Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor here

today, disappointed. Over the next few months, the United States will

make some very important decisions, probably the most important

national security decisions that we will make in this decade. These

decisions are going to affect the size and the composition and the

equipment of our military. It will impact our relationships with our

allies, the perception of our enemies, and the stability of the Persian

Gulf region. These are serious and difficult issues that demand

thoughtful leadership and the careful exercise of our considerable

responsibilities under the Constitution.

The resolution that we have before us today is not binding in a legal

sense. We are not exercising any real power here. But I think it is

worse than that. The words in these two brief sentences are vague

enough to allow people with very different views on what we should do

to feel satisfied whichever way they vote. The language in this

resolution is clever, but this isn't a time for clever. Whether I

support this resolution or oppose it, this body should say something,

say something that matters about what our vital national interests are,

about how we should pursue those interests, about what the risks are,

what the trade-offs are and the potential consequences. We should say

whether we intend to buy the bullets and the body armor for those who

are about to deploy and take on the challenges that we face as a

Nation.

With power comes responsibility. And rather than do the hard work of

building a consensus here in the House and leading the way, it is

easier to punt, to be vague and clever, to frame political issues

rather than confront forthrightly the difficult problems that we face

as a Nation. For that reason I believe this resolution represents a

lost opportunity that we cannot afford to lose.

I believe that too often in the last 3 1/2 years our goals in Iraq

have been described in the lofty and idealistic terms that go far

beyond America's vital national interests. There has been a tendency to

move beyond the hard-nosed and clear-eyed view of what America's

national interests are in Iraq and we have come to emphasize the

loftier dreams for the American people.

To be sure, I am glad that Saddam Hussein is dead and gone. And I

hope that the Iraqi people seize this opportunity to create a unified

state that respects minorities and has robust democratic institutions.

But there is a difference between what we would wish for the Iraqi

people and what is vital for America's national security.

In thinking about America's vital interests in Iraq, I think it

really boils down to two things: First, Iraq must not become a safe

haven for al Qaeda; and, second, Iraq must not be a source of

instability in the region. These vital interests are actually quite

narrow. Some might argue that they are too narrow. But they are most

notable for what they do not include. Perhaps most significantly, I

don't believe it is vital to America's national interests to stop all

sectarian violence in Iraq.

We admire our military because they are forward leading and ``can

do'' people. But in this instance we cannot do for the Iraqis what they

will not do for themselves.

The President is sending an additional 20,000 troops to Iraq. The

problem isn't the numbers. The problem is the mission and setting the

conditions to be able to accomplish that mission. Some of these troops

are going to Anbar, and I think that we do need to enforce our troops

in the Sunni heartland to fight al Qaeda and to make it less likely

that they will be welcomed there for the long term. But I am skeptical

about the Baghdad mission. Operation Together Forward, the effort to

secure Baghdad last year, failed. The idea was to clear, hold, and

build; but the Iraqi units did not show up in enough numbers to be able

to hold what America had cleared. In the early days of this surge in

Baghdad, there are too many indications that this will be happening

again.

The resolution we are considering this week contains only two

thoughts. It is only two sentences long. First, that we oppose

increasing troop levels in Iraq by 20,000. As I have said, I support

increasing troops in Anbar, even though I am skeptical about the

likelihood of success in Baghdad.

But the second thought is notable for what it omits. The resolution

says that this House will fund our soldiers and our veterans if they

are there now or if they have been there before.

This begs the most important question about our real power here in

the Congress. What about the five brigades of young Americans who are

now preparing their families and packing their gear to deploy? What

about them? What are you saying to them? Will we buy body armor for

them? Will we have armored Humvees for them? Will they have trucks to

take them to their assigned place of action? Will they get the bullets

and the night scopes and the sleeping bags and the chow? What about

them? Will they get their combat pay? Will they get their family

separation allowance?

I believe that the majority in this House and the sponsors of this

resolution would support a clear statement that we will fund the troops

and the mission they are being ordered to undertake. But, of course,

perhaps half of the Democrats in the Congress, from the far left of

America's political spectrum, want to stop the funding.

