Mr. Speaker, yesterday's decision by President Bush to

escalate the U.S. troop commitment in Iraq will not bring stability to

Baghdad. It will not ameliorate the growing civil war in Iraq. A troop

increase will not result in a more rapid exit for the more than 130,000

American troops serving there, many of them on their third or fourth

tour in Iraq. And worst of all, it makes apparent that the President

has paid little heed to the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, a multitude of

experts, both civilian and military, the Congress and, most

importantly, an overwhelming majority of the American people.

For a long time, many of us have been calling for a new way forward

in Iraq, and the White House billed last night's speech as a dramatic

departure from current policy. But while the rhetoric may have been

different, the plan outlined by the President was more of the same, and

he clearly intends to stay the course. This is a position that I

believe is unwise and that I strongly oppose.

I will support a resolution of disapproval, and I am willing to

explore other options to force the President to truly change policy in

Iraq.

In his remarks, the President told us that failure in Iraq is

unacceptable, but his prosecution of the war has made success in Iraq

recede further and further from our reach. The latest escalation is

another in a long series of poor decisions by the administration that

have cost the lives of so many brave and dedicated troops, cost

American taxpayers more than $350 billion and left Iraq in chaos.

Shiites and Sunnis who once lived in integrated neighborhoods in

Baghdad are slaughtering each other now at a terrifying

pace. Iraqis spend 16 of every 24 hours without electricity.

Rather than sending additional troops to combat the insurgency, we

should begin to responsibly redeploy our forces in Iraq while

redoubling our efforts to train and equip Iraqi forces to provide their

own security, an effort which is at the very heart of the Iraq Study

Group recommendations for bolstering security in Iraq.

President Bush rightly characterized the most recent pushes to

stabilize Baghdad, Operation Together Forward and Operation Together

Forward II, as unsuccessful, because there were not enough Iraqi forces

to hold areas cleared by American troops. But the President's assertion

that we will now be able to rely on 18 Iraqi army and police brigades

to shoulder much of the burden in a new offensive in Baghdad is clearly

at odds with reality.

The Iraqi Army has not distinguished itself in combat. And four of

the six battalions that were deployed to the capital last summer failed

to show up at all.

The Iraqi police, which are under the control of the Ministry of the

Interior, have been heavily infiltrated by Shiite militias and death

squads and cannot be expected to take on Shiite extremists as Prime

Minister Malaki has pledged. There is little support for an escalated

American military presence in Iraq. American military commanders do not

see an increase as improving the security situation on the ground, and

the strain of multiple deployments has seriously eroded our capacity to

respond to other contingencies should the need arise.

The American people, Democrats and Republicans alike, do not support

an increase in the troop strength in Iraq. Perhaps most important of

all, the Iraqis do not want more American troops in Iraq. In fact, if

there is one thing that unites Iraqis, it is the desire that American

forces should not remain indefinitely.

Furthermore, by continuing to bear the brunt of the fighting against

insurgents, foreign fighters, and militias, the United States has

fostered a dangerous dependence that has slowed efforts to have Iraqis

shoulder the burden of defending their own country and government.

Even as we focus our military efforts on training Iraqi security

forces, we need to push the Sunnis and Shiites to make the political

compromises that are the necessary precondition to any reconciliation

process. I have been arguing for more than 2 years that the struggle in

Iraq is primarily a political one. The Iraq Study Group and numerous

outside experts have also pressed the administration to force the Iraqi

Government to make the hard decisions on power sharing, minority

rights, and the equitable distribution of oil revenues that could help

quell the Sunni insurgency and undermine support for Shiite maximalists

like Muktada al Sadr.

I also believe the United States must work to convene a regional

conference to support Iraq's bringing together its neighborhoods to

find ways to stem the flow of weapons and foreign fighters into Iraq

and to pursue common strategies in support of reconstruction and

political reconciliation efforts.

There is hard evidence that Iran is facilitating the flow of weapons,

trainers, and intelligence to Shiite militias in a bid to assert

greater control over its neighbor. At the same time, the long and

porous Syrian border has continued to be a transit point for foreign

jihadis who have carried out some of the spectacular and devastating

attacks on U.S. troops and Iraqi civilians.

Finally, our efforts in Iraq cannot be pursued in a vacuum. We need

to do more to engage the Arab and Muslim world, and there must be a

renewed effort to start peace negotiations between Israel and the

Palestinians. This week's passage of the 9/11 implementation bill

included excellent proposals for buttressing our leadership by

improving our communication of ideas and communication in the Muslim

world and by expanding U.S. scholarship exchange and other programs in

Muslim countries.

Mr. Speaker, failure is unacceptable, but so is staying the course. I

hope and expect that the debate we are going to have, the first real

debate we have had in years, will convince the President to listen to

those who are calling for a new way forward and not more of the same.