Mr. Speaker, the fact that we are on this floor today

considering a resolution condemning outrageous conduct by American

soldiers and perhaps some civilians against defenseless Iraqi detainees

is an unmitigated and shameful embarrassment for this Nation. This

abuse, which is as criminal as it is un-American, demands full

accountability. And full accountability must be demanded not just at

the bottom of the military chain of command, but for the highest

ranking military and civilian officials who knew or should have known

about this behavior and either turned a blind eye to it or failed to

immediately address it.

Let us be clear. The buck should not and it must not stop with a 20-

year-old enlisted man or woman who may well have thought they were

acting within the framework of a psychology that permitted them to

demean and deny basic decency of treatment to detainees.

Mr. Speaker, 43 years ago, I stood in front of this Capitol building

as President Kennedy told the American people in one of the most famous

inaugural addresses in our history that Americans, he said, are

``unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights

to which this Nation has always been committed and to which,'' he said,

``we are committed today at home and around the world.''

Mr. Speaker, I believe we are still committed to those. That is the

America that every Member of this body knows and loves; an America that

stands for the rights and dignity of every human being; an American

America that fights oppression, inhumanity, and intolerance wherever it

rears its head.

This Congress, the elected representatives of 290 million Americans,

must fulfill its constitutional duty as a co-equal branch of government

and demand accountability for these criminal acts. This means that we

must hold hearings so that the American people and all the world know

the truth about this episode.

I am pleased to see the chairman of the committee is holding

hearings. Some 4 days ago, he said they were not necessary and the

leader of his party said they were not necessary. Those who perpetrated

these criminal acts and those who created the environment in which such

acts were thought to be acceptable should be, must be, held

accountable.

Today we learn that the Secretary of Defense has known for months

that prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan have been humiliated, beaten,

tortured, and even murdered. Twenty-five prisoners have died in U.S.

custody. And, still, there is virtually no accountability for those

deaths. No House congressional inquiry, no presidential or secretarial

condemnation, and no end.

The buck must stop somewhere. Private admonishments are not

sufficient. Full public accountability must be demanded. If the

Secretary of Defense failed to perform his duty, he should be held

responsible. If anybody below him failed to perform their

responsibility, they too should be held responsible, as should those

perpetrators.

Mr. Speaker, it is nothing short of tragic that this indefensible

conduct threatens to overshadow the extraordinary courage and sacrifice

of our brave men and women in our Armed Forces. I have supported their

efforts and supported the President in removing Saddam Hussein. We have

liberated 25 million Iraqis from the clutches of a ruthless dictator.

How proud we are of our men and women in uniform.

The only way we can remove that dark cloud that now hangs over their

noble efforts is to ensure that those who have acted outside the law

are required to answer to it and those who allowed it to go unchecked

and unpunished are removed from positions of responsibility.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let me say that the damage inflicted upon our

image and standing in the world is incalculable. As Tom Friedman

pointed out in the New York Times this morning, it has been quoted

before but let me quote it again: ``We are in danger,'' he said, ``of

losing something much more important than just the war in Iraq. We are

in danger of losing America as an instrument of moral authority and

inspiration in the world.''

I will offer a motion to recommit, which makes more clear our outrage

and more pointed our demand for full investigation and responsibility.

I urge my colleagues to support it.

I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, first, let me say to the gentleman from

California (Mr. Cox) that I associate myself with his remarks and thank

him for those comments. Let me say to my friend, the chairman of the

Committee on Armed Services, he and I voted together probably 95

percent on issues of defense.

I will tell my friend, he has repeated the fact that we knew this in

January at least four or five times, that I have heard. If that is the

case, and I take him at his word, frankly, I did not focus on it, the

chairman did not focus on it, there have been no hearings, there have

been no investigations. It is a shameful reality that perhaps some knew

this as early as January, and we are here today, some 4 months later,

with the public getting that information and the Members of Congress

being energized by it. And this resolution did not come from your

committee, I say to my friend, until almost mid-May, notwithstanding

the fact that you read that disclosure over and over and over again.