In this war on terrorism, the greatest burdens have fallen on the

shoulders of the relatively small number of Americans who have

volunteered to take great risks on our behalf. As leaders of this

Nation, this House abdicates its responsibility if we fail to make

clear to them that they will have the equipment they need to do the job

and come

home again. The short two sentence resolution we will vote on here this

week doesn't address any of these important issues.

If you are asking the wrong question, perhaps any answer will do. But

we will vote anyway, and it will make headlines, and it will accomplish

nothing of the hard work we have in front of us. What are our vital

national interests in Iraq, and what is not vital? What strategies can

we use to protect and promote those vital interests? What are the

resources that are required to pursue those strategies? What are the

risks and the costs and the choices we must make? Are there ways to

mitigate those risks?

These are the important questions, and in the short two-sentence

resolution, they remain unresolved, leaving the House with nothing very

important to say about what matters to America and what we should do.

I have made my position clear in ways that this resolution fails to

do. I will seek to provide leadership in this House to address these

important questions, to influence this administration and to focus on

what is vital to America. It is for these reasons that I must oppose

the resolution in front of us today.

I come to the House floor today disappointed.

Over the next few months, the United States will make some of the

most important national security decisions of this decade. Those

decisions will play out principally in Iraq, but will affect our

broader national security and foreign policy.

The decisions we make will affect the size, composition, and

equipment of the American military for many years.

These decisions will impact our relationships with our allies, the

perceptions of our enemies, and the stability of the Persian Gulf

region.

These are serious and difficult issues that demand thoughtful

leadership and the careful exercise of our considerable powers under

the Constitution.

We have to do more than debate. We have to take a stand; we have to

make tough decisions; we have to clearly articulate what America's

vital interests are. We have to do things that matter and build a broad

consensus moving forward.

The resolution we have before us today is not binding in a legal

sense--we are not exercising any real power here. But it is worse than

that. The words in these two brief sentences are vague enough to allow

people with quite different views on what we should do to feel

satisfied with whatever way they vote.

The language in this resolution is clever. But this isn't a time for

clever. We are better than this. Whether I support a resolution or

oppose it, this body should say something about what our vital

interests are, about why this matters, about what we do recommend and

what we do not recommend, about whether or not we will buy the bullets

and the body armor for the troops for the next rotation of troops,

about the risks and the challenges we face to best protect our Nation.

With power comes responsibility. And perhaps the real truth is that

the Congress is as uncertain and divided as the country is on what is

best to do in the Middle East. Rather than do the hard work of building

consensus and leading the way, it is easier to punt, to be vague and

clever, to frame political issues rather than confront forthrightly

difficult problems important to the security and future of this

country.

For that reason, this resolution represents a lost opportunity that

we can ill afford to lose.

Over the last 3 months, I've spent a lot of time thinking about Iraq,

reading widely from both classified and unclassified sources, meeting

with experts inside and outside of government, spending time with our

intelligence agencies and our men and women in the military listening

to what they think and drawing on their experience.

At the New Year, I returned to Iraq. I went to Falluja, al Kut,

Baghdad and Balad.

At each stop along the way, I was reminded of how fortunate we are to

have such dedicated, capable and decent men and women serving us in

uniform. They are all committed to their missions and they are

performing admirably.

Our forces have the ``can do'' attitude that we have come to take for

granted but never should. They are doing difficult work a long way from

home and have been at it for a long time.

There are good reasons to be restrained in public comments about

military strategy and operations when we have young Americans in

combat. Honest debate about policy can be confused with lack of support

for the troops.

There have been times that I have questioned the administration's

conduct of the war over the last 3\1/2\ years--the inadequacy of force

levels immediately after the fall of Saddam, the decision to disband

the Iraqi army and the slow reconstitution of the Iraqi Army, the need

to expand the size of the active duty Army and Marine Corps, and the

failure to understand the strategic significance of treatment of

prisoners at Abu Ghraib. All of these decisions were made at senior

policy levels, not by people in the military doing the job.

