Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend for yielding.

I must begin by reacting to the two distinguished Republican speakers

who preceded me. The distinguished Republican leader recited movingly

and accurately terrorist outrages across the globe. Those terrorist

outrages make the passage of our resolution all the more urgent and all

the more imperative. We are not fighting terrorism in Iraq. We are

attempting to referee a religiously based civil war which saps our

strength and destroys our fabric as a society.

As to the distinguished Republican whip, may I say this resolution

does not make tactical decisions. It reverses a mistaken course. The

administration is recommending an acceleration of the wