Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding.

We have no more serious matter to debate than war and peace. I thank

the gentleman for his extraordinary leadership and for bringing this

bill to the floor.

I must remark that how different I think the debate would be if not

one of the facts were changed but one: that if it were Bill Clinton in

the Presidency and all the other facts were the same, I ask my friends

on the other side of the aisle what would their comments reflect.

I have said it before many times on this House floor and I will say

it again today. Every Member of this great body who swears an oath to

support and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and

domestic, is committed to fighting and defeating terrorism. We must not

lose sight in this debate that terrorism is a real threat to our people

and to our country. We do not lose sight of that on this side of the

aisle. We are committed to defeating terrorists and protecting America.

Any suggestion otherwise demeans our discourse and is beneath, frankly,

the dignity of the Members of this institution and the American people.

After nearly 4 1/2 years in Iraq, a war that has been, I think,

superbly peopled by our men and women in uniform but they have been

trying to pursue an incompetently planned policy, this is what our

Nation has to show for its efforts:

More than 3,600 brave American servicemen and women have been killed

in action. More than 26,000 others have been maimed and injured. The

American taxpayer has spent $450 billion on this war, with a pending

request by the administration for an additional $147 billion.

And yet the President's policy in Iraq is not succeeding. Just today

the administration released the ``assessment report'' on Iraq demanded

by this Democratic Congress. The bottom line is the Iraq Government has

failed to meet a single one of the security, political, and economic

milestones for success. Perhaps most jarring, the administration rates

as ``unsatisfactory'' the number of Iraqi security units capable of

operating independently. That is over 50 months later.

The report states: ``There has been a slight reduction in units

assessed as capable of independent operations since January, 2007.'' In

other words, the administration says we are going backwards in terms of

the capability of the Iraqi forces.

While the administration and congressional Republicans try to put a

positive spin on the so-called ``progress'' in Iraq, other respected

voices are not so optimistic. Yesterday, Thomas Fingar, the Deputy

Director for Analysis at the National Intelligence Council, told the

House Armed Services Committee that there have been ``few appreciable

gains'' in Iraqi political progress. Even General David Petraeus, our

top commander in Iraq, a gentleman that all of us respect as a military

leader, told the New York Times that ``while some measures of violence

showed a downward trend, it was too early to suggest that there has

been a lasting turnaround in the war.'' That is over 50 months later.

Mr. Speaker, last January in an address to the Nation, President Bush

stated: ``America will hold the Iraqi government to the benchmarks it

has announced.'' We have not done so. We said we would do that, but we

have not done so. Today the President shows no intention of changing

course even as the Iraqis fail to meet those benchmarks.

Our fight against terrorism must and will be tough, but it also must

be smart. And it is long past time that we recognize the following: The

President's stay-the-course strategy is not working. The Iraqis must

take responsibility for their own country. This war has severely

diminished our military readiness and diverted our attention in the war

on terror. If that were not the case, Osama bin Laden would still not

be at large and al Qaeda would not be reported as being back at the

strength that it had on September 11 of 2001.

After $450 billion and precious blood being spilled by American

troops and others, we must change course by voting for this

legislation, which calls for a responsible redeployment of American

forces in Iraq and a comprehensive plan in U.S. policy in Iraq and the

broader region.

Mr. Speaker, we must have a specific strategy for missions our

remaining forces would undertake as well as plans to engage Iraq's

neighboring states and to locate and eliminate al Qaeda and allied

terrorist networks, which seek to destabilize and destroy the United

States and other democracies. Jonathan Alter at Newsweek just a week

ago referred to this as a ``pull and strike'' strategy. Redeploy so

that our forces are able to focus on the terrorists, not on the civil

war in which they find themselves embroiled.

Mr. Speaker, the American people and an increasing number of our

friends on the other side of the aisle have lost confidence in the

President's Iraq strategy because we have yet to see demonstrable,

sustainable progress in that effort. Our troops have done everything we

have asked them.

I'll tell you that we are so proud of those of you who have served in

the Armed Forces of the United States. I was so proud of Patrick

Murphy's statement that he gave here today, so proud of all of those

who have served not only in Iraq but in every theater of conflict to

which Americans have responded.

But as Senator Domenici told the Baltimore Sun yesterday, one of the

senior Members of the United States Senate and a leader in the

Republican Party, he said this: ``There is no reason to wait . . . I am

trying to tell the President that he must change his ways because there

is nothing positive happening.''

That is not a Democratic Member of the Senate speaking, that is a

senior Republican leader saying there is no reason to wait.

This bill is on this floor this day because there is no reason to

wait. Hopefully this body will overwhelmingly respond to the will and

focus of the American people, which are pleading for a change in

strategy, a new direction, a policy of success against terrorists, and

ensuring the safety of our Nation and its people. Let's change our

strategy and demand that the Iraqis step up and be responsible for

their country.

Our presence there, General Casey observed, has been undermining

their taking responsibility, not enhancing it. Let's be responsibly

redeploying our troops. And let's focus our resources and efforts on

disrupting and destroying the terrorist networks that threaten our

national security. This legislation allows us to accomplish that

mission.

I urge my colleagues, for this body, for their constituents, for this

country, and for our troops, pass this legislation.