Mr. Speaker, the Iraq war is now in its 4th year, and I,

like many of my colleagues and millions of my fellow citizens, are

troubled about the direction the conflict is taking.

I have been to Iraq three times to visit our troops there, and I have

spent time with our wounded here and in Germany. They have done

everything we have asked of them, and they have done it magnificently.

While we have a moral obligation to do whatever we can to avoid having

Iraq spiral into an all-out civil war, now is the time for the Iraqis

themselves to decide if they wish to be one country. And, Mr. Speaker,

it is time for us to take steps that will ensure that 2006 is a year of

significant transition to full sovereignty for the people of Iraq.

This is a conflict that has come to grief in many ways. In the fall

of 2002, I voted to authorize the use of force against Iraq because of

the threat that Saddam Hussein had stockpiles of chemical and

biological weapons, and because I was concerned that he had an

active nuclear weapons program. If you go back and look at the debate

in the House and Senate, this was a decision taken by the Congress to

prevent Iraq from acquiring or using or transferring nuclear weapons.

Months later, as American forces pushed across the Kuwaiti frontier

and into Iraq, we were on a hunt for weapons of mass destruction.

Delivering the Iraqi people from the brutality of Saddam Hussein was a

noble act, but the promotion of democracy in Iraq was not our primary

reason for going to war. Similarly, we knew the Shiite majority had

suffered terribly under the Ba'ath regime, and freeing them from the

oppression of the Sunni minority was an added benefit of the invasion.

But reordering the ethnic balance of political power in Iraq was not

our primary purpose for going to war.

Soon after the fall of Baghdad, it became clear that many of the pre-

war assumptions that had guided the President and his advisers were

wrong. There were no chemical or biological weapons, there was no

nuclear program, and while many Iraqis celebrated the ouster of Saddam

Hussein, they did not line the streets of Baghdad to greet our troops

with flowers. In fact, within days, there emerged the beginnings of

what would become an organized and deadly insurgency that would quickly

put an end to General Tommy Franks' plan to pare down the 140,000

troops in April 2003 to about 30,000 by September 2003.

In recent months, even as our military has become more adept at

combating the insurgency, the nature of the struggle in Iraq has

changed yet again. Long-simmering ethnic tensions, which had been

suppressed under Saddam's totalitarian regime, have threatened to tear

the country apart. While the full-scale civil war that many feared in

the wake of the bombing of the Askariya mosque in Samarra has not yet

come to pass, most observers believe the country is currently in the

grip of a low-level civil war that could erupt into a full-scale

conflict at any time.

The ongoing sectarian strife has been exacerbated by the protracted

struggle among and inside Iraq's political factions over the formation

of a permanent government. Last week's decision by the Shiite parties

that make up the largest block in parliament that was elected 4 months

ago to replace Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari with Jawad al-Maliki

paves the way for the formation of a broad-based government. The

question is now whether this hopeful development will be enough to pull

Iraq back from the precipice.

There is a broad census among experts here and abroad that Iraq's

future will be determined by politics and not by force. The formation

of a permanent Iraqi Government, one that will have the power of

legitimacy and vision to assume primary responsibility for securing and

governing the country, is a necessary precondition to ending the

insurgency, preventing a civil war, and allowing large-scale

reconstruction to begin.

Consequently, our role in Iraq must become more political and less

military. For if there is one thing that Iraqis of every ethnic,

religious, and political stripe can agree on, it is that they do not

want foreign troops in their country indefinitely.

I support a responsible redeployment of our troops during the course

of 2006 so we are not drawn into sectarian conflict and so Iraqis are

forced to take primary responsibility for securing and governing their

country. A responsible redeployment of American coalition forces will

have to be done in stages to build greater Iraqi sovereignty and

control over security, not civil war. We should also publicly declare

that the United States does not seek to maintain a permanent military

presence in Iraq, and I have cosponsored legislation to prevent the

establishment of permanent bases, which can only serve as a catalyst

for the insurgency and for foreign jihadis.

Devising and implementing a successful end-game in Iraq will be

difficult, but an open-ended commitment to remain in the country is

untenable and unwise. The American people want Iraq to succeed and for

a representative government there to survive and to lead to a better

future for the Iraqi people. But it will ultimately be the Iraqi people

who must decide whether they wish to live together in peace as one

country or continue to murder each other in large numbers. We cannot

decide that for them.

