Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman for

yielding.

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of House Concurrent Resolution 63, a

bipartisan resolution supporting our troops in Iraq, while opposing the

President's troop escalation strategy.

This marks the fourth year of this war. It is time to bring our

troops home now. We have not quelled the violence. We have not thwarted

al Qaeda. We have not stabilized the region. We have not deterred

terrorist radicals. In fact, because of our presence, there are more

jihadists in Iraq than there were before.

Thus, I find it inconceivable that the President's response to this

situation, 3 years of military failure in Iraq, is to suggest that we

add more troops, 20,000 additional troops.

Since the start of the war in 2003, over 3,000 U.S. troops have died,

more than 50 from my State of Maryland alone. In addition, 23,000

American soldiers have suffered serious injury and will have post-

traumatic consequences.

The President's approach will only result in the loss of more U.S.

lives.

Iraq is in the midst of what has become a civil war between Shia and

Sunni. There also is internal tribal and gang violence. Our troops can

play no constructive role in this environment, except as targets for

all sides.

This is not a partisan Democratic issue. Let me be clear. The

President's proposed troop escalation runs contrary to the

recommendations of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group and military experts

such as the Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to a December Washington

Post article, the Joint Chiefs have long opposed the increase in

troops.

Generals Colin Powell, George Casey, John Abizaid and Barry McCaffrey

have all expressed skepticism about the President's surge strategy.

Even some of my Republican colleagues will oppose this surge strategy,

and for good reason.

Troop buildups in Iraq haven't worked. U.S. troop levels increased by

18,000 from November 2004 to January 2005 in advance of the Iraqi

elections, yet insurgent attacks increased. In 2005, the administration

increased troop levels by over 20,000 to secure Iraq ahead of its

constitutional referendum. The strategy not only failed to quell the

violence, but insurgent attacks increased by 29 percent.

Some of my Republican colleagues make an argument that if you support

the troops, you must support the mission. They say if we don't defeat

radical Islam in Iraq, then where will we do it? Unfortunately, both of

these theories are flawed.

Our troops have performed admirably, sacrificing life and limb, often

without sound strategy or adequate equipment. And, yes, the goal of

peace and stability in the Middle East is admirable, but this mission

is misguided. The fact is that despite previous congressional support,

this mission was inadequately planned and our troops inadequate

equipped. In addition, the administration has cast a blind eye at

massive fraud, waste and abuse that has undermined the reconstruction

efforts and cheated the American taxpayer.

We are now in the midst of a civil war that we neither understand nor

can we resolve. I support the troops, but I cannot support this ill-

conceived mission.

As hard as it is for some, we must understand that this is not a

World War II type conflict. This is not our great army defeating their

great army.

We cannot defeat a radical Islamic insurgency militarily. This does

not mean we cannot defeat a radical Islamic insurgency. It does not

mean that if we oppose a troop escalation or begin withdrawing our

troops that we have failed. Rather, it is a recognition of what the

American people already know: We need a new strategy.

This administration operates under the arrogant assumption that only

America wants peace in Iraq. In fact, other Arab nations in the region

have an even greater desire for peace and stability. They don't want to

see their brethren killed. They don't want to see waves of refugees

flood their region. Our new strategy should be a diplomatic initiative

to bring countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iran and Syria

to the table to engage in finding solutions.

Now, I know the war hawks will say diplomatic approaches cannot work.

But think about it. It wasn't too long ago that this administration and

these war hawks were saying that North Korea was an intractable enemy.

Yet today, through diplomatic efforts, we are making appreciable

progress. I believe this diplomatic approach can work in Iraq.

We need a dramatic change in strategy. We should begin with the

withdrawal of U.S. troops and place more responsibility on the Iraqis

to foster their own democracy. Most people, including General John

Abizaid, understand that we cannot impose democracy on the Iraqis if

they don't want it for themselves. That is why I support the End the

War in Iraq Act, which would use the congressional power of the purse

to bring this war to an end if the administration cannot or will not do

so.

But in addition to beginning a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops, we

must pursue an aggressive diplomatic initiative to involve willing

Muslim countries in creating a ceasefire first, a peace process second,

and the rebuilding of Iraq in the third instance. These countries have

a vested interest in promoting peace and stability in the region.

It was said many years ago war is not the answer, and today more war

in the form of troop escalation is the absolutely wrong answer. I urge

adoption of the resolution.