Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 6 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also acknowledge Mr. Marshall and the powerful

sentiments he just shared with all of us. Mr. Speaker, this debate is

long overdue. It is our first extended and substantive debate on the

war in Iraq since Congress gave the President the authority to invade

more than 4 years ago.

But if we do nothing more than debate the President's escalation

plan, we will not keep faith with the American people who rightly

expect this new Congress to bring our costly involvement in Iraq to a

close. And while the resolution before us is largely symbolic and

nonbinding, it can be, I think it should be, the opening part of a

longer, thoughtful debate about our long-term national interests not

only Iraq but the entire Middle East.

So this resolution is a start. And I will vote for it because I agree

with the message it sends. The resolution expresses disapproval of the

President's sending more troops to Iraq, an action that is contrary to

the wise advice of the Iraq Study Group, critical members of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff, and experienced military commanders like former

Secretary of State Colin Powell.

The President's escalation is most likely too small to be effective,

and adopting new counterinsurgency tactics comes 2 years too late. The

resolution, in my opinion, represents the correct response to these

facts. It expresses support for our brave men and women in uniform, but

disagreement with the policy of military escalation.

Mr. Speaker, as we speak here today, the death toll in Iraq rises,

and the war continues to drain our national Treasury, stretch our Armed

Forces, and weaken our capacity to effectively counter Islamic

terrorism. Congress needs to send the message that things must change.

I opposed the Bush administration's decision to go to war in Iraq,

and I have never once regretted that vote. But today we must focus on

the future. We cannot move the clock back, but we need to avoid making

a bad situation worse. We should not be scaling up our military mission

in Iraq, we should be scaling back. We need to make the U.S. military

footprint lighter, not in order to hasten defeat or failure in Iraq,

but to salvage a critical measure of security and stability in a region

of the world that we can ill afford to abandon.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee, I know about the

pressure on our active duty and National Guard and Reserve soldiers.

They lack enough equipment and training. They are experiencing multiple

or extended deployments and limited time at home between deployments.

But to be successful our men and women must be properly trained,

equipped, and ready to deploy worldwide quickly.

Shortfalls in personnel, equipment, or training increases the risk to

our troops and to their mission. In short, this administration's

policies have brought us to the point where we not only cannot sustain

an escalation in Iraq, but also we are not fully prepared for other

contingencies.

But that is not the only reason I oppose the escalation. I do not

think the President's rationale for it makes sense, no matter our

readiness levels. The just-released National Intelligence Estimate on

Iraq agrees that the term ``civil war'' accurately describes what is

happening in Iraq, and suggests that the conflict may in fact be worse

than a civil war.

Putting more Americans at risk is not a recipe for victory. And as a

new Foreign Relations Council report notes, we bear responsibility for

developments within Iraq, but are increasingly without the ability to

shape those developments in a positive direction.

So what should be the way forward? For one, I believe a reduction of

military forces in Iraq and a phased redeployment of our Armed Forces

to border regions like Anbar and the Kurdish areas of Iraq would be

effective. That can give us flexibility to act militarily in Iraq if

necessary, but will also increase the pressure on the Iraqi Government

to move toward political reconciliation.

I do not think an immediate withdrawal of American forces or setting

a date certain for withdrawal makes sense, but neither does an open-

ended commitment for American blood and treasure. And as bad as the

situation is in Iraq, we must work to avoid a collapse in the region.

Not only because we have a moral obligation to the people of Iraq, but

also because our national security has been badly compromised by the

Bush administration's failures.

We should adopt the main policy recommendations of the Iraq Study

Group, including stronger efforts of diplomacy in the region. It is not

in the interests of any nation to have Iraq descend into further civil

war and chaos. As challenging as diplomacy is in the Middle East, I

believe the sacrifice of our soldiers demand that we engage in serious

regional talks, including those with our adversaries Syria and Iran.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I am convinced we must reach for bipartisanship

in crafting our policy in Iraq. Mr. Speaker, the stakes in Iraq are

very high.

The outcome in this region will have consequences for future

generations that will long outlive those of us who are in Congress

today.

Great leaders acknowledge mistakes, learn and chart a new course. For

the sake of future generations and to keep faith with the generations

that built America, let us be a Nation of great leaders.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first significant debate we have had on the

war in Iraq since Congress passed the President's request for an

authorization to invade Iraq more than four years ago. And even though

our debate today is on a largely symbolic question--a non-binding

resolution disapproving the President's announced plan for moving

additional troops to Iraq--I believe it ought to serve as the beginning

of a deeper and more thoughtful debate about our long-term national

interests in the Middle East, and Iraq.

If all we do is debate the wisdom of a surge, we will not keep faith

with the American people, who rightly expect this new Congress to bring

our costly involvement in the Iraq war to a close.

