Mr. Speaker, today the Iraq Study Group released a

reasonable working document that affirms the situation in Iraq, and I

quote, and, I quote again,

Indeed the report attests

that 79 percent of the Iraqi people do not believe that the U.S.

presence there is constructive; 79 percent of the people of Iraq do not

view our presence as constructive.

I have affirmed many times since the Abu Ghraib prison scandal that

the Bush administration policy has forfeited our moral authority in

Iraq. Those polling numbers prove it again. On the very day that this

report was released, today, another 10 U.S. soldiers have lost their

lives in Iraq. Attacks against U.S. forces now total more than 180 a

day. And this figure doubles with each passing year.

The report also restates our Nation's financial commitment to the

Iraqi war, now soaring over $400 billion a year,

sapping strength from U.S. domestic priorities such as health care,

education, energy independence, all much needed here at home.

Unfortunately, the report begins with this sentence, and I quote:

but then, amazingly, fails to identify them. Obviously, one of

them is oil. And the U.S., again, does not commit itself in this report

to a strong effort to restore America's energy independence here at

home.

In addition, the report is very iffy on how the oil bounty of Iraq,

which has the second largest set of reserves in the entire world, will

be handled in the future. Though it makes suggestions on how to manage

that oil reserve, the prospects of that being accomplished are quite

remote. The report makes many recommendations that apply in Iraq, but

not to end America's chief strategic vulnerability, our dependence on

imported petroleum surely from the Middle East.

Importantly, the report places the Iraq situation in a regional

context, explaining how what is happening in Iraq is operating to harm

America's standing throughout the Middle East. It states how tepid

international support is for the U.S. engagement in Iraq, despite the

President's acclamations that there is a coalition of the willing.

In addition, the report acknowledging that for the United States to

draw down forces, Iraqi units must replace them. And then the report

details that the 138,000 Iraqi Army troops and 188,000 police units

have some state of readiness. Half of them are not up to the task, with

many functions infiltrated by the opposition.

The report presents a confusing picture on the issue of how long the

United States might need to maintain its presence in Iraq. It

recommends unit withdrawal by 2008 at some level. But then, in a

different section, the report states that not all U.S. combat brigades

would be needed in the future for force protection for backing up Iraqi

units, but, of course, says many units would still be needed. At least

that is the inference, but it doesn't say how many.

In the end, it fails to address the issue of how many combat units

would actually be needed and, therefore, leaves the door open for an

extended U.S. presence.

Admitting the difficulty it will entail, the report recommends

restoring broken diplomatic relations with nations the administration

has publicly ridiculed, such as Syria and Iran, as well as factions

within Iraq and throughout the region with which the administration has

no dialogue, such as Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi faction. The report

properly identifies the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict as

paramount to reaching a regional peace settlement, stating clearly that

neither Democrats nor Republicans would ever abandon Israel, but making

strong recommendations on how to restore the peace process.

The report also makes some statements I find implausible. One is that

only 5,000 civilian contractors are operating in Iraq, from hired guns

to transportation specialists, when in fact that number now exceeds

over 100,000, and represents a serious and worrisome departure from

past U.S. military operations. If that private presence morphs into a

mercenary force that occupies Iraq as the U.S. military withdraws, this

would be a first in American history and a development I would not

welcome.

Mr. Speaker, I was disappointed to read that at the U.S. Embassy in

Baghdad, which was the largest in the world with over 1,000 employees,

only 33 Americans speak Arabic. This is shocking and dangerous and

another indication of the shocking mismanagement of the U.S. mission in

Iraq.