Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, when the President announced in January that he intended

to escalate the number of American troops in Iraq, he sought to betray

the increase in American combat forces as a necessary precondition for

Iraq's government to make the political compromises necessary to

prevent Iraq's civil war from spiraling completely out of control. In

that speech, the President pledged to hold the Iraqi leadership

accountable and to demand progress in two main areas: political

reconciliation and security.

Now, more than 6 months later, it's unfortunate but also undeniable

that little sustainable progress has been made on either front. Even as

we speak, the administration is downplaying the significance of an

interim report on the effect of the surge in Iraq.

On the security front, the heroism and sacrifices of American forces

has caused a drop in sectarian killings, leading to an overall drop in

the number of Iraqi deaths, but the reduction of Iraqi casualties has

come with a horrific increase in the loss of our own troops. More than

600 Americans have been killed since January.

Moreover, as American troops leave cities that are quieted with their

own blood, there is every indication that Iraqi troops will not be able

to sustain the calm. If the past is any indicator, insurgents and

militias are merely waiting for us to exhaust ourselves and move on

before returning, and Iraqi security forces will be powerless to stop

them.

When President Bush announced in January that he intended to escalate

the number of American troops in Iraq, he sought to portray the

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we speak, the Administration is downplaying the significance of an

interim report on the effect of the ``surge'' in Iraq.

On reconciliation, the Iraqi Government has failed to meet any of the

political benchmarks endorsed by the President in January and which

this Congress mandated earlier this spring. These political goals are

the best indicator of the prospects for reconciliation in Iraq and,

tragically, all signs indicate that political reconciliation has been

non-existent.

The Iraqi Parliament has yet to begin consideration of the oil law or

an associated revenue-sharing law. Given the disparate geographical

distribution of Iraq's oil reserves, these laws are essential if Iraq

is to have any hope of remaining a united country.

More alarming, is the lack of progress in healing the Sunni-Shiite

rift. Of greatest importance, is the need to reverse some of the more

draconian edicts of the postwar de-Baathification orders promulgated by

former Coalition Provisional Authority chief Paul Bremer. These decrees

removed any incentive for Sunnis to participate in creating a better

future for Iraq. Other laws--to disarm militias and to grant amnesty--

are still being formulated, and most observers believe that the

prospect of disarming militias is so remote that it will not be

possible in the foreseeable future.

On the security front, the heroism and sacrifice of American force

have caused a decline in sectarian killings and suicide bombings,

leading to an overall drop in the number of Iraqi civilian deaths. But

the reduction of Iraqi casualties has come with a horrific increase in

the loss of our own troops--more than 600 Americans have been killed

since January.

Moreover, as American troops leave cities they have quieted with

their own blood, there is every indication that Iraqi troops will not

be able to sustain the calm. If the past is any indicator, insurgents

and militias are merely waiting for us to exhaust ourselves and move

on before returning--and Iraqi security forces will be powerless to

stop them.

There has been one very positive development--in al Anbar province,

Sunni tribal leaders have decided that al Qaeda's indiscriminate

killing makes them a bigger problem than we are, and they have taken up

arms against our common foe. This alliance of American forces and

former insurgents is desirable and should be encouraged elsewhere. But,

like most marriages of convenience, it is not sustainable and cannot

form the bedrock of a secure Iraq or reconciliation among Iraqi sects.

For almost two years, I have been calling for a change in our mission

in Iraq--from policing a civil war to training, containment and

counter-terrorism. This necessitates a responsible redeployment of our

combat forces from Iraq, and I believe that this bill does an excellent

job of providing a framework for that redeployment, while still giving

our armed forces the flexibility that they need to respond to

contingencies.

Iraq's future must be decided by the Iraqi people and that solution

must come from political reconciliation. Every day that we maintain our

forces in the crossfire between warring sects is another opportunity

for hatreds to harden and radicals to consolidate their grip on Iraq's

ethnic and sectarian communities. We should change our mission now, and

begin the withdrawal of our combat forces.

In planning for the inevitable withdrawal, we must recognize that a

poorly executed departure could result in an escalation of civil war

violence as Iraqi sects compete for power. As we draw down our forces,

we must make every effort to prevent a magnification of this

catastrophic violence. In particular, we must not compound the error of

the lack of pre-invasion planning, with an equally tragic failure to

adequately anticipate the post-occupation environment.

Mr. Speaker, it is long past time to begin to end the war in Iraq. I

support this bill and urge its passage by the House today.