Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of this renewed

debate on the war in Iraq. Iraq is today's signature issue, and it is

one of the most divisive and complex ones before this Congress. The

choices we make regarding Iraq will establish a legacy for the United

States that will define our policy toward the Middle East region for a

generation or longer. For that reason, it is my hope that we, as an

institution and, indeed, as a country can agree upon a policy that will

best protect our national interests and those of our allies and

supports those servicemembers and civiians--and their families--who so

bravely serve our country today in Iraq and elsewhere around the world.

If enacted, H.R. 2956, the Responsible Redeployment from Iraq Act,

the legislation before us today, would significantly change the

direction of current operations in Iraq. Notably, this legislation

would require the Secretary of Defense to commence the reduction of the

number of United States Armed Forces personnel deployed in Iraq--

beginning as early as 120 days after enactment of this bill--to a more

limited presence by April 1, 2008. Also notable, this legislation would

require the President to submit to Congress a new comprehensive

strategy that would guide future operations in Iraq and that would

include specific plans for diplomatic initiatives to engage United

States allies and others in the region to bring stability to Iraq.

This strategy, according to H.R. 2956, would be written to reflect an

honest assessment of the United States' national security interests in

Iraq and the broader Middle East region. The document would be written

to include the diplomatic, political, economic, and military components

of a comprehensive strategy to maintain and advance such interests as

the Armed Forces are redeployed from Iraq. This bill takes into account

the importance of protecting United States diplomatic personnel and

combating terrorism in Iraq in any redeployment strategy. The strategy

would also include a justification of the minimum force levels required

to protect United States national security interests in Iraq after

April 1, 2008, based upon a description of the specific missions of the

Armed Forces to be undertaken. Of those missions, the strategy would

require an assessment of the extent to which military personnel would

fulfill roles traditionally performed by diplomatic personnel.

H.R. 2956 will generate Significant debate. Withdrawal timelines and

a date have been discussed during recent debate on this issue.

Consensus on this aspect of this bill will remain hard to reach. But

this bill helps advances our national discussion with respect to the

war in Iraq by calling for a new comprehensive strategy. Such a

comprehensive strategy is long overdue.

I introduced H.R. 744, the Iraq Policy Revitalization and

Congressional Oversight Enhancement Act on January 31, 2007. H.R. 744

would help enhance congressional oversight of Operation Iraqi Freedom

by requiring the President to transmit periodically to Congress a

consolidated, comprehensive report that would detail the terms of

completion for Operation Iraqi Freedom. The bill would also require the

President to seek to enter into a multilateral agreement--based on that

plan--to help provide for the completion of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I

am encouraged that the legislation before us today would require a

similar plan be drafted by the President and communicated to Congress.

Our soldiers and diplomats need a comprehensive, actionable plan that

defines what it is that they need to accomplish in order to

successfully complete their missions.

It is true the Government of Iraq must increasingly shoulder the

burden of, and better fulfill its obligation to, govern from moderate

positions, with uniformity, and with regard to the rule of law. But

recent history tells us that we cannot rely on the Government of Iraq

to govern in that manner. As H.R. 744 notes, the inability or

unwillingness of the Government of Iraq to govern in moderate terms

contributes to violence against United States service members and

Coalition forces, creates barriers to national reconciliation in Iraq,

and impedes the expeditious completion of Operation Iraqi Freedom and

the return of our service members to their peacetime duty stations. The

outcome of policies that are overly dependent upon a reportedly broken,

corrupt, and sectarian government delivering on complicated policies,

against great odds, and during a compressed period of time is

uncertain. This fact underscores the importance of and the need for a

new comprehensive strategy.

I believe that continued, honest and open exchange of views on the

substance of what our country and our allies must achieve in Iraq in

order to complete Operation Iraqi Freedom is needed. Finding an

achievable, expeditious, and honorable way to complete Operation Iraqi

Freedom should be a primary goal for all of us. We owe this to those

who have sacrificed so much for this mission. But the situation in Iraq

will not yield a solution easily. Nevertheless, we must endeavor to

find one. In doing so we will be helping shape in the best way possible

the legacy future generations of Americans will inherit and the one we

will have to defend to history. The United States assumed a moral

obligation to bring a minimum of order to Iraq when we, in a pre-

emptive manner, attacked that county four years ago. History will judge

us harshly if we act to abandon this obligation. The consideration of

H.R. 2956 allows us an opportunity to formulate a national strategy

that more effectively addresses the realities of Iraq.