I'm from the old school that believes partisan politics should stop

at the water's edge. The security of this country is too important to

make it subservient to domestic political maneuvenng.

It was clear to me in late October that it was time for a complete

review of American strategy in Iraq. That means we must: Fully

understand the situation we face in Iraq and be honest with ourselves

and the American people about the challenges we face; clearly define

and build a broad consensus on exactly what the vital national

interests of the United States in Iraq are and, conversely, what is not

vital; and develop strategies, plans, and resources to pursue those

vital national interests fully vetting the alternatives and the risks

of those alternatives.

Iraq is a country of 26 million people in a land area about twice the

size of the state of Idaho. About 6.5 million people live in the

capitol, Baghdad.

Ethnically, Iraq is 75-80 percent Arab and 15-20 percent Kurdish with

the remainder Turkoman, Assyrians and others.

Iraq is 97 percent Muslim by religious faith. It is one of four

countries in the world where there are more Shi'a (60-65 [percent) than

Sunni (32-37 percent) Muslims. Shiite populations constitute a majority

in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Azerbaijan. Worldwide, about 10-15% of all

Muslims follow the Shiite branch of Islam. Sunnis and Shiites share

most basic religious tenets. Their differences have sometimes been the

basis for sectarian violence and political infighting.

The Iraqi people have made substantial progress in governing

themselves over the past two years. They have written a Constitution,

conducted elections under that new Constitution and formed a

government. The Iraqi people as a whole voted in the face of death

threats and Iraqi elected officials serve in spite of risks to

themselves and their families. If you are wondering whether there are

Iraqi's who are willing to take great risks to build their future, you

should visit the military hospital at Balad. Two thirds of the

casualties brought to our great surgeons and trauma teams are Iraqi,

not American.

Our admiration for their progress and their courage cannot blind us

to some other realities.

The central government in Iraq is weak. In part, that weakness is

inherent in the Constitution under which the Prime Minister does not

form his own government. Ministers of Health, Interior and Defense for

example are chosen separately and do not serve at the pleasure of the

Prime Minister.

Ministers are loyal to different parties and factions. Corruption, a

long established practice in that region of the world, is endemic. Both

the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense are heavily

penetrated by militias loyal to factions rather than loyal to the

national government. As one officer involved in training local Iraqi

police told me, ``The head of training for the police in this province

has no experience and is not qualified for the job. He has the job

because he is a member of the Badr Organization.''

Another officer involved with training the Iraqi border patrol said,

``The commander in my sector was given a list by the Ministry of the

Interior of 42 people he was supposed to hire. They were all militia.''

The Iraqi central government and its ministries do not have the

capacity and, in some cases, perhaps the will to support operations in

the 18 provinces. Even though the central government has money, it

can't seem to spend it. There is no national banking system so soldiers

and police are paid sporadically and in cash. They must travel home to

give their pay to their families.

The combination of factionalism within the ministries and weak

logistics systems are used to undermine units in the field. As another

officer told me, ``If I train a really good Iraqi police SWAT team

that's going after the `wrong' people, they can be strangled by

logistics. No bullets. No gasoline. No SWAT team.''

The national police are heavily infiltrated by the militias,

particularly Jaish al-Mahdi or JAM, which is loyal to Shia firebrand

Muqtada al-Sadr.

A principal characteristic of a sovereign government is that it has a

monopoly of the use of force within its borders. The central government

of Iraq has not yet consolidated this monopoly for itself.

The Iraqi Army is more reliable and has made significant progress

over the last 18 months. But the quality and capability of its

units varies. Even units that are fully manned usually have half of

their soldiers on leave at any time. During Operation Together Forward,

the joint Iraqi-American operation to secure Baghdad this summer, some

Iraqi Army units refused to be deployed to Baghdad, a clear indication

of the weakness of the central government and the questionable

effectiveness of these units.

There is not a single insurgency or source of violence in Iraq. There

are a number of interrelated and overlapping conflicts.

