Mr. Speaker, the President has said for more than 4

years that he would follow the advice of his commanders on the ground

with respect to troop levels in Iraq. That is why I am both surprised

and disappointed the President did not follow the advice given as

recently as 2 months ago by the Army and Marine Corps Chiefs of Staff,

as well as General John Abizaid, General George Casey, and General

Colin Powell. All of these highly respected commanders expressed their

opposition to increasing the number of U.S. troops in Iraq.

As General Abizaid, the top commander in the Middle East said, an

increase in U.S. troops would be counterproductive because it will

perpetuate the dependency of Iraqi forces, create more targets and

stretch our military too thin.

Until recently the top ground commander in Iraq, General George

Casey, has said that sending more American troops into Baghdad and

Anbar province would increase the Iraqi dependency on Washington. As

General Colin Powell, one of the most respected military leaders of our

generation put it, a surge was already tried in Baghdad last fall and

it failed. Now it will only further delay Iraqis taking control of

their own security.

``It will only further delay Iraqis taking control of their own

security.'' That is from General Colin Powell, who also noted that he

had not heard any generals on the ground in Iraq ask for more troops.

Mr. Speaker, the original mission of U.S. troops in Iraq was to

liberate the country and turn it over to the Iraqi people. We need to

get back to that original mission. Our brave troops have done an

absolutely heroic job of liberating the people of Iraq. Now our troops

should get back to the original mission of training Iraqi security

forces so they can secure their own country and turn it over to the

Iraqi people. General Casey has long argued that the principal emphasis

of American policy should be training Iraqi security forces and handing

over responsibility to the Iraqis.

Mr. Speaker, the resolution authorizing the use of force in Iraq that

we passed in the fall of 2002 was never intended to authorize the use

of American troops to police a civil war. It was never intended to

provide justification for sending 21,500 more American troops into the

middle of a civil war. As former Navy Secretary in Virginia, Senator

John Warner, put it: ``Whom do they shoot at, the Sunni or the Shia?''

With 325,000 Iraqi security forces already trained, Mr. Speaker, that

is according to our Defense Department, it is time for Iraqi troops to

step up to the frontlines in Baghdad, Anbar province, and Fallujah. It

is time to accelerate the training of Iraqi security forces and the

turnover of security to the Iraqis so our troops can come home with

their mission completed. It is time for enforceable benchmarks to

measure the progress of Iraqi security forces. Mr. Speaker, it is time

for a surge in diplomacy, not a surge in troops to mend a broken

country. It is time for a stepped-up regional peace effort in the

Middle East to settle this conflict.

Mr. Speaker, Congress should listen to our commanders on the ground.

We should follow the advice of the Army and Marine Corps Chiefs of

Staff. We should follow the advice of General Abizaid, General Casey,

and General Powell when they spoke up in December. It is time for

Congress to step up and express our strong support of our brave troops,

our continued support of the original mission, and our opposition to

the increase of U.S. troops to police a civil war in Iraq.

I urge a ``yes'' vote on the resolution.