Mr. Speaker, since learning we would consider a

resolution regarding troop levels in Iraq, I have spent considerable

time listening to veterans of this war and other wars questioning some

of America's top national security officials, reading every e-mail,

literally every letter on this most serious issue of this day that has

come into my office from my constituents. I have listened to voices of

leaders of other nations who surround Iraq. I have read the National

Intelligence Report. I have read the Iraq Study Committee Report. I

have been given books such as ``Fiasco'' to digest, and I have reached

out to the parents of brave Americans who are on their way into this

conflict, and I have heard from the parents of sons who were lost in

this conflict. I have heard strong opinions on both sides of this

issue, and I have reflected upon my own vote to authorize the war in

the first place.

To say the least, it has been an agonizing experience. Agonizing,

because I want to do what is right for America with minimal sacrifice

to the brave Americans who wear our Nation's uniform. I want to do what

is right to protect our freedom and our security.

I will always remember the days and nights when the smoke from the

burning Pentagon wafted into the apartment I lived in just blocks from

that building. I remember the images of that day when rescue personnel

were trying to save lives, only to lose their own. I remember the

pledge I made to myself that I would never let that happen to America

again if I had my way.

So I supported implementation of the 9/11 Commission Report. I

supported efforts to improve our intelligence gathering and processing

efforts so that America does not miss key indicators of danger or,

worse, misinterpret the data that is gathered.

Policymakers must be given accurate, reliable intelligence if we are

to make responsible decisions. Had Congress been given an accurate

intelligence assessment, I doubt the vote to invade Iraq would ever

have come to this floor in the first place, and I certainly would not

have cast the vote I cast because the threat was not what we were told

it was, despite the horrific brutality of Saddam Hussein and his

henchmen sons.

Unfortunately, though, we cannot edit history; we cannot change the

past. Our responsibility is to the present and even more so to the

future, America's future.

In some areas of the world, America has made strong diplomatic

progress on the most difficult issues facing our planet. I speak of the

recent agreement with North Korea coming out of the Six Party talks. I

am reminded of the willingness of Libya to give up its weapons of mass

destruction and come into line with the world community. And while much

work remains regarding Iran's nuclear development, America's work with

other countries and through the United Nations is having an effect on

Iran.

Meanwhile, our troops and our work internationally in Afghanistan

continues to show progress, even in light of the recent resurgence of

the Taliban. Consider the historic role NATO is playing to bring peace

and stability to that far-off land.

So if we are accomplishing good in Afghanistan and elsewhere, why is

the situation in Iraq still such a mess? And what can or should America

do there now that will hasten Iraq's move towards stability and hasten

the bringing home of our troops to America?

As my colleague from New Mexico, Heather Wilson, so eloquently and

forcefully asked this week: What are America's strategic interests in

Iraq, and how can we best achieve them?

These are the serious questions of our day, and these are the issues

tragically missing from this nonbinding resolution.

In this new world where war is not waged by armies in uniform with

codes of honor but by terrorists who blow up food markets and behead

journalists, how do we respond in an effective way to prevent the

insanity from coming again to our shores? How best do we prevent a

whole region from ripping apart at the seams and perhaps taking much of

the world with it?

While Congress has a clear constitutional role and responsibility

when the Nation is at war, where is the line that Congress should not

cross? Are we really best equipped to decide precisely how many

reinforcements are sent into which battle? Isn't that a decision best

left to the commanders in the field? Can Congress really give General

Petraeus a unanimous vote of support to lead our effort in Iraq and

then turn around and deny him the strategy he told us he believes is

necessary to win?

A former colonel in the Air Force wrote to me recently on this very

topic. She said, ``Some in Congress say they support General Petraeus

but don't want them to undertake the mission they were confirmed to do.

It seems right out of Alice in Wonderland.''

And if Congress is going to make these decisions, then have we really

carefully analyzed where the other 134,754 troops in Iraq are, what

they are doing, and what they should do?

Another of the e-mails I received was from a veteran of the Vietnam

War who, like many other veterans of that conflict, urged me to vote

against this resolution; and he wrote, ``Our troops need unqualified

support. They don't need to be told they are participating in a lost

cause.''

Indeed, this two-sentence nonbinding resolution does send a very

mixed message to our troops. Moreover, this resolution is a lost

opportunity to address at least five major issues that a serious

Congress needs to address.

First, this resolution fails to even mention the Iraqi role. Where is

the siren call for the Iraqi government to keep its word and perform as

promised? We cannot expect for long to do for Iraq what it is unwilling

to do for itself.

Second, this resolution fails to even mention the need for this

administration to embrace the Iraq Study Group Report's call for

aggressive diplomatic initiatives with Syria, Iran, and other nations

in Iraq's neighborhood. Where is the call for enhanced diplomacy?

Third, this resolution fails to even mention the need to replenish

the equipment that our National Guard units have left behind while

serving our country overseas. My State's own National Guard's ability

to conduct training is deeply affected by lack of equipment.

Fourth, this resolution fails to call on Iran, Syria, and other

nations to stop directly or indirectly supplying the weapons and

explosives to those who detonate car bombs in Baghdad and elsewhere in

Iraq, killing women and children as they try to buy food in local

markets. Where is the condemnation of their actions?

Fifth, this resolution fails to define what our strategic national

interests are in Iraq and how we can best achieve them.

I know that I stand alone in my State's delegation by opposing this

resolution. I have been told by some I should just vote for it. It

would be easier politically for me because then the problem is off my

back. It is someone else's. They will own it. I cannot do that and look

at myself in the mirror.

I cannot ignore the counsel recently given to us by diplomats in the

region whose advice we ignored when America took on this challenge in

Iraq and who now counsel us with most seriousness in the strongest of

terms against leaving Iraq before the country is stabilized. They have

made it clear to this Member of Congress that failure in Iraq will have

grave and dangerous consequences to the entire region. In short, we

broke it, we need to fix it before we leave it.

But fixing Iraq does not mean ending religious differences,

differences that have ripped apart that region for 1,300 years or more.

Fixing Iraq does not mean installing our form of democracy. Fixing Iraq

means ensuring a new terrorist haven is not created or allowed to be

created from which they can train and plan safely to carry out attacks

against the West. Fixing Iraq means ensuring their government can stand

on its own and not collapse into a sinkhole that drags other nations in

the region into an abyss.

Given the glaring shortcomings of the non-binding resolution we have

before us today, I will vote ``no'' for as many of those who served in

Vietnam have told me its message does undercut our troops. Moreover, it

fails to call for the increased diplomatic initiatives in the region,

it fails to call for Iraq to do its part, it fails to define our

strategic national interests of stabilizing Iraq so as to prevent the

creation of another terrorist training haven, and it fails to address

the very real needs of our National Guard.

It is unfortunate that the opportunity to actually affect these very

serious policy choices was not allowed on the Floor of the House today.

It is, indeed, a missed opportunity for America.