Mr. Speaker, I rise today to oppose the

escalation of troop levels, to call for an end to the American

occupation of Iraq, and to support the resolution before the House.

The two clauses of this resolution go hand in hand. There should be

no doubt about the support from this Congress and indeed from the

American people for those who risk their lives to defend this Nation.

As a Nation, we have learned to sincerely honor the warrior, even when

we disagree with the war.

I have personally been moved by my own interactions with our troops.

I have been honored to meet with them here at home, in Iraq, in

Afghanistan, in Kosovo, and in numerous other places where they are

serving honorably. And I have mourned with their families when their

service has led to the ultimate sacrifice. No one who spends time with

the members of our Armed Forces can fail to be impressed by the

dedication and valor with which they carry out their duty.

In addition to guaranteeing that they have the resources, equipment

and compensation they need, supporting our troops also means ensuring

that the missions we ask them to perform are viable and well-designed

in terms of our national objectives. The President's surge plan does

not meet these criteria, and Congress should oppose it.

The question before us today is whether an escalation of as many as

48,000 American troops is the best way to turn things around in Iraq.

However, this question is part of a much larger debate that this

country and this Chamber must conduct, a debate about the future of the

U.S. military mission.

There cannot be a simply military solution to the challenges that we,

and the Iraqi people, face in Iraq. The size of our military presence

will not make the difference, because any solution to Iraq's problems

will still be political, not military.

The recent National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraq confirms this

conclusion. The unclassified report noted that even the term ``civil

war'' is not grave enough to convey the complexity of the security

challenges in Iraq. More to the point, the NIE noted that there were

three ``identifiable elements that could help to reverse negative

trends'': broader Sunni acceptance of the federalist political

structure, Shia and Kurdish concessions to Sunnis, and ``a bottom-up

approach to help mend frayed relationships between tribal and religious

groups.'' Note that none of these elements can be achieved by military

force.

The outgoing commander of Multi-National Forces Iraq, Lieutenant

General Peter Chiarelli, recently stated, ``We need to get out of

thinking that this is solely a military conflict. All of our Nation's

strengths--diplomatic, economic, political--must be leveraged to help

the Iraqis find their way through this process.'' Other military

leaders have echoed this sentiment.

My colleague from North Carolina, Brad Miller, and I have proposed

such an approach in our bill, H.R. 645.

Our bill would dramatically strengthen U.S. political and diplomatic

efforts. It would send special envoys to the region to encourage Iraq's

neighbors to play a more productive role in resolving the conflict and

to facilitate a national reconciliation process in Iraq. It would also

authorize a program to get would-be insurgents off the streets and into

the workforce. And it would provide ongoing support for the development

of democratic institutions, particularly at the local level.

While enhancing our political and diplomatic efforts, our bill would

de-escalate our military commitment. It would terminate the

authorization for the war at the end of this year, and require

President Bush to develop an exit strategy for bringing our troops home

by that date.

We can no longer ask our troops in Iraq to do the impossible. In

fact, their presence is fueling the insurgency and is a magnet for

international terrorism. It is time for the American occupation of Iraq

to end, and for Iraqi leaders to assume responsibility for their

country's future, for better or for worse.

Some have argued that our troops must remain in Iraq to prevent

intolerable outcomes. But the outcomes that we have most feared--a

civil war, a training ground for terrorists, an ascendant Iran--have

already become reality, despite the continuing presence of our troops.

While a military presence may delay even worse outcomes, it cannot

prevent them. If we are to avoid a regional war or an exponential

increase in Iraq's carnage, our best hope is the increased political

and diplomatic effort that I have proposed.

Mr. Speaker, how we leave Iraq does matter. A well-planned withdrawal

can enhance our ability to protect our troops and prepare Iraqis to

assume control. We must not make the same mistake ending the war that

we did in beginning it, pursuing a strategy without adequate planning.

But we should not hide behind this imperative. We can't allow an exit

strategy to prevent or postpone an exit.

I urge my colleagues to consider H.R. 645, which I believe offers the

best way to pursue American national security interests in Iraq.

Let me close on a note of caution. The resolution we are debating

here today is necessary, but it is not sufficient. The President should

hear our message, which expresses the conviction of the majority of the

American people that the time to end our occupation of Iraq has come.

However, if he doesn't take steps to bring our troops home, the

President should be under no illusion that this nonbinding resolution

exhausts Congress's role. Rather, it is a first step in holding him

accountable and reversing a failed policy that has made our Nation less

safe, and has cost us so dearly in blood and treasure.