In the fight against the malicious al Qaeda in Iraq, foreign jihadis

bent on destroying a government chosen by the Iraqi people, we are in

solidarity with the Iraqi people who want a better life for their

children. But, Mr. Speaker, we will not stand as a shield between Iraqi

sects bent on killing each other. The new prime minister and leadership

have the next 30 days to form a strong unity government. We hope they

will be successful in that task, and we hope that the Iraqi leaders

understand that the patience of the American people is running out.

Mr. Speaker, the Iraq war is now in its fourth year and I, like many

of my colleagues and millions of our fellow citizens, am deeply

concerned about the direction that the conflict is taking.

I have been to Iraq three times to visit with our troops there and I

have spent time with our wounded here and in Germany. They have done

everything that we have asked of them and they have done it

magnificently.

Tragically, these American heroes are still being killed and wounded

daily. Over 2,300 troops have been killed and thousands more have been

injured. American taxpayers are paying approximately $194 million a day

for the war according to the Congressional Budget Office--that's more

than a billion dollars a week. A new CRS report puts the current costs

of continued operations in Iraq and Afghanistan at close to $10 billion

a month, with most of that money going to Iraq.

While we have a moral obligation to do whatever we can to avoid

having Iraq spiral into all-out civil war, now is time for the Iraqis

themselves to decide whether they wish to be one country. And, Mr.

Speaker, it is time for us to take steps that will ensure that 2006 is

a year of significant transition to full sovereignty for the people of

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This is a conflict that has come to grief in so many ways. In the

fall of 2002 I voted to authorize the use of force against Iraq because

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prewar assumptions that had guided the President and his advisors were

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combating the insurgency, the nature of the struggle in Iraq has

changed yet again. Long-simmering ethnic tensions, which had been

suppressed under Saddam's totalitarian regime, have threatened to tear

the country apart. While the full-scale civil war that many feared in

the wake of the bombing of the Askariya mosque in Samarra has not yet

come to pass, most observers believe that the country is currently in

the grip of a low-level civil war that could erupt into full-scale

conflict at any time. I am especially concerned by media reports that

Shiite militias have been deploying to Kirkuk, Iraq's third largest

city, in a bid to forestall any attempt by Kurds to assert control over

this major center of Iraq's oil-rich north.

The ongoing sectarian strife has been exacerbated by the protracted

struggle among and inside Iraq's political factions over the formation

of a permanent government. Last week's decision by the Shiite parties

that make up the largest bloc in the parliament that was elected four

months ago to replace Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari with Jawad al-

Maliki paves the way for the formation of a broad-based government. The

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begin.

Consequently, our role in Iraq must become more political and less

military; for if there is one thing that Iraqis of every ethnic,

religious and political stripe can agree on, it is that they do not

want foreign troops in their country indefinitely.

I support a responsible redeployment of our troops during the course

of 2006 so that we are not drawn into sectarian conflict and so that

Iraqis are forced to take primary responsibility for securing and

governing their country. While the process of training Iraqi security

forces has gone more slowly than many had hoped, recent reports have

indicated that we are making progress and that every week more Iraqi

units are capable of taking a greater role in combating the insurgency.

A responsible redeployment of American and coalition forces will have

to be done in stages to build greater Iraqi sovereignty and control

over security, not civil war. In the first phase of the redeployment,

our forces should be gradually withdrawn from insecure urban centers

and moved to smaller cities where reconstruction is supported by the

local population, and to remote bases where our troops will be able to

support Iraqi units if necessary. Over time, these troops will be

withdrawn from Iraq altogether and redeployed outside the country,

either in the region or back to the United States. We should publicly

declare that the United States does not seek to maintain a permanent

military presence in Iraq and I have co-sponsored legislation to

prevent the establishment of permanent bases, which can only serve as a

catalyst for the insurgency and for foreign jihadis.

Devising and implementing a successful endgame in Iraq will be

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their children. But we will not stand as a shield between different

Iraqi sects bent on killing each other. The new Iraqi prime minister

and leadership have the next thirty days to form a strong unity

government. We hope that they will be successful in this task. But our

hopes in Iraq have too often led to disappointment, and the Iraqi

leaders must understand that the patience of the American people is

running out.