Mr. Speaker, we went to war in Iraq in an

irresponsible way; we should leave Iraq in a responsible way.

The Administration's slogan of ``stay the course'' is not a strategy.

More of the same is unacceptable. We must change course. The Bush

Administration has tried to stifle debate here at home by shamelessly

challenging the patriotism of those who question their approach. The

time has come for a serious debate on this issue of utmost importance

to the American people. We should bring our troops home as quickly and

safely as possible. But bringing our troops home is only part of a

successful strategy for leaving Iraq. We must redeploy our troops in a

way that does not unleash even more bloodshed and killing in Iraq, and

does not create a vacuum that will be exploited by Al Queda and

terrorist elements.

Our nation went to war in Iraq based on false information and gross

distortions of the facts made by President Bush and others in his

Administration. Before the invasion, a number of us gave speeches on

the floor of this House outlining the dangers of going to war in Iraq.

The Bush Administration and the Congress chose to disregard the

warnings that were raised by many people who had experience on foreign

policy issues regarding the Persian Gulf region.

We have made many mistakes during the war, but many of the results of

our invasion were predictable. As I said on this floor prior to the

war:

``The President has presented a utopian vision of democracy breaking

out in the Middle East after we invade Iraq. It is just as easy to

imagine a scenario where difficulties in Iraq and the American action

there fuel resentment toward occupying American troops and inflame the

region against us, strengthening the hands of radical Islamic

fundamentalists and making it more difficult to promote democracy and

other U.S. goals in the region.''

Now, more than two and half years after the invasion of Iraq, those

predictions have unfortunately proved true. The Administration utterly

failed to understand the dynamics and history of Iraq. They failed to

understand the opening that Sunni grievances and old rivalries would

give to our enemies, to Al Queda and others. The Administration built

its actions on a foundation of sand--on rosy scenarios and wishful

thinking. We never had a plan to deal with the forces we were

unleashing in Iraq and we are dealing with the consequences now. There

have been over 2,079 confirmed American deaths in Iraq. Over 15,500

have been seriously injured. There have been reports of at least 30,000

Iraqi civilian deaths.

Having invaded Iraq, the United States has a moral and national

security obligation to do everything possible to prevent the situation

from spiraling even farther out of control. We must devise a plan to

leave Iraq in a way that maximizes the chances for stability and

minimizes the possibilities of a full scale civil war erupting.

The insurgency today consists primarily of former Baathists who lost

their grip on power and who fear for their future security in a country

dominated by the Shia. They have resorted to a bloody campaign of

terrorist attacks to prevent the establishment of a central government.

The Bush Administration has failed to develop a political strategy that

will end the violence.

This conflict will not be resolved by military force. It requires a

diplomatic and political solution. Any resolution must address the

Sunni fears that are feeding much of the violence. At the same time,

any resolution must recognize the facts on the ground--the Kurds will

never again allow themselves to be victimized by a central government

in Bagdhad and the Shia, by virtue of their majority status, will never

again allow themselves to be dominated by others.

The Bush Administration's efforts to achieve a political solution

have been grossly inadequate. However, the prospects for a political

and diplomatic resolution are less likely in the face of a total

immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. The more likely result

would be a surge in killings of innocent Iraqis as different groups

compete for power in the vacuum left by the immediate and total

departure of American forces. That bloodshed would be a great stain on

our nation and a terrible blow to our already shattered credibility.

Moreover, just as the precipitous U.S. disengagement from Afghanistan

following the Soviet withdrawal from that country opened the door to

the Taliban regime, the immediate and total withdrawal of U.S. forces

from Iraq--without a political plan in place--would most benefit

extremist and terrorist groups.

Our strategy for leaving Iraq must also recognize that Iraq's

neighbors--Iran, Turkey and Syria--all have strong interests in the

future of Iraq. Our plan must ensure that the United Nations and the

international community will work to prevent others from exploiting the

situation in Iraq at the expense of the Iraqi people and the security

of the region and the United States.

The Senate Democrats, under the leadership of Senators Harry Reid and

Carl Levin have proposed a path for bringing our troops home in an

orderly way that minimizes the likelihood of an outbreak of a full

scale civil war in Iraq.

In the aftermath of the terrible attacks of September 11, 2001, the

world rallied to our side. The international community supported our

decision to go into Afghanistan to root out Al Queda. The Bush

Administration squandered that international good will. Instead, it

began a war of choice against Iraq. As many predicted before the

invasion, that war has fueled the ranks of Al Queda and strengthened

the jihadists. We must not compound the blunders of the Bush

Administration by creating the conditions for even more bloodshed in

Iraq and allowing it to become a haven and launching pad for terrorist

activities.

This Congress has not had a serious debate on Iraq. Instead, the

Republican leadership in this House has worked to hide from the

American people the gross incompetence of the Bush Administration's

policies on Iraq. The time is long overdue for us to have a serious

discussion on this issue of the greatest importance to the American

people. Our troops and their families deserve no less.