Mr. Speaker, in this debate, our first

care should be for the safety and morale of the men and women serving

in the American Armed Forces. Whatever the way forward, nothing said

here should be heard by friend or foe as disrespect for the work and

sacrifice of those who willingly fight our battles in a very dangerous

world.

It took the United States and coalition forces less than 3 weeks to

topple

a brutal Iraqi regime that had held an iron grip on power for almost 30

years. Since then, they have battled a growing insurgency and rampant

sectarian violence with professionalism and bravery. Of all the

instruments of national power we could and should be discussing today,

diplomacy, economic policy, intelligence and warfare, our military is

the only one that has performed predictably, consistently, and well.

Still, knowing what we know today, after almost four years of

attempted nation-building on the shifting sands of Iraq, the plan to

put 21,000 more Americans in harm's way there has to be viewed with a

cold-eyed skepticism born of that hard experience. Putting American

troops between feuding Sunni and Shia in the middle of Baghdad, in my

judgment, is a mistake. This is the appropriate place for Iraqis, not

Americans.

The Iraq Study Group concluded that, ``Sustained increases in U.S.

troop levels would not solve the fundamental cause of violence in Iraq,

which is the absence of national reconciliation.'' They quoted a U.S.

general who said that if the Iraqi Government does not make political

progress, ``all the troops in the world will not provide security.'' I

agree.

Like many Members, Republicans and Democrats, I voted for the

resolution authorizing President Bush to use force in Iraq, just as I

supported President Clinton's decision to take military action against

the former Yugoslavia. Four years ago, we were trying to persuade

Saddam Hussein to comply with the United Nations resolutions on

disarmament and weapons inspections. Only a credible threat of force

could possibly convince him that it was finally in his interest to

respect the lawful demands of the international community.

Voting to support the President strengthened his hand in the

diplomatic effort to get the Iraqi regime to comply peacefully. Saddam

Hussein chose not to comply, and when diplomacy fails, and military

action becomes necessary, politics should stop at the water's edge and

every American should stand behind the Commander in Chief.

But no grant of authority is a blank check. Today, naive notions

about a quick or tidy victory in Iraq have given way to far grittier

options on how best to achieve our strategic goals in that nation, in

the region, and in the global struggle against Islamic extremism.

We want the President to succeed, but we are disappointed our hopes

and good intentions for Iraq remain unrealized. Many are frustrated by

the mistakes and missed opportunities that plagued this noble but star-

crossed effort. Poor planning for occupation and reconstruction of a

devastated nation, and missteps by the Coalition Provisional Authority,

allowed the insurgency and long-simmering factional hatreds to erupt

and to take root.

At this point, it seems clear to many that only Iraqi interests, not

ours, can be advanced on the streets of Baghdad. U.S. and coalition

forces were tasked as protectors of Iraq's hard-won sovereignty, not

referees in unchecked sectarian vendettas. From here, the surge looks

much more like the status quo on steroids than a serious alternative

policy to reach a realistic goal. Some way must be found to cut the

Gordian knot that ties us to an Iraq strategy that says we can neither

win nor leave.

Moreover, so long as American troops are the ones on the ground,

taking the fire and being objects for sectarian terrorist hatred, other

stakeholders who have more at stake in the region than we will refuse

to step forward.

But whatever else it might accomplish, this resolution still does not

do enough to illuminate a new, sustainable strategy in Iraq. It offers

us few alternatives, and I am disappointed in that. The profound and

complex issues central to our international position today cannot be

reduced to simplistic political statements. We took an oath to uphold

and defend the Constitution, not just strike poses on how that duty

applies to the key questions before us as a Nation. In the end, these

are purely political statements, when the debate we really need to have

is about the most apolitical subject of all: national security in a

time of global peril.

Today, the House sends a purely symbolic message to the President. It

is a message that will also be heard by our troops, by the Iraqi

Government, by the Iraqi people who have relied on us, and by our

enemies who are hoping we will quit the fight soon. It does not say

enough. We should be debating the elements of an effective policy to

stem the tide of jihadism infecting growing swaths of the globe. This

resolution says only what some Members are against, nothing about what

we are for.

The Iraq Study Group report put forth 79 specific recommendations,

many focused on the need for far greater engagement of regional powers,

friends and foes in taking realistic steps to stabilize Iraq. I joined

my colleague, Frank Wolf, in supporting creation of the Iraq Study

Group, and I wish he and others were allowed to offer those

recommendations for discussion by the House. Those are the debates and

the votes I had hoped to participate in today.

The lack of substantive alternatives before us, particularly on the

question of adequate funding for deployed troops, betrays the

majority's empty, conflicted positions on Iraq: against the President,

but for nothing. The Senate majority attempted to straddle the same

contradictions recently, confirming without dissent the new commanding

general for Iraq, while at the same time claiming to be against the

very same mission they know he has been ordered to undertake.

On the genuine questions of security and strategy in Iraq, we cannot

remain, as Winston Churchill admonished, ``decided only to be

undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for

fluidity, all-powerful to be impotent.''

Mr. Speaker, we must decide, and I have decided, to support this

resolution because it is the only option that has been made in order by

the majority today to engage the House in formulation of Iraq policy,

but once troops are committed by the Commander in Chief and we are

engaging the enemy, symbolic gestures like this must confront the more

complex realities of how to support those forces in the safe and speedy

completion of their mission.