In the south, while there has been less violence, different Shi' a

factions, principally those associated with Muqtada al-Sadr (JAM) and

the Supreme Council for Islamic Resistance in Iraq (SCIRI) (the Badr

organization) periodically fight each other for local advantage and

attack coalition forces as well.

In the northern Kurdish region the Kurdish Peshmerga has made the

area mostly secure and stable. We can expect violence to increase in

Kirkuk in the run-up to the referendum on whether this oil rich city

will be associated with the Kurdish region.

Anbar province, the large province in western Iraq that borders

Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, is predominantly Sunni. While there is

a Sunni insurgency and rejectionists in this region, it has also been

fertile territory for al Qaeda in Iraq and foreign fighters. In recent

months, some key Sunni tribal leaders have started working together to

resist al Qaeda in this region, opening opportunities for United States

forces to work more cooperatively with local leaders to fight al Qaeda.

Overlaying these regional fights is a rise in sectarian violence that

has increased substantially since the bombing of the Golden Mosque in

Samarra in February 2006. Anger and distrust between Sunni and Shiite

is very high and plays out in death squad killings, torture,

intimidation and what amounts to ethnic cleansing of neighborhoods in

Baghdad.

This summer, the Iraqi government with the multinational force in

Iraq launched Operation Together Forward to reduce widespread sectarian

violence in Baghdad. U.S. Forces, including the American striker

Brigade, were sent to Baghdad as part of an effort to ``clear and

hold'' those neighborhoods. The operation failed, as did Operation

Together Forward II this fall. Levels of sectarian violence are high

and are not improving.

The concept was for U.S. forces to ``clear'' violent neighborhoods

and the Iraqi Army would ``hold'' the neighborhoods providing security

after they had been cleared out. The Iraqi Army forces didn't show up

in the size required and were not able to provide security. As one Army

officer told me, ``It wasn't clear and hold. It was clear and fold.''

Confidence in the ability of the central government, the Army and the

national police force to provide security has declined causing people

to rely on local militias and neighborhood security to protect their

families. In some cases, JAM, Muktada al-Sadr's militia, has built

confidence and support by blocking emergency response by the central

authorities while JAM members help victims, thereby increasing local

trust of the militias and further undermining the credibility of the

government.

Finally, while the Sunni insurgency may have been spurred by al Qaeda

in Iraq and various Shi'a groups get support from Iran, at this point,

the violence in Iraq is largely internal and self-sustaining.

In summary: The overall security situation in Iraq is grave and is

not improving. Strategies to quell violence have not been effective;

while some violence is anti-coalition, the most dangerous trend has

been the rise of sectarian violence between Sunni and Shiite militias

and death squads in a cycle of violence and retaliation; while the

unity government of Nouri al-Maliki says all the right things, there

are strong doubts about the ability of the unity government to reduce

widespread sectarian violence; further political evolution in Iraq is

likely as factions maneuver for power relative to one another and

decisions are made on critical issues including federalism,

distribution of oil revenues, and the militias. Iraq will make more and

more of its own political choices, less and less influenced by America.

Too often in the last three and a half years, our goals in Iraq have

been described in lofty and idealistic terms that go far beyond

America's vital national interests.

Most of us in the Congress voted to authorize the use of force

against Saddam Hussein because the intelligence said he had or was

seeking to acquire chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and that he

intended to use them against the United States.

In my case, it was the intelligence on biological weapons that was

the deciding factor, reaching the high threshold required for pre-

emptive military action.

As we all now know, the intelligence was wrong in several important

respects. Perhaps in part because it was wrong, there has been a

tendency to move beyond a hard-nosed, clear-eyed view of our national

interests in Iraq to emphasize loftier dreams for the Iraqi people.

To be sure, I'm glad that Saddam is dead and gone, and I hope the

Iraqi people build a unified state with a society that respects

minorities with robust democratic institutions. But there is a

difference between what we would wish for the Iraqi people and what we

need for American security.

