Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, I believe in a robust military and a strong national

defense; however, I oppose this escalation, because I do not believe

that it will make America safer or improve security in Iraq.

At this hour, sending more American forces cannot reasonably be

expected to resolve a civil war rooted in over 14 centuries of deep-

seated historical division. I oppose the escalation because I believe

that we must recognize Iraq for what it is, not what we want it to be.

Our best hope lies not with increasing Iraqi dependence on us, but

rather in handing over responsibility to them. This ultimate success or

failure is the endeavor that now lies in the hands of them, not us.

Our goal in Iraq must reflect reality. Our objective should be to

protect the ethnic minorities and religious minorities from further

oppression and genocide, and to maintain a strong deterrent against the

spread of a broader war in the Middle East. None of these ends is

served, however, by simply escalating the failed strategy that has

gotten us to this point today.

Like most Americans, I am deeply dismayed by this administration's

inept prosecution of this war. At almost every turn, the President and

his team have been intolerant and dismissive to outside advice, the

consequences of which have been dire. The President sent our men and

women into battle absent a real plan and lacking the tools they need to

protect themselves. By pushing our allies aside, the President has

isolated America from the world. We are now bearing the burden of this

war virtually alone. It did not have to come to this.

From the beginning, responsible critics who genuinely desire success

in Iraq have offered the President and his team sensible strategies for

changing course. Almost 3 years ago, I proposed a plan to the President

that offered a responsible path forward. I am still waiting to this day

for a response.

President Roosevelt during World War II, President Truman during

Korea and the dawn of the Cold War, President Kennedy during the Cuban

missile crisis, and President Reagan at the twilight of the Cold War

all successfully guided the ship of state through the roughest of seas.

That caliber of leadership has been sorely lacking during this

challenging time for our Nation. This President's inability to admit

and correct mistakes has not served our Nation or our troops well. Now

Iraq has descended into a bloody civil war that cannot be resolved by

the American military. The Sunni-Shia divide goes back 1,400 years.

Twenty thousand more American troops cannot reverse 14 centuries of

division and hate in that country.

According to a recent poll, 71 percent of Iraqis want us to leave.

Sixty-one percent of Iraqis support attacking U.S. troops. To argue

that increasing our presence in Iraq will lessen the violence defies

common sense. The American people and our military did not sign up for

refereeing a civil war halfway across our planet. History has taught us

that outside powers are ill-equipped to influence or resolve civil wars

in foreign lands.

I am also deeply troubled that the war in Iraq has undermined our

efforts to address urgent threats in the war on terrorism, note notably

in Afghanistan. After failing to kill Osama bin Laden at Tora Bora, the

administration turned its attention to Iraq, allowing the Taliban to

regain lost ground.

I believe we must refocus our efforts on the following objectives:

Stopping the spread of a wider war in the Middle East.

Preventing a humanitarian crisis in Iraq.

Protecting the ethnic and religious groups, such as Assyrian

Christians, who are vulnerable to persecution.

And we must redouble our efforts to snuff out the Taliban in

Afghanistan.

Let me close, Mr. Speaker, by paying homage to our men and women in

uniform. Some have alleged that this debate is inconsistent with

support for our troops. Those who insist that Congress should remain

silent on this issue are very familiar with that word ``silence.'' Many

have remained silent when it comes time to supporting care for our

veterans and their families as well. Many have stood idly by for years

as our troops went into battle lacking the equipment and body armor

they needed. Most of all, far too many have been invisible when it

comes to genuinely supporting our servicemen and women by insisting on

an effective plan to conclude and win this conflict. Simply repeating

the word ``victory'' does not equal a plan, or support for our men and

women in uniform.

I want to conclude by thanking those serving in harm's way. These

brave men and women are America's finest. They have done everything

that has been asked of them and more. Let us honor them by thanking

them for a job well done and pursuing a policy that is worthy of their

sacrifice.