Reed amendment. I am, however, questioning the wisdom of such a move, of allowing this terrible mistake to continue for days, weeks, months.

I will continue working to bring this war to a close. As long as so many of my colleagues refuse to listen to the American people, to acknowledge that this war is hurting our country and making our Nation more vulnerable, we will have more debates and more votes. Sooner or later, we will end this war. And the sooner we do so, the sooner we can start redeploying our servicemembers from Iraq's civil war and refocusing on a global campaign against a ruthless, determined enemy whose reach extends far beyond Iraq.

REMEMBERING LADY BIRD JOHNSON

Mr. BIDEN. Madam President, so much has been said about the various parts of Lady Bird Johnson's life, as one of our most beloved First Ladies, as a loving mother and grandmother, as the mother of the conservation movement, and as a skilled businesswoman. But there is another aspect all of us in this body appreciate, and that is her mark on this Chamber.

Before the Johnsons left Washington in January 1969, they came to the Capitol to say farewell. And the ever gracious Lady Bird Johnson, who had watched her husband serve as a Senator and a majority leader, said:

When we say goodbye to Washington, the address of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue was a small span of time for us in comparison to the years that we spent closely affiliated with this building.

She knew how to use this building. She was the first First Lady to ever undertake a major legislative effort—the Highway Beautification Act of 1965. Four decades later, her efforts still bloom on our highways in every region of this country, and in this city.

She did what each of us, and all of us combined, come here to do—leave America better than we found it. Her achievement is all the more remarkable because it was a trying period in