Mr. Speaker, in listening to this debate, I

think the biggest problem is the proponents of the stay-the-course plan

in Iraq continually and completely equate the battle in Iraq with the

battle against al Qaeda and the terrorists who struck us. The two are

not the same. In fact, we heard from Ms. Ros-Lehtinen that Iraq is but

one of the battlefields that we are fighting against al Qaeda. That is

absolutely true. Yet we have 80 percent of our assets in Iraq.

Meanwhile, report after report come out that al Qaeda is strengthening

themselves in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where we don't have enough

resources.

Our argument is not for retreat. Our argument is that there is a

better way to fight al Qaeda and those who threaten us than to put all

of our assets in Iraq while not paying enough attention to where al

Qaeda is really strengthening itself. In Iraq, it is primarily a power

struggle in which al Qaeda is a player. It is not primarily about al

Qaeda's threat against the U.S. In Afghanistan, with the Taliban and al

Qaeda, it is a very different story.

Our troops, our assets, the lives and the talents of the people of

this country are tied down in Iraq fighting what is primarily a civil

war instead of better fighting al Qaeda. In fact, our presence, in many

ways, has strengthened al Qaeda. Syria would never be an ally of al

Qaeda in any sort of real-world scenario, because al Qaeda wants to

topple their regime. Yet to defeat us in Iraq, they have come up with

an alliance of convenience.

There is a better way to fight al Qaeda. We are here today to change

course in Iraq because it is a better way to protect this country.

Timing isn't the issue. Six months ago, these facts were basically the

same as they are today. In September, these facts will be basically the

same as they are today. We cannot wait if we are going to have the best

possible strategy for defeating al Qaeda, the group that threatens us

most, instead of getting bogged down in the civil war and in the tribal

differences that are present in Iraq. We want to win, not to quit. This

is the better way to do it.