The American military should only be used to protect America's vital

national interests, under American command, with the resources

necessary to win and come home again.

When it comes to clearly defining our vital national interests in

Iraq, we have lost our way in mushy rhetoric. These words matter

because they set the goals we ask our military to achieve and drive the

strategies and resources to achieve them. There has been far too little

debate and discussion on what our vital interests are and what they are

not in Iraq.

Every discussion of what path forward we should choose in Iraq should

start with clearly defining our vital national interests. As the saying

on the classroom wall goes, ``If you don't know where you are going,

you're likely to end up somewhere else.''

In thinking about America's vital interests in Iraq, it seems to me

there are only two: Iraq must not become a safe haven for al Qaeda or

its affiliates; Iraq must not be a source of instability in the region.

These vital interests are really quite narrow--some might argue too

narrow--and probably most notable for what they do not include.

It's not vital to America that Iraq be able to defend itself from

outside powers. Iraq is unlikely to have an Army that can defend

against external threats for a long time and we should not define

success this broadly or even raise the possibility of arming them with

indirect fire weapons, tactical air forces and so forth.

It is not vital to American interests that Iraq remain unified except

to the extent dissolution of Iraq as a strong nation contributes to

regional instability or creates ungoverned areas where al Qaeda could

thrive. Iraq was created after World War I from three Ottoman provinces

of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul. The country has a history of instability

as a result of ethnic, religious and regional rivalries. It is not

vital to American national interests that we resolve these tensions and

probably not reasonable to expect to do so.

There are a variety of governing models from a loose confederation to

de facto local arrangements that are consistent with the vital national

interests of the United States.

The Iraqi constitution allows for regional arrangements and we need

not spend too much capital resisting new arrangements that might

emerge.

Perhaps most significantly, it is not vital to American interests to

stop all sectarian violence in Iraq. Certainly if sectarian violence

escalates to a conflagration that affects stability in the region, it

could affect our vital interest in regional stability. But the Iraqi's

must decide to quell sectarian violence. While we might assist and

support Iraqi efforts, we cannot and should not do this for them. They

must take the lead.

We admire our military because they are forward leaning and ``can

do''. But in this instance, we cannot do for the Iraqi's what they will

not do for themselves.

There are other things that do not appear in a clear statement of

America's vital interests like making Iraqi into a model of democracy

in the region and ensuring its economic prosperity. Both of these

things are desirable. Iraq certainly has the oil, natural gas, and two

fertile river valleys to sustain itself and prosper economically. But

these desirable things are not vital to America's national interests

and what is vital should drive American strategy.

If everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. What is vital, it

seems to me, boils down to two things: No al Qaeda safe haven and an

Iraq that is not a source of instability in the region.

The shear breadth of the policy options for Iraq put forward in

recent months by thoughtful people is striking.

Quit and withdraw. Reposition in neighboring countries. Increase U.S.

forces temporarily. Increase forces substantially and with no deadline.

Side with the Shia because they are likely to win. Befriend the

Sunnis. Destroy the Sunnis.

Withdraw U.S. forces from the cities. Start with Baghdad and the

cities first.

Divide the country into three pieces. Insist on unity.

These debates are healthy when they get beyond the brainstorming

stage--which they rarely do--but the breadth of the options out there

is partially due to a lack of clarity and consensus about America's

vital interests.

We should also be clear that no strategy is without risk. There are

no easy or obvious paths here.

Al Qaeda in Iraq principally thrives in the Sunni regions of the

country. Defeating al

Qaeda and denying them sanctuary must be a central objective for U.S.

Forces in Iraq. This must be an area of focus and, to some extent, we

have lost that focus over the last six months as we have emphasized the

fight for Baghdad.

Using U.S. special forces, conventional U.S. military forces and

American intelligence capabilities, the United States should target,

kill or capture and detain al Qaeda leadership in Iraq.

U.S. forces have had some significant success in recent months

capturing middle and high ranking al Qaeda operatives in Iraq in spite

of the reduction of emphasis and fewer troops in the Sunni dominated

areas of the country.

