Mr. Speaker, every Member of this Congress, every Member

is absolutely committed to the security of our families, our

communities, and this Nation. And every Member is absolutely committed

to supporting our troops and our veterans.

The real question today is not whether we are committed to security

or whether or not we support the troops; the real question is how we

believe that security is best achieved. On that, there is legitimate

disagreement which is, or should be, what this debate is about. To have

this debate is not only a right but a responsibility of the elected

Representatives in a Republic such as ours. Indeed, it is to defend

that very right that our young men and women are serving not only in

Iraq but around the world.

None of us here today need to be reminded about the threat of

terrorism from floor speeches or from Presidential homilies. But let us

not forget that the terrorists of 9/11 did not originate in Iraq, they

came from Afghanistan. And, with only one exception, every Member of

this body, Democrat and Republican alike, voted to prosecute the war

against the terrorists in Afghanistan, bring al Qaeda to justice, and

topple the Taliban.

We were united then, along with virtually the entire world, and the

fight was right. Iraq, however, is different. The focus on Iraq has

distracted and detracted from the mission in Afghanistan and the real

battle against terrorists. The President and the rest of the

administration took this Nation into an unnecessary and ill-conceived

war based on false threats and with a deeply flawed plan.

Before this war, I and many of our other colleagues asked the

administration some fundamental questions: How many troops will this

take? How many lives will be sacrificed? How long will we be there?

What will it cost financially? How will we pay for it? And how will

this impact our security profile elsewhere in the world?

The fact is, this administration has never answered any of those

questions fully or honestly. Never. Either they know the answers and

refuse to say them, which is duplicitous; or, they do not know the

answers, which is incompetent. Sadly, it appears a little of both is

operating.

I voted against this war from the outset, and believe to this day it

was the right vote. But once we were committed and engaged, I, along

with most of my colleagues, voted to continue to support our troops, to

try to achieve success in our mission, and do our best to help the

Iraqis rebuild their country. We fervently hoped and continue to hope

the mission would succeed; but now, several years later, more than

3,000 lives later, U.S. lives alone, and nearly $1 trillion later, as

we consider the President's latest proposal, we must ask again, ``Mr.

President, how many lives? How long will we be there? How much will

this cost? And how will you pay for it? And what does it do to the rest

of our security position?''

We still have no answers to those questions. And lacking such

answers, which are fundamental to the security of this country and the

safety of our troops, I must vote ``yes'' on this resolution and ``no''

on expansion.

My colleagues, it is irresponsible to allow a Commander in Chief who

has not been honest or accurate from the outset to continue sacrificing

the lives, the bodies, and the families of our

troops in a mission that lacks a clear end point or a successful

strategy. It is dangerous to permit a Commander in Chief to jeopardize

our Nation's security by letting our military equipment, readiness, and

troop morale continue to decline, and it is shortsighted and unwise to

leave our National Guard and Reserve unprepared and under-equipped to

respond to challenges overseas or at home. It is strategically unsound

to concentrate so much of our intelligence resources in one nation. It

is unsustainable for our economy to keep pouring billions of dollars

every week into this ill-conceived plan, and to pile debt upon our

children with no strategy for paying it back. It is a breach of trust

to not fund the needs of our veterans when they return home. And it is

immoral to leave our soldiers dying and bleeding in the midst of a

centuries-old religious conflict that is not of our making and is not

of our power or responsibility to resolve.

In written comments, I describe what I believe is a better course.

Some of our friends have said there are no plans. I have offered a

plan, and I urge you to look at it.

But before I conclude, I must also respond to those who suggest that

if we don't give unquestioning support to this administration

regardless of what they ask for, regardless of history, and regardless

of the evidence on the ground, that we are empowering the terrorists or

undermining our troops. I believe the evidence suggests, from this war,

that while there may be differences of opinion about policy, this

Congress and the American people have and will continue to support our

troops. It is a sign of strength of our very form of government, which

is, after all, what we are hoping to promote in Iraq and elsewhere in

the world that we should have this debate.

Our allies and adversaries understand that if we turn the course of a

failed policy and the President has not been honest with us, that is

not cutting and running; that is wisdom, it is courage, and it is

honesty. That is what this resolution is about. That is what we owe the

soldiers who have already given their lives, and that is what we owe

the families and that is what we owe the future of this Nation.

