Mr. Speaker, 1 year ago, I retired from the U.S. Navy

after 31 years in our military, serving our Nation during the

challenges of peace and in the fury of war, including commanding an

aircraft carrier battle group of 30 ships and 15,000 sailors in combat

operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Having worn the cloth of this

Nation for so long, I know that our military is a national treasure

that cannot be hoarded like miser's gold if it is to be a force for

peace and progress, but nor can it be used recklessly. And now, as a

Member of the House of Representatives, I am conscious that war is a

shared responsibility in our Constitution between the President and

Congress, as are the respective responsibilities of the executive and

legislative branches to ensure U.S. security, and to provide for our

common defense.

My experience leads me to be concerned for U.S. security because of

Iraq, a tragic misadventure that does not permit us to best address

more important security challenges throughout the world. My experience

also says don't double down on a bad military bet by using more troops

as the President has proposed, when an increase has not worked before;

have confidence in our diplomatic ability to lead regional negotiations

for stability, even with Syria and Iran; and, set a date certain for

redeploying out of Iraq, this year, to serve as the necessary leverage

to have the Iraqis accept the reality of the personal consequence of

not assuming responsibility for their nation.

What concerns me about Iraq is the continuing use of our national

treasure in what is an inconclusive, open-ended involvement within a

country where the long-term benefits do not match what we need to reap,

and where the tradeoffs in benefits of not focusing elsewhere is

harming our future prosperity, interests, and values.

We need to apply our resources elsewhere in the world, where

terrorists come from, including Osama bin Laden, who is still on the

loose, or where emerging nations such as in the Western Pacific have

growing political and economic interests, and therefore influence, that

may challenge ours.

An alternative strategy is just what is needed, because remaining in

Iraq means less security and a greater strategic security risk for

America. It negatively impacts the readiness of our Armed Forces and

hinders our ability to adequately focus on other security priorities

here at home and throughout the world, including the global war on

terror and regional challenges from Afghanistan, North Korea, and Iran

to the Western Pacific and Middle East regions.

The fact is we have fostered a culture of dependence in Iraq, and it

is time for Iraqi leaders to be responsible for their own country. They

must make the difficult political compromises that will stop the civil

war we are refereeing and bring about stability. We cannot do this work

for them. Nor is that wonderful phrase I heard often when deployed to

that region throughout the years, Anshala, Bugra: God willing,

tomorrow, good enough any longer.

So, yes, I will vote for this resolution, because sending more troops

to Iraq and remaining there indefinitely will only increase the

dependence of the Iraqis on America, both politically and militarily,

at a time when they should be shouldering increased responsibility for

their country, while impacting our degraded military and strategic

security readiness further.

But I also believe we need to go a step further and pursue an

alternative strategy, which is why last week I introduced binding

legislation setting the end of 2007 for our redeployment from Iraq. The

rationale for doing so is clear: Redeployment from Iraq will enhance

our security by allowing us to properly address other potential

challenges around the world, and by allowing us to resolve the concerns

about the readiness of our Armed Forces here at home.

Rather than leading to a spiral of violence, redeploying from Iraq

will serve as the necessary catalyst for the Iraqis to assume

responsibility for their country, with regional nations then interested

in ensuring stability when the United States is outside that country,

but remaining with strength in the region. The needed reconciliation

will only come about when the Iraqi political leaders are forced to

take the difficult political steps needed to cease the violence in

their country, such as building coalitions among competing sects,

ensuring minority rights, balancing power between provincial and

central governments, and sharing oil revenues among all regions in

Iraq. And regional nations', particularly Syria's and Iran's,

incentives change toward stability when the United States is no longer

in the midst of the civil war, and these nations will have to bear the

consequences of further strife, with refugee flows to their countries,

and the possibility that these relatively allied nations could then be

joined into a proxy battle to their detriment, as one is primarily

Sunni and the other Shia.

Only by a strategy of setting a date certain, a deliberate timetable

for redeployment, are we able to create a catalyst for the political

leaders in Iraq to acknowledge and accept that they must undertake the

difficult political steps necessary to cease the sectarian violence, as

they understand that they otherwise would bear the consequences of not

assuming the responsibility for their country.

Iraq is not the central front in terrorism. Rather, it is a result of

our leadership forgetting the age-old axiom that ``successful generals

win, then they go to war.'' In short, we did not accurately plan before

we went into Iraq, and we should redeploy.

The only way is to use our redeployment as the catalyst for Iraqis

and other regional nations to accept their responsibilities for a

relative peace. U.S. interests in the world do not

include pouring endless amounts of our national treasure of lives and

money into elusive, endless goals when there is an alternative

strategy, and when we have so much else to achieve in this world.