Mr. Speaker, almost 4 years ago our brave men and women

in uniform defeated the armed forces of a brutal tyrant, and he has

been brought to justice.

In the years since Saddam's fall, our troops have won thousands of

battles, taken numerable objectives, built schools and utility systems,

and provided all types of humanitarian relief in countless villages,

towns, and cities ravaged by sectarian violence. But now our fighting

men and women are thrust into a civil war that pits religious and

ethnic factions against each other. Lurking amid Iraq's civilian

population, they mercilessly kill their fellow Iraqis.

These fanatical killers plant thousands of explosive devices and

crouch in thousands of ambush positions to attack our troops, who seek

to replace senseless sectarian violence with a measure of stability so

that the dysfunctional and deceitful Maliki government can survive. To

fight and die in the middle of an Iraqi civil war fueled by centuries-

old religious hatred is not why we sent our troops into harm's way.

Our troops have stepped up for 4 years. They have paid the price in

blood. Now is the time for Iraqi authorities to step up. If they are

ever to do so, it will be only after they understand that it will be

their blood, not the blood of young Americans, that will be shed to

stop the horrific sectarian violence that is tearing Iraq apart.

Throwing 20,000 additional Americans into the carnage of a Sunni-

Shiite civil war can only allow the Iraqi Government to continue to

shirk its responsibility for the security of its own people, as they

continue to use our troops to eliminate their adversaries rather than

sitting down and negotiating with them to share power and oil revenue.

After the election, the President said he heard the concerns of the

American people and he promised a new plan for victory, but what he has

proposed is merely a continuation of the same failed policy. Sending

20,000 more American troops to Iraq will do nothing to further the

cause of victory. It will only prolong the agony.

Our mission in Iraq remains dependent on a viable Iraqi Government

with both the ability and the will to confront the extremists that are

tearing that country apart. The Maliki government has demonstrated

neither the ability nor the will to take the action necessary to bring

an end to this sectarian bloodshed.

The Members of his government at the highest levels and Maliki's

strongest supporters are using their office to aid the insurgents and

are directly involved in the sectarian violence gripping and destroying

Iraq and killing our troops.

At a time when we should be doing everything we can to promote

diplomacy in the Middle East, our attention to resources have instead

been focused

on a civil war in Iraq which threatens to envelop the surrounding

nations and further inflame the region.

The effect of this open-ended conflict on our military preparedness

cannot be overstated. We have zero active duty or Reserve brigades in

the United States that are combat-ready. One quarter of our troops

deployed in Iraq are National Guard and Reserves. Our Guard units are

stretched so thin, only 30 percent of their essential equipment

remains. These units are the ones we depend on in case of domestic

emergency. By further extending our commitment in Iraq, we are

compromising our safety here at home.

In my home State of Nevada, one-third of our Guardsmen have served in

Iraq, and with this surge they will face the possibility of further

tours and extended time away from their families.

I commend our troops for their bravery in carrying out their mission.

They have not let us down; we have let them down. We cannot ask them to

continue their sacrifice while we wait for the Iraqi Government to step

up.

I remain opposed to a fixed timetable for the withdrawal of U.S.

troops from Iraq, and I realize the grave consequences we face if our

mission fails. But that does not mean that I will give a blank check to

the President for a surge when he has not given us a clear

understanding of why such an increase is needed or how it will help us

succeed.

President Bush has yet to put forth a strategy that outlines where we

are going, how we are going to get there, how long is it going to take,

how much is it going to cost, and at what sacrifice to the American

people. He must define the meaning of victory before it is too late.

``Mission accomplished.'' ``Bring them on.'' ``Stay the course.'' And

``we will stand down when the Iraqis stand up.'' Our campaign slogan is

not ``thoughtful strategies for victory.''

The President has failed to make the case for sending 20,000 more

U.S. troops into a civil war with an open-ended mission and a bull's-

eye on their back. I say yes and thank you to our troops, and I say no

to the surge. I ask my colleagues to join me in doing the same for the

good of our families, our military and our Nation.