Mr. Speaker, every member of this Congress, every member,

regardless of political party, and regardless of their position on this

war, or the resolution before us now, is equally committed to the

security of this nation, our communities, and our families. And I

believe every member of this Congress supports our troops and their

families while they

are deployed. We must all support our veterans and their families when

they return home.

Since this war began, I have attended, as many of my colleagues have,

deployment ceremonies as we send the troops off to fight. I have been

on the tarmac in the cold and dark mornings when they've come home to

their families. I have been many times to Walter Reed to visit the

wounded. I have been to funerals for the fallen and held the hands of

loved ones left behind.

Over the past weeks, months, and in the years since this conflict

began, I have heard from constituents on all sides of this issue,

including members of our armed forces who have served or are now

serving in Iraq. Some of our troops support the war in Iraq, others

oppose it, some support an increase, others don't. To suggest that

opposing the President's planned escalation means not supporting the

troops would imply that many of the troops themselves and many of their

loved ones back home don't support the troops. That suggestion simply

makes no sense and we should put it to rest for good.

The real question today is not whether or not we are committed to

security, or whether or not we support the troops. The real question is

how we believe protecting security is best achieved. On that, there is

legitimate disagreement, which is, or should be, what this debate is

about. To have that debate is not only a right, but a responsibility of

the elected representatives in a republic such as ours. Indeed, it is

to defend that very right that our troops are being asked to serve and

sacrifice not just in Iraq, but around the world.

I saw the Pentagon explode from my office window on September 11th.

We all knew that thousands of our fellow citizens were dying before our

eyes and I was worried about the safety of my own family. None of us

need to be reminded through floor speeches or Presidential homilies

about the threat of terrorism. But let us also not forget that the

terrorists of that day did not come from Iraq. And let no one forget

that, with only one exception, the entire House of Representatives,

Democrats and Republicans alike, all voted to authorize the use of

force to destroy the Al Qaeda bases and the Taliban who harbored them

in Afghanistan. That is where the terrorists of September 11th were

based, that is where the central focus of the fight against terrorists

was focused, and we were united, along with virtually the entire world,

in that fight.

Iraq is different, and the focus on Iraq has distracted and detracted

from the mission in Afghanistan and the real battle against terrorists.

Administration suggestions aside, none of the terrorists of September

11th came from, or were trained in Iraq, and there were no weapons of

mass destruction.

President Bush and the rest of the administration took this Nation

into an unnecessary and ill conceived war based on false threats and

with a deeply flawed plan. Our soldiers, their families, our economy,

our overall military readiness, the Iraqi people, friends in the

region, and our coalition partners, have all suffered as a result of

the administration's misinformation and miscalculations.

Before this war, I, and many others, asked the administration to

answer fundamental questions. How many troops will this take? How many

lives will be sacrificed? How long will we be there? What will it cost

financially? How will we pay for it? How will you manage internal

conflicts among the Iraqi's themselves? What will be the impact on our

overall security elsewhere in the world?

The fact is this administration has never answered any of those

fundamental questions honestly or fully. Never. Either they knew the

answers and refused to give them, or they did not know and went ahead

anyway. If the first is true, they were being dishonest. If the second

is true, they were incompetent. Sadly, it appears likely that both

incompetence and duplicity were at work.

Unfortunately, very little has changed since this war began. As we

consider the proposed escalation of the occupation in Iraq, none of the

most important questions has been answered.

I voted against this war from the outset and believe to this day that

was the right vote. But once we were committed and engaged, I believed,

as most of my colleagues and most Americans, that we had a

responsibility to support the troops and try our best to help the

Iraqis rebuild their nation, establish a democratic republic, and try

to restore stability. I, along with most members of this Congress,

voted repeatedly to provide our troops the needed resources to succeed,

and I fervently hoped the mission would be successful. To a degree,

there have been successes. We determined there were no weapons of mass

destruction. Saddam Hussein has been removed from power, and is now

dead as a result of a public and open judicial process. There have been

free and open elections, and Iraq has a constitution and elected

government.