Nevertheless, I will support this resolution disapproving the

president's call for additional troops in Iraq because it runs contrary

to the wise advice of the Iraq Study Group (the Baker-Hamilton

Commission), critical members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and

experienced military commanders like former Secretary of State, Colin

Powell, on the best strategic approach in Iraq. The President's plan

calls for an infusion of additional soldiers--probably too few to have

the desired outcome--and utilizing counterinsurgency tactics that are

two years too late and that I believe will be ineffective in the

context of the civil war that has emerged in Iraq.

We are also expecting General David Petraeus and our troops to

operate under a complicated joint command structure with Iraqi forces

and political leaders that is unprecedented in our military history and

undermines the ``unity of command'' rule in warfare. And all this comes

at a time when the death toll in Iraq is rising and the war continues

to drain our national treasury, stretches our armed forces, and

decreases--rather than enhances--our ability to wage an effective war

against Islamic terrorism. Even as we debate a ``surge'' in Iraq, we

should not forget Afghanistan. We will win there if we redouble our

efforts now.

I opposed the Bush Administration's decision to go to war in Iraq and

I have never once regretted that vote. Today, we cannot move the clock

back, but we can surely avoid making a bad situation worse. We should

not be scaling up our military mission in Iraq--we should be scaling

back. We need to make the U.S. military footprint lighter--not in order

to hasten defeat or failure in Iraq, but to salvage a critical measure

of security and stability in a region of the world that we can ill

afford to abandon.

I say this as a Member of the Armed Services Committee who

understands the pressures on our active duty and National Guard and

reserve soldiers, including a lack of equipment and training, multiple

or extended deployments, and limited time at home between deployments.

To be successful, U.S. forces must be trained, equipped, and ready to

quickly deploy worldwide. Shortfalls in personnel, equipment, or

training increase the risk to our troops and to their mission. By all

measurements, we are not in a position to sustain an escalation of

troops.

But I don't believe the President's rationale for the ``surge'' makes

sense, no matter our readiness levels. The just-released National

Intelligence Estimate on Iraq agrees that the term ``civil war''

accurately describes aspects of the Iraq conflict and goes further in

suggesting that the conflict may in fact, be more complicated and worse

than a civil war. Putting more American troops at risk in this kind of

setting is not a recipe for victory; it is only a prescription for

quagmire. As a new Foreign Relations Council report notes, we bear

responsibility for developments within Iraq, but are increasingly

without the ability to shape those developments in a positive

direction.

So what should be the way forward? How should Congress respond?

I believe a policy aimed at escalating diplomatic and political

efforts is preferable to one that continues to rely on our soldiers to

carry the heavy burden of nation-building--a mission that soldiers are

ill-equipped for without strong international support, particularly in

the midst of civil war and sectarian violence. That is why I favor a

reduction of military forces in Iraq, and a phased redeployment of our

armed forces to border regions in places like Anbar province and the

Kurdish areas of Iraq, which should give us some flexibility to respond

militarily should circumstances require it, but will also increase the

pressure on the Iraqi government to move toward political

reconciliation and stability.

I do not believe an immediate withdrawal of American forces or

setting a date certain for withdrawal makes sense, but neither does an

open-ended commitment of American blood and treasure.

As bad as the situation is in Iraq, however, we must work to avoid a

collapse in the region--not only because we have a moral obligation to

the people of Iraq, but also because our national security has been so

badly compromised by the Bush Administration's failures there. The

President's decision to take the Nation to war has made our country

less safe. We need to change course and chart a path that enhances our

national security and sets the right priorities for the war on

terrorism and struggle against extremists.

To do this, I believe Congress should pass a resolution that embodies

the main policy elements of the Baker-Hamilton Commission, including a

call for stronger efforts at diplomacy in the region and

internationally. It is not in the interests of any nation to have Iraq

descend into further civil war and chaos. As challenging as diplomacy

is in the Middle East, I believe the sacrifice of our soldiers demands

that we engage in serious regional talks, including talks with our

adversaries, Syria and Iran.

Finally, I believe we must reach for bipartisanship in crafting our

policy in Iraq. The President misguidedly took us into war on the eve

of a bitter national election. We must try hard not to compound this

error by turning a debate on Iraq into a partisan game of one-upmanship

where legitimate disagreement with the Administration's plan for

escalation is called a betrayal of our troops or where resistance to

immediate withdrawal is called war-mongering.

For my part, I intend to speak out loudly and often for a responsible

withdrawal strategy in Iraq, but I will also offer proposals that are

aimed at finding common ground. I will be introducing legislation that

looks beyond the ``surge'' and toward the necessary and inevitable

contingency planning that will be needed if we are to avoid deeper and

more catastrophic scenarios in Iraq and the region.

Mr. Speaker, the stakes in Iraq are very high. The outcome in this

region will have consequences for future generations that will long

outlive those of us who are in Congress today. Great leaders

acknowledge mistakes, learn, and chart a new course. For the sake of

future generations and to keep faith with the generations that built

America, let us be a Nation of great leaders.