But there is an infuriating fact seldom discussed: fully half of the

high value al Qaeda targets in Iraq have been captured and released

before. As one senior officer put it, ``I have great photographs of

half the people we are hunting. They are wearing orange jumpsuits in

the mug shots we took of them when we captured them the first time.''

Weare operating a catch and release program for al Qaeda in Iraq.

This is inexcusable and frustrating as all get out for our men and

women in the fight.

American soldiers are capturing terrorists trying to kill Americans

and Iraqis and they are turned over to an Iraqi run detention system

that is likely to release them.

Indeed, some officers whose opinions I trust describe detention as

training camp for al Qaeda where they share information and contacts

improving their skills and enhancing their position within al Qaeda

when they are released.

We cannot afford to spend half our resources hunting al Qaeda members

we have already caught before. We need to change our detention policy

so that there are no high value targets with orange jumps suit mug

shots in ``wanted'' posters hanging on the walls in the operation

centers of our special forces units in Iraq.

Using classic counter-insurgency strategies and tactics, the United

States military and intelligence services should build relationships

with tribal and local leaders in the Sunni-dominated regions who will

deny al Qaeda safe haven for the long term.

We are having some recent and fragile success with this approach to

security in al Anbar. Sunni tribal leaders, with the support and

encouragement of U.S. forces, are recruiting men from their tribe into

security units.

These counter-insurgency efforts building on established local tribal

relationships and indigenous leadership must be supported financially

directly by the U.S. military. Large U.S. aid programs run at the

national level have been slow and ineffective at engaging the Iraqi

people and getting things done.

The American military has the capability to use funds to support

counter-insurgency operations at the community level rapidly and where

needed without a lot of hassle. This mechanism has been used

successfully in Iraq before, although it is not universally supported.

It's a turf and power thing. To a certain degree, we have a choice. We

can micro-manage contracts from Washington and Baghdad or we can get

things done rapidly and effectively giving authority within broad

guidelines for Lieutenant Colonels to use their judgment.

While al Anbar is a very large area, it is sparsely populated with

about 1.2 million people, the vast majority of whom live in the

Euphrates river valley. An intense counterinsurgency strategy in the

Sunni areas can help to root out al Qaeda today and make their brand of

extremism unwelcome for the long term.

Strengthen both technical intelligence collection and human

intelligence collection in the Sunni regions of Iraq.

Intelligence is the first line of defense in the war on terror and we

are doing a lot of things right. But there continues to be a need to

strengthen technical intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance

collection so that more requirements can be met.

More importantly, we continue to lag behind in human intelligence

collection capability.

We are five years after 9/11 and we still are desperately short of

linguists in strategic languages. We need more soldiers trained in

basic 30 and 60-day language programs in order to effectively conduct a

counter-insurgency effort.

At a higher level, we need more military members and intelligence

specialists who are fluent in languages like Arabic, Farsi, Pashtun and

Dari. Heretofore, this has just not been a national priority and it

must change.

The training of the Iraqi Army has gone slower than any of us want.

They are still heavily dependent on the U.S. for logistics and their

capability and effectiveness is limited by the practice of allowing

military members to go home for about two weeks of each month.

Still, the Iraqi Army offers the best possibility for the Iraqi

government to consolidate its authority and quell violence.

The United States should continue to accelerate training and

equipping the Iraqi Army so that they can take responsibility for

internal security.

I am not convinced that embedding large numbers of U.S. soldiers in

Iraqi units is the most effective way to train Iraqis. I'm not

convinced that it is not effective either. There are differing views by

thoughtful people and I don't have the experience to know. But it is an

important question for the military and its training elements to

assess. We should pursue training strategies that are most likely to

make Iraqi units effective and independent in the shortest time.

There are two disadvantages of embedding Americans in Iraqi units.

First, it is harder to protect and support the Americans to the

standards we expect for our soldiers when they are detached. Second,

some American trainers who have been embedded express concern that it

is difficult to get the Iraqis to stand on their own and take

responsibility because they think the Americans will do things for

them. An embedded American trainer told me, ``I have to decide that I'm

not going to do the maintenance for them even though I can. That's hard

to do.''