Those are good things. But the costs have been horrific and the key

questions still have never been, perhaps cannot be, answered by this

Administration. As we consider the President's latest proposal we must

ask again: How many more lives? How much more will this cost? How will

we pay for this? What will it do to the rest of our security

internationally and at home?

Because these questions are at the core of whether or not this policy

will enhance or jeopardize our troops and our security, and because the

administration to this day is unwilling or incapable of answering these

basic questions honestly, I must vote in favor of this resolution, and

oppose further troop increases.

It is irresponsible to allow a commander in chief, who has not been

honest or accurate from the outset, to continue sacrificing the lives,

bodies and families of our troops to a mission that lacks a clear

objective or any foreseeable endpoint.

It is recklessly dangerous to permit a commander in chief to

jeopardize our nation's security by letting our military equipment,

readiness and troop morale continue to decline. It is shortsighted and

unwise to leave our National Guard and Reserve unprepared and under-

equipped to respond to other challenges or crises abroad or within our

own borders. It is wasteful and foolhardy to build the largest embassy

in the world in this very small nation. It is dangerous and

strategically unsound to concentrate more of our intelligence assets in

this one city, leaving the rest of the world and other dangerous

threats less covered. It is unsustainable for our economy to keep

pouring out money, forgoing needed investments at home, and piling debt

onto our children with no real plan to pay for it, and no real end in

sight. It is a breach of trust to not provide the needed services for

our veterans and their families when they return home. It is irrational

and inaccurate to believe that securing Iraq is the real key to keeping

our nation safe from terror, or that if we withdraw from Iraq the only

possible outcome is for our nation to be more vulnerable. It is immoral

to leave our soldiers dying and bleeding in the middle of a centuries

old religious conflict that is not of our creation and is not within

our power or responsibility to resolve.

For far too long we have given this President far too much

credibility, far too much power, far too many lives and far too much

money. It is time to stop.

Having said how I will vote, the sad but simple truth is this,

neither moving forward with the President's proposed troop increase,

nor voting for this resolution of disapproval, will really do what is

needed to secure our own nation, solve the problems in Iraq or bring

real stability to the region. There are, in fact, better alternatives

to the administration proposal and those of us who oppose the

President's plan should spell out what we think is the better course.

This is where I believe that better course should take us:

1. We must renew our focus on securing and rebuilding Afghanistan and

increase both troop strength and financial investment in that nation

along with our allied partners. The fight in Afghanistan was the real

and most important fight against the terrorists of September 11th. It

was justified from the beginning and remains just today, and it has the

support of the world. We cannot let the Taliban regroup and reinstate

their reign of terror and extremism there and we still have a chance,

though it is slipping fast, to help the Afghanis establish a

successful, tolerant and secure nation.

2. In Iraq, the administration should meet confidentially with the

Iraqi leaders and give them a timeline with key benchmarks by which our

forces will withdraw. The timeline and benchmarks should be sufficient

to ensure the safety or our forces and give the elected Iraqi

government a reasonable time to train their forces and strengthen their

political processes, but there must be a timeline so there is real

pressure for real progress. The process of conveying this information

and the timeline itself should be confidential. The elected Iraqi

government should then announce that it is they who are asking us to

begin withdrawal, thereby strengthening their credibility and

leadership while giving our nation a graceful way to exit at their

request. Frankly, this should have been done by the administration

before the Iraq Study Group report and before this debate in Congress,

but it is still not too late.

3. While beginning a measured and strategic redeployment of our

forces from Iraq, we should increase our support for infrastructure

repair and shift increasing responsibility for that effort to Iraqi

companies and workers and away from foreign contractors.

We should, however, maintain close oversight of the spending to

ensure the resources are being used as intended and we should link

continued financial support to real political and security progress on

the part of the Iraqis. Further, we should prevail upon wealthy

neighbors in the region, notably the Saudi Arabians and others, to

expend some of their own vast funds to enhance the infrastructure

effort. We should also dramatically reduce the size of the

embassy complex that is now under construction in Baghdad and we should

pledge to no permanent U.S. bases in Iraq.

4. To help fund the infrastructure and security activities within

Iraq, and to give every Iraqi a stake in the success of their political

process. An equitable means of distributing oil revenues should be

created that ensures all Iraqis will benefit from the oil resources

and, simultaneously, that all Iraqis will lose economically if

insurgents damage those resources.

