Mr. Speaker, lately it seems that the national debate over

the next move in Iraq has become bogged down in a way that really

reflects the military struggle itself. The administration has dug in,

believing that simply staying the course, we can simply outlast the

military insurgency.

Conversely, there are some in my party who, angered understandably by

war under false pretenses, are seeking a pell-mell evacuation complete

with a publicly announced evacuation date, which I think makes the

withdrawal of 136,000 troops more dangerous and more difficult.

But, Mr. Speaker, drawing upon the lessons of history, I would like

to propose a third way: creating a mechanism to more effectively

empower the new elected Iraqi Government, which will allow for a

gradual but permanent U.S. troop reduction.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to talk about a process

that we went through in my office after five visits to Iraq to try to

find a model that would allow us to shift the governmental operations

in Iraq away from the U.S. military and to their new government. And

the example that we came up with, that has been used by this government

in the past, is actually the model that was developed during the Second

World War.

In 1944, after driving Japanese forces from the Philippines with the

help of the Filipino resistance, the United States military, like today

in Iraq, found itself in complete control of the Philippines, over

7,000 islands. It found itself in complete control of the basic

services that government would provide in the Philippines. And because

of the recent occupation by Japanese forces, there was no incumbent

government in the Philippines that could take the responsibilities for

these government operations.

So, by default, the U.S. military took over these government

operations; and while U.S. policy at the time strongly supported

Filipino independence, the military had no choice but to temporarily

exercise control under the fragile circumstances.

Clearly, that situation could not endure indefinitely. And what

Congress did next, in 1944, under the tutelage of John W. McCormack and

the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration, and later the Truman

administration supported, was instructive and I think worth repeating.

In 1944, this Congress passed and the President signed the Filipino

Rehabilitation Act, which created a national commission comprised of

three appointees each from the White House, the Senate, and the House,

and their mission was to plan and coordinate and oversee the transition

of government operations away from the U.S. military and over to the

newly forming Filipino government.

Of course, there are certain arguable differences between the

situation in the Philippines in 1944 and Iraq in 2006. However, after

my five visits to Iraq and dozens of meetings with General George Casey

and top generals in his office and in the field, as well as Iraqi

President Jalal Talabani and members of the Iraqi Council of

Representatives, I believe the critical weakness in our current

strategy is this persistent inability to empower the new Iraqi

Government.

With this in mind, I recently introduced the Iraq Transition Act of

2006, H.R. 5716, drawing from the Philippines model. And I give credit

to those in 1944 who devised this. This is not original thought; this

is borrowed from their example.

I have proposed the establishment of a national bipartisan commission

comprised of appointees, again from the White House, the Senate, and

this House, whose specific and targeted purpose would be to help

facilitate the orderly, deliberate, and expeditious transition from

U.S. military control to Iraqi civilian control of operations of

government in Iraq. It is important to remember that the transition to

civilian control in Iraq is a political process, and while I have many

times witnessed the excellence with which our military has performed in

Iraq, I also believe it is a strategic disservice to the military for

us to add political reconciliation to the massive burdens of security

and reconstruction that they are now shouldering.

Simply put, the newly created Commission on Iraqi Transition would be

held directly responsible for working with the military leadership and

the Department of State to accomplish the transition to Iraqi civilian

control of government operations in Iraq and to regularly report its

progress to the Congress, the President, and the American people.

While this approach may not satisfy the ``stay the course'' advocates

or those who would prefer to announce a specific date for withdrawal, I

believe it offers a responsible and workable plan for two important

reasons.

In closing, firstly, this bill introduces a level of direct

accountability to the political transition process that does not now

exist and has made measuring progress extremely difficult. And secondly

and lastly, it has precedent and success to support it and offers the

best opportunity for the earliest withdrawal of U.S. forces, while

leaving the Iraqi people with the greatest chance for preserving their

newly found democracy.

I look forward to working with my colleagues.