Assist the Iraqi Army and Ministry of Defense in establishing

logistics and service support for the Army.

While we have focused on training military units--and Iraq may need

more of them than they initially planned--the systems for payroll and

logistics support just do not exist. We need to put effort into helping

them develop those systems so that the Iraqi army is fed, paid, has

gasoline and trucks and uniforms.

The Iraqi police and border patrol are infiltrated by militia and

ineffective. We should not expect that the police will be effective as

other than a mechanism to employ and occupy young men anytime soon.

I do not believe that the United States should take the lead in

resolving sectarian violence between Shi'a and Sunni or between

different militias vying for power in Shi'a areas. The Iraqi government

and Iraqi leaders must take the lead. We cannot and should not do this

for them.

I told the President this before he announced his new plan for Iraq

and I have been clear about this publicly both in New Mexico and here,

in Washington.

American soldiers should not be in a situation as reportedly happened

on October 24th when they raided an area looking for a leader of a

Shi'a militia group and were told by the Iraqi government to stand

down.

We cannot do for the Iraqis what they will not do for themselves. If

they do not choose to disarm the militias and stop the death squads,

Baghdad will continue to be a violent place.

I believe it is unlikely that this violence will rise to a level

where Iraq becomes a source of regional instability even if it does

threaten the internal stability and political direction of the country.

As cold as it sounds, the sectarian violence is not something we can

stop by getting in the middle of it and it is not vital to American

national interests that we do so.

This is where we are at most risk, again, of losing our way by

reaching beyond our grasp.

The President is sending an additional 20,000 troops to Iraq. The

problem isn't the numbers. The problem is the mission and setting the

conditions to be able to accomplish that mission.

Some of those troops are going to Anbar, and I think we do need to

reinforce our troops in the Sunni heartland to fight al Qaeda in Iraq

and strengthen relationships that will make it less likely that they

will be welcome there over the long term.

But I am skeptical about the Baghdad mission.

Operation Together Forward, the effort to secure Baghdad, failed

because there was no ``holding'' after a neighborhood was ``cleared''.

The Iraqis did not show up. And the ``building'' never really happened

at all. It was a failed approach without adequate resources from the

Iraqis to follow through. We probably made plenty of enemies without

making people feel safer or more confident in the ability of their

government to protect them.

Rather than ``clearing'' neighborhoods where there is sectarian

violence, we should focus on strengthening indigenous security in

cooperation with the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Army in

neighborhoods and villages where there is stability or leadership to

work with. This is an inside-out approach that builds indigenous

capacity rather than an outside-in approach.

In the Kurdish region, the Peshmerga protect the Americans, not the

other way around. That is a relationship we built over a decade. Al

Qaim on the Syrian border used to be a hotbed of foreign fighter

activity. Now it is largely peaceful and led by strong local tribal

leaders who cooperate with the Americans and own their community.

In 2003 and 2004, immediately after the fall of Saddam when there was

no Iraqi government, I believe a large U.S. presence that took charge

and visibly controlled the streets killing or disarming any Iraqi with

a weapon would have made a difference. When it comes to occupation,

quantity has a quality all of its own.

But we are beyond that now. Iraq has its own government with an Army

that is getting better. They must own their own neighborhoods. We can

help them, but we cannot do it for them.

In the early days of this ``surge'' there are too many indications

that we will be doing this for them. Two units of Iraqis have showed up

to help secure Baghdad, and they are at about half strength.

Like Operation Together Forward, the units committed by the Iraqi

government have shown up far below strength, which means the effort is

unlikely to have enough reliable soldiers and police to conduct an

effective counter-insurgency in a city of 6 million people.

Perhaps more importantly, as projected by the intelligence community

in Congressional testimony, the Jaish al-Mahdi militia loyal to Muqtada

al Sadr seems to have decided to lay low, put away their arms and wait

out the surge calculating that they can afford to bide their time.

In contrast, the Sunni insurgents have escalated their attacks in

recent weeks. As a result, it is possible that U.S. forces will

concentrate on putting down Sunni insurgents and possibly rogue

elements of Sadr's Shiite militia who don't keep their heads down. The

irony here is that we risk strengthening radical anti-American cleric

Muqtada al Sadr in the medium and long term by taking out his enemies

now while his militia lays low waiting for America to leave.

While this scenario is not inevitable, we need to understand that US

forces in the midst of sectarian violence may be helping consolidate

the power of a radical anti-American Shiite.

The resolution we are considering this week contains only two

thoughts. First, that we oppose increasing troop levels in Iraq by

20,000.

The second thought is notable for what it omits. The resolution says

that this House will fund our soldiers and veterans if they are there

now or if they have been in Iraq before. This begs the most important

question about our real power as the Congress.

What about the five brigades of young Americans who are now preparing

their families and packing their gear to deploy? Will we buy body armor

for them? Will they have armored Humvees and trucks and bullets and

night scopes and sleeping bags and chow? Will they get their combat pay

and their family separation allowances?

Most of you know that I served in the United States military. I'm the

only woman in the House or Senate who has. Some of you know that I am

married to a man who continues to serve as a drilling reservist in the

Air Force Reserve. A lot of our closest friends in the world still wear

the uniform. These are not idle questions if you are the parent or the

spouse or the child of a soldier who is being called up to do their

duty.

I believe the majority of this House would support a clear statement

that we will fund the troops and the mission they are being ordered to

carry out. But, of course, perhaps close to half of the Democrats, from

the far left of the American political spectrum, want to stop funding.

In this war on terrorism, the greatest burdens have fallen on the

shoulders of a relatively small number of Americans who have

volunteered to take great risks on our behalf. As leaders of this

nation, this House abdicates its responsibility if we fail to make

clear to them that they will have the equipment they need to do the job

we are asking them to do.

The short two sentence resolution we will vote on this week does not

address any of these important issues. If you are asking the wrong

question, perhaps any answer will do.

But we will vote on it anyway, and it will make headlines and

accomplish nothing of the hard work we have in front of us. It is a

disappointing abdication of our responsibility to grapple seriously

with defining and protecting vital US national interests in the Persian

Gulf.

What are our vital national interests and what is not vital? What

strategies can we use to protect and promote those interests? What

resources are required to pursue these strategies? What are the risks

and the costs of the choices we might make? Are there ways to mitigate

those risks? These are the important questions and, in this short two

sentence resolution, they remain unresolved leaving this House with

nothing very important to say about what matters to America and what we

should do.

I support increased troops in al Anbar--the Sunni region where al

Qaeda thrives. These forces are part of the 20,000 referred to in the

resolution. It is vital to U.S. interests that we destroy al Qaeda in

Iraq and deny them a safe haven from which to operate. The resolution

makes no distinction or even reference to these forces.

I am skeptical that increasing U.S. forces in Baghdad in the quantity

and with the mission and tactics described by the President and his

military commanders will quell the sectarian violence between Shia and

Sunni, nor do I think it is vital to America's national interests to do

so. The Iraqis must resolve these sectarian rivalries. The President

believes the Baghdad security plan is the most realistic path forward.

I disagree with the President on this point and I have told him so

directly. It's not about the troop numbers, it's about their mission.

The resolution intentionally leaves unanswered the question of

whether we will fund the bullets and body armor for troops who are not

there yet but are going. I believe a majority of this House would vote

to equip and support the men and women being sent there, even if they

question the President's strategy. The resolution's silence on this

important reassurance to our troops and their families brings discredit

on this House.

I have made my position clear in ways that this resolution fails to

do. I will seek to provide leadership in this House to address these

important issues and to influence the administration to focus on what

is vital to America. We must adopt strategies, tactics and apply

resources to secure those vital interests and garner the support of the

American people for doing so. It is for these reasons that I will

oppose the resolution before us.