5. We should encourage the Iraqis to work more closely with moderate

Arab neighbors, notably Jordan, Egypt and others in the region to help

with the training of the security forces and with the reconstruction

effort. This assistance has been offered since the beginning of the

conflict but the Iraqis have not taken advantage of that offer to any

real degree as of yet.

6. Because the Iraq conflict has had a devastating and destabilizing

economic, political and social impact on friendly and moderate nations

such as Jordan, Egypt and others, we should provide additional

financial aid to those nations, particularly to help them deal with the

influx of refugees, the high costs of energy, reductions in trade and

tourism, and other adverse impacts. We cannot leave our friends to

suffer from this conflict, and we dare not let the instability spread

to nations that have been models of change and moderation.

7. We must also reach out once again to our traditional allies in

Europe, Asia and elsewhere in the world, openly acknowledge past

mistakes, spell out this new direction, and ask for their financial,

diplomatic, and, if necessary, military help in making it succeed.

8. While supporting and working with friendly and moderate nations in

the region and elsewhere, we should engage in direct discussions and

negotiations with other nations in the region, notably Iran and Syria.

We disagree profoundly with these nations on many issues, and we must

not be naive or overly optimistic, but it is in our best interests to

at least engage in a dialogue and search for areas where we may find

common ground. The administration's refusal to do this, even through

back channels, is misguided and counterproductive.

9. It is dishonest to not include the full costs of this war and the

associated increases in defense spending as part of the annual budget

and deficit projections. We must at last fully account for the costs of

this war and fully fund our commitment to veterans when they return.

10. Our focus on the Iraq situation should not cause us to lose

sight, as it has for too long, of the real goal, which is promoting

broad security, stability and moderation in the region for the sake of

that region itself and in the interest of our own security. Even if we

could fully secure Iraq with this surge of troops, which is highly

doubtful, if we do not improve our overall image and relationships in

the region and the world, and if we do not do more to support moderate

and friendly nations, we will see continued and worsening threats from

extremist groups and rogue nations.

A key part of this effort will be playing a constructive role in

working to resolve the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians.

We also have important and necessary work to do to improve our image

and relationships within our own hemisphere and we must not ignore or

neglect that work.

11. Finally, but importantly, for far too long our energy policy and

dependence on petroleum has distorted our foreign policy and thereby

endangered our national security, our economy, and our environment. We

must recognize that energy policy is coupled with national security and

we must change both policies or we will never have real and lasting

security.

I urge my colleagues to consider this course, but before I conclude,

I must respond to those who suggest that if we do not give

unquestioning support to this administration regardless of what they

ask for, regardless of history, and regardless of the evidence on the

ground, we are somehow empowering the terrorists or undermining our

troops. The President himself has implied that any questioning of his

policies is ``politically motivated'' and anything short of further

escalation is sending a message that our Nation will ``cut and run''

when things get tough.

I believe the evidence suggests the opposite. The evidence from this

war is clear, while there may be differences of opinion about policy,

this Congress, and the American people have, and will continue to

support our troops to the fullest. The evidence is also clear that our

troops will serve valiantly and effectively whenever and wherever they

are called.

For the elected representatives of the people of this great nation to

exercise their constitutional responsibility and demand change is not a

sign of weakness, it is a sign of the strength of our own republic.

Perhaps more importantly, it is a sign of the strength of our very form

of government itself, which is, after all, what we are hoping to

promote in Iraq and elsewhere in the world. The rest of the world, our

allies and adversaries alike, understand this and understand that the

strength, character, courage and commitment of this Nation, its people,

and the Congress are separate from, and stronger than the flaws, and

mistakes of any one President or administration.

We are not turning away from the fight against terrorists or

terrorism by changing course in Iraq. We are changing the course of a

strategy that has been wrong from the beginning and has not gotten

better. Our Nation, our Armed Forces, and our Congress are fully

willing to sustain a tough fight when the fight is right and the

strategy is sound. But our republic, our people, and this Congress are

also strong enough, wise enough and courageous enough, to recognize the

truth and change direction when the time comes. That time is now.