Mr. Speaker, in 2 days, we will mark the sixth

anniversary of America's invasion and occupation of Iraq. When

President Bush announced the start of the conflict on the night of

March 20, 2003, he said that America must go to war against a regime

``that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder.'' Of course,

Mr. Speaker, we know that those weapons did not exist and that the war

should never have been fought. But today, I don't want to go back, and

I don't want to revisit all the many mistakes of the past. Instead, I

want to use this time to remember the literally millions of men, women

and children from the United States of America, from Iraq and from the

many other countries whose lives have been shattered over the past 6

years.

These include those who died, the wounded, the veterans, the

refugees, the orphans, the widows and the many other family members who

are left to mourn and to struggle. We have a great responsibility in

this House of Representatives to honor and to give meaning to their

sacrifice. I believe the best way to do that is by committing ourselves

to work for peace so that war becomes a thing of the past.

On this sixth anniversary, Mr. Speaker, this anniversary of the

occupation, we have more reason to hope for peace than on the previous

five. That is because we have a new leader in the White House, one who

has already taken some very positive steps. President Obama is

committed to diplomacy, not war, and the most important tool of

American foreign policy. He has banned the use of torture. He is

closing the notorious prison at Guantanamo Bay. And he has announced a

plan to remove all combat troops from Iraq. But Mr. Speaker, there is

much more that we need to do.

The Iraq withdrawal plan will leave 50,000 troops behind to continue

the occupation. That is unacceptable. All troops and military

contractors must come home by August 2010, at the latest. In

Afghanistan, the administration is planning to double down on our

military involvement. But, Mr. Speaker, there is no military solution

to the situation in Afghanistan. That is why I have joined my

colleagues, Barbara Lee and Maxine Waters, in asking the President to

establish a timeline for the redeployment of our troops out of

Afghanistan. We have also called for a plan to assist the Afghan

people, because we cannot defeat the Taliban with bombs and bullets. We

can only defeat the Taliban by helping the Afghan people to meet their

desperate needs for schools, for roads and for economic development.

But we need to do more than just solve problems as they arise. We

need to be proactive. We need to have a comprehensive strategy for

keeping the peace. Let me suggest two ways to achieve that goal. First,

I believe this is a good time to renew Congressman Kucinich's calls for

the establishment of a Cabinet-level Department of Peace so we can work

full-time to analyze international problems and advise the President on

strategies to prevent war and to peacefully resolve conflicts around

the world. The President of the United States has never had the

advantage of such advice. I believe it is high time that he did.

Second, I believe that this is a good time to renew our proposal for

a smart national security plan. ``Smart'' is based on a simple idea:

War is an outdated concept. That is why my smart plan keeps Americans

safe through strong global alliances and better intelligence, as

opposed to pre-emptive military strikes. Smart also calls for the

United States to support nuclear nonproliferation, and it includes an

ambitious humanitarian development agenda to end the hopelessness and

oppression that lead to war and terrorism in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, after these many years of violence, one thing is clear.

The American people have had enough war. They are seeking a better way

to make the world safe for their children and grandchildren. So let us

resolve in the honor of those who suffer because of a mistaken

occupation 6 years ago to do everything we can to avoid the mistakes of

the past and lay the foundation for a peaceful future.

That is the best way to honor those who were caught up in the chaos

of Iraq. And it is the best way to turn the tragedy of this sixth

anniversary into a time of hope for the people of the world.