Madam Speaker, let me

begin by thanking my colleague Congresswoman

MAXINE WATERS, the gentlewoman

from California, for organizing

this very important special

order tonight. Let me just say to you,

Congresswoman WATERS, your clear

voice and your sound judgment as the

co-founder of the Out of Iraq Caucus

has helped guide this antiwar movement,

not only here in the House of

Representatives, but throughout the

country.

Your boldness and your vision in organizing

those of us who knew that

this war was wrong from day one in

putting together over, what, some 77

members now of the Out of Iraq Caucus,

I have to salute you and thank you

for that, because we will never go back

again. All we can do is go forward to

try to end this occupation and try to

prevent another preemptive war

against Iran.

It is very timely that Congresswoman

WATERS has called us here tonight

to sound the alarm on Iran. It is

truly disturbing to me to hear many of

the same drumbeats on this administration

’s march to war with Iran as we

saw 5 years ago in the run-up to the

war in Iraq. So I want to provide just a

little bit of history on Iraq to draw out

some of these parallels, in the hope

that they will provide Congress and the

American people with a clear warning

signal.

Madam Speaker, this discussion is

also timely today because today is

April 15th, and millions of Americans

across our country are right now racing

the clock to beat the tax filing

deadline. Lots of them are asking, how

much do they owe and what is the government

doing with their money?

One answer, Madam Speaker, is that

in the last 5 years, this administration

has spent nearly a half trillion dollars

on the Iraq war and occupation. This

Iraq tax, and that is what it is, an Iraq

tax, comes out to approximately $16,500

for every American family of four. Has

the tax been worth it? Let’s look at

what we have gotten in exchange.

More than 4,000 of the Nation’s best

and bravest have been killed. More

than 30,000 others have been wounded,

many suffering permanent and debilitating

injuries. Tens of thousands of

innocent Iraqi civilians have died, and

millions have been internally displaced

or sought refuge in neighboring countries.

Meanwhile, the occupation of

Iraq has caused serious damage to

America’s international reputation and

created a generation, mind you, a generation

of future enemies incensed by

the endless occupation of their country

by a foreign power.

Madam Speaker, compounding the

folly of this strategic blunder, the $500

billion which American taxpayers already

have spent on this occupation is

now undermining our ability to finance

the investments needed to address the

pressing domestic needs of the American

people and to revive our sagging

economy. Given what the Iraq tax has

brought American families, and this

$500 billion is quickly mounting to almost

$3 trillion very soon, is anyone

really surprised that the American people

are angry and demanding change?

The saddest aspect of this whole

story and this whole episode, Madam

Speaker, is it did not have to be that

way. Along with 125 of my colleagues, a

substantial majority of House Democrats,

I opposed the war, like Congresswoman

WATERS did, from the beginning,

and we voted against the resolution

authorizing the use of military

force.

I offered an amendment Congresswoman

WATERS supported, we got 72

votes during that period, to the original

use of force resolution to prohibit

the administration, remember this,

Congresswoman WATERS, we tried, we

tried, we did everything we could do to

try to keep the administration from

taking military action until the United

Nations could complete their inspections

and confirm that Saddam Hussein’s

regime indeed possessed weapons

of mass destruction which it intended

to use against us or to give to our

sworn enemies.

Had the Lee amendment been adopted,

we would have learned much sooner

and at far less cost what the whole

world knew, that evidentially we didn’t

know, but some of us knew, but the

whole world now knows, including the

American people, that Iraq did not pose

an imminent threat to the United

States, was not involved in the September

11th attacks, had no ties to al

Qaeda and had no weapons of mass destruction.

The war and occupation has also exacted

an awful toll on our military

force, our structure, our readiness, and

the men and women in uniform and

their families. General Richard Cody,

the Army Vice Chief of Staff, testified

before the Congress that the Army is

out of balance. The current demand of

our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan exceeds

the substantial supply and limits

our ability to provide ready forces for

other contingencies.

Because of this administration’s mistake,

tens of thousands of servicemen

and women have been required to undertake

lengthy deployments into the

war zone, two, three, and some even

four times. This has placed enormous

strain on them and their families and

increased their risk of struggling with

mental health issues, including when

they return home many, many posttraumatic

stress issues that we have

never seen before. Nearly 60,000 veterans

of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

have been diagnosed with

posttraumatic stress disorder, and

most experts in the field believe the

numbers could be much higher.

Some may ask, why is it necessary to

review this history? Well, as the old

saying goes, those who forget history

are doomed to repeat it. The other reason

for reviewing this history is because

it goes straight to the veracity

and the credibility of this administration

that brought us this debacle and

which may be maneuvering to reprise

its strategic and geopolitical incompetence

by taking preemptive military

action against Iran.

If you listen carefully, you can hear

the same distant drumbeats of a coming

war with Iran. The signs are very

familiar. Nearly on a daily basis we

read or hear these from the administration,

and let me just repeat a few of

these drumbeats that we hear.

They say Iran is the single greatest

threat to the stability in Iraq, although

when I asked General Petraeus

last week if Iran was in Iraq 5 years

ago, he said they weren’t really ‘‘kissing

cousins.’’ I think that is what his

comment was. No, Iran was not in Iraq

5 years ago.

Iran is building nuclear weapons.

Iran is killing American soldiers in

Iraq, arming, training and funding insurgents

and terrorists.

Iran is interfering with the peace

process in the Middle East.

I am reminded how the administration

sent General Colin Powell, do you

remember that, Congresswoman WATERS,

the Secretary of State, by far the

most effective and respective spokesman,

before the United Nations Security

Council to make the case to the

world that Iraq posed an imminent

threat to regional peace and security.

The case presented by General Powell

accomplished its mission, but its factual

foundation rested on falsehoods,

misinformation and speculation

masquerading as evidence. To this day,

General Powell regards his performance

that day as really a mark on an

otherwise distinguished career of public

service to our Nation.

General Petraeus is the 2008 version,

quite frankly, of General Powell. He inspires

more confidence than President

Bush and is far more credible than Vice

President CHENEY. But so did General

Powell inspire and bring this credibility

to this administration, and he

turned out to be wrong; terribly wrong.

Again last week, General Petraeus

testified that Iranian-backed so-called

special groups posed the greatest longterm

threat to the viability of a Democratic

Iraq. He testified that it was

these groups that launched Iranian

rockets and mortar rounds at Iraq’s

seat of government two weeks ago,

causing loss of innocent life and fear in

the capital and requiring Iraqi and coalition

actions in response.

This is starting to sound like the

groundwork being laid for the need to

take defensive action against Iran.

This is unacceptable. We should not be

looking for an excuse to attack Iran.

Congress should not stand for yet another

so-called preemptive military

strike, and we should take action to

clearly prohibit any such attempt

against Iran.

As I stated, we have been down this

road before. We have learned a simple

truth from five hard and bitter years in

Iraq. No unjust war ever produced a

just and lasting peace. It has not

worked in Iraq. It will not work in

Iran.

What is needed is not another rush to

unwarranted, unnecessary and misguided

military action, but rather a

strong diplomatic surge for peace and

reconciliation. And, yes, I do believe

that a nuclear-armed Iran poses a danger.

I believe we need to move forward

with nonproliferation efforts, including

looking at our own arsenal of nuclear

weapons in our own country. Nuclear

weapons should not be an option at this

point, given the dangers of the world.

So we need to address nuclear nonproliferation

in the context of a strong

diplomatic initiative.

One of the most important first steps

we should take is to have direct, comprehensive

and unconditional bilateral

talks with Iran. To facilitate this goal,

it is imperative for the administration

to show that it is serious in this endeavor

by appointing a special envoy. I

think we need to appoint a special person,

an individual who does nothing

but ensure that we move forward to reduce

the tensions in the region, and

this envoy should receive the necessary

support to carry out his or her mandate.

That is why I introduced H.R. 5056,

the Iran Diplomatic Accountability

Act of 2008. Among other things, this

bill directs the President to appoint a

high level envoy empowered to conduct

direct, unconditional, bilateral negotiations

with Iran for the purpose of

easing tensions and normalizing relations

between the United States and

Iran. No one says this is going to be

easy, but we must start somewhere.

The latest National Intelligence Estimate

released last week representing

the consensus view of our 16 intelligence

agencies clearly indicates that

Iran is nowhere close to having nuclear

weapons capability. The NIE assessment

underscores why it is critical for

Congress to ensure that this administration’s

saber rattling against Iran

does not turn into a march to war. We

have been down this path before.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, the

last 5 years in Iraq demonstrates the

folly of rushing off to start a war. We

don’t need another war in Iran. We

need to end the war in Iraq and fully

fund the redeployment of American

troops so that they may be reunited

with their families in the United

States. We need to use our funds to

support them, protect them, and bring

them home. And we need to begin to

move forward to address the real issues

with regard to Iran and begin to take

the military option off of the table, because

our President, this country always

has the military option, and it

makes no sense to use this or to talk

about it if we truly intend to reduce

tensions and look for some form of

global peace and security.

Thank you, again, Congresswoman

WATERS for calling us together today.

I, too, want to commend

the gentlelady from Texas for raising

some of the constitutional issues that

we have to grapple with each and every

day.

I would like to talk briefly about the

issue of the preemptive strike which is

central to this administration’s foreign

and military policy.

In essence what the Bush administration

has decided is that it is all right,

and actually it is their standard, to be

able to use force not necessarily in the

face of an imminent threat, but it is all

right and it is a policy of this administration

to be able to use force to prevent

a future perceived threat. All of

this is couched in this global war on

terror where oftentimes they believe

they do have a blank check to use force

wherever they want to go in the world.

When you look at what they are trying

to do now in Iraq with regard to the

security agreements, they are trying to

negotiate a permanent military presence

in Iraq without even coming back

to Congress to try to get the authority

to do that. I think minimally, and we

have several bills that have been introduced

into this body, that basically

just say before the administration decides

to use force or take military actions

or strike Iran, minimally they

must come to Congress to seek authorization.

Well, for the life of me, this is the

People’s House. I cannot figure out

why we cannot have a resolution as

basic as that come to this body so we

can pass that. I think that should be a

minimum standard to protect the

American people from first of all what

could be total chaos. Secondly, when

you just look at the expenditure of resources

and what a possible preemptive

strike could cost as it relates to Iran in

terms of treasury, blood, our young

men and women and also our financial

resources. We may just be a few voices

in the wilderness crying out tonight,

but we are crying out very loudly and

asking the American people to look at

these signs because as Congresswoman

WATERS said, we are sounding the

alarm so we can stop what appears to

be on the horizon.