Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Speaker, I first want to express our appreciation to the brave

men and women of our Armed Forces. I have met with our troops in Iraq

and in Afghanistan and our wounded soldiers in Walter Reed and Bethesda

Naval Hospitals and the families of those who have paid the ultimate

sacrifice defending our freedoms. We thank them for their unwavering

commitment to our country and believe we owe it to them to have an open

and honest debate regarding our next steps in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that the war in Iraq has been

challenging. We are fighting a war against terrorists and radical

Islamic militants who are determined to kill as many Americans as

possible. They believe that killing American soldiers will drive us out

of Iraq and out of the Middle East, allowing radical terrorists free

rein and a base to expand their influence around the world.

These are the same radical Islamic militants who bombed the World

Trade Center in 1993, the Khobar Towers in 1996, the embassies in Kenya

and Tanzania in 1998 and the USS Cole in 2000. We surely can't forget

the slaughter of 3,000 innocent American citizens on our soil. And just

last year a couple arrested in Britain planned to use their 6-month-old

baby as a human bomb to destroy a civilian airliner over the Atlantic

Ocean.

We must recognize that we are dealing with irrational, radical,

maniacal monsters who will not respond to diplomatic niceties.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that the vast majority of Americans do not

support an immediate withdrawal from Iraq, just as they do not support

a never-ending deployment of U.S. forces there. They want us, they

expect us, to work together and with the President to find a way to win

the war on terror while bringing our troops home as soon as possible.

We should be past the point of political posturing when it comes to

Iraq. Yet this resolution is more of the same, once again placing

politics over policy. Instead of encouraging substantive discussion on

options in Iraq, the majority has once again shut us out of the process

and refused to consider any alternative to their point of view. That is

truly unfortunate because this nonbinding resolution does nothing to

increase the accountability of the Iraqi government or provide for our

troops or even propose a new course in Iraq.

We all agree that this administration has made mistakes in Iraq. Most

harmful, I believe, has been the slow pace of training Iraq troops and

security forces to take responsibility for their own country. Early

lapses in this area are a principal reason why our troops remain in

Iraq today.

But the administration has taken action to accelerate this training

and better prepare Iraqi forces. So now it is time for the Iraqi

government to demonstrate that it has the ability to confront the

problems facing their country, both politically and militarily. That is

why it is so important that we hold the Iraqi government accountable

for what they say they are going to do and require them to take the

lead in securing their Nation. The Iraqi government and the Iraqi

people must recognize that they, not American troops, are responsible

for the future of their country.

With that being said, we must continue to support our troops and

commanders on the ground by giving them the resources they need to be

successful. It would be a tragic mistake to cut off funding or limit

support for our troops fighting against terrorists abroad. We also must

be very careful about the message we send to our allies and our enemies

and, most importantly, to our troops in the field who have performed

with great courage.

The bipartisan Iraq Study Group has stated that it could support a

shorter redeployment or surge of American combat forces to stabilize

Baghdad or to speed up the training and equipping mission, if the U.S.

commander in Iraq determines that such steps would be effective, and

that is a quote from the Iraq Study Group report. Well, General

Petraeus says that it can be effective.

Clearly, the path forward must include military and political

strategic benchmarks so that we are in a position to measure the

progress and commitment of the Iraqi government, but we must also be

willing to give our troops, who have sacrificed so much for our Nation,

the opportunity and the resources to be successful and provide the

short-term support needed to achieve increased stability in Iraq.

There are serious consequences to our national security if we fail in

Iraq. Cutting off funding, limiting military options or pushing for

immediate withdrawal will only make our future more dangerous. It is

time to stop the politics, stop the games, stop the finger pointing,

and do what is best for America. Let us put partisanship aside and

discuss concrete plans on how we can defeat radical terrorists and

protect our Nation from those who mean us great harm.