Mr. Speaker, three years ago, I argued against the

Bush Administration's proposal to attack Iraq for the very reasons we

have seen emerge from this troubled region. We were prepared to defeat

Saddam Hussein's military but the administration and congressional

leaders were never prepared to win the peace.

Not only was the premise for the war flawed, but the administration

has made the wrong military, political, and diplomatic choices at every

turn. The members of our armed services make up the finest fighting

force in the world and they have done their duty with great distinction

and honor, yet the administration has failed them as well.

I take no satisfaction in my worst fears having been proven correct.

The administration's spectacular failures in executing this war have

set back our efforts against terrorism and left America with no good

options in Iraq. But, as our military is being not just frayed but

damaged and Iraq faces increasingly difficult prospects for democracy

and stability, staying the course is simply not an option.

Until now, I have resisted advocating for an accelerated pullout

because of my fear of the downward spiral that could occur in the

aftermath. Yet this is a question that must be faced sooner rather than

later, and it's hard to imagine a policy that would be more

destabilizing than the administration's current mismanagement of the

war effort and continued estrangement from reality.

There is no longer any basis for the hope that a sustained American

military occupation will stabilize Iraq. Instead, we continue to lose

credibility and influence in the region and with our allies, as well as

strengthen the hands of those extremists who wish to do us harm. Even

many of those who initially supported military action have come to

admit that the administration's strategy has failed and that a large

United States military presence inhibits the development of a stable

and democratic Iraq. Iraqis in key positions are arguing for at least

some withdrawal of US. forces. Most telling is a recent poll of Iraqis

themselves, commissioned by the British Ministry of Defense, which

showed that 82 percent of Iraqis were ``strongly opposed'' to the

presence of foreign troops and less than 1 percent believe the their

presence is helping to improve security.

Iraq's future depends on creating a secure space for politics and the

rule of law to replace violence. This is a process at which only Iraqis

themselves can succeed, with America and the international community

playing a supporting role. Elections scheduled for December provide the

perfect opportunity to begin the withdrawal of American troops, a

refocused U.S. effort, and transfer of responsibility to Iraqis.

American forces should be redeployed out of Iraq in two phases.

First, let's bring the 46,000 National Guard and Reserve forces home

immediately. These elements in our total force have been most

overburdened by

ever-increasing deployments and are most needed here in the United

States.

Continued U.S. aid and military support must be tied to performance

objectives for the Iraqi government and military. On that basis, the

rest of the American forces should be withdrawn over the next one to

two years, based on a detailed plan for the sector by sector transfer

of security responsibility. The majority of these troops should be

brought home. Others should be redeployed to Afghanistan to create a

larger security footprint and help prevent the reemergence of the

Taliban. A small rapid-reaction force should be left in Kuwait that can

protect against any destabilizing coups.

The administration must reengage diplomatically by seeking a new

United Nations resolution that supports international efforts to

stabilize Iraq and by beginning a regional security dialogue with

Iraq's neighbors. We should also work with the Arab League to

facilitate a renewed effort towards a political solution within Iraq by

engaging with nationalist faction leaders who might be a force for

stability in that country if U.S. troops were withdrawn.

We must also change the nature of our economic assistance. By

shifting reconstruction aid to Iraq away from large projects undertaken

by foreign contractors towards small, locally oriented projects run by

Iraqis, we create jobs, give Iraqis a greater investment in their

success, and minimize corruption and price-gouging.

President Bush's model of ``go it alone, do it cheap, and put it on a

credit card'' has not only led to grave instability in Iraq, it is

crippling our ability to deal with the more serious strategic threats,

from Iran and North Korea to a terrorist movement that we have

inadvertently strengthened. We must now do our best to salvage what we

still can of American credibility, military readiness, democratic

ideals, and Iraqi stability through a change in strategy and the

beginning of a responsible phase-down of American troops and the

orderly transfer of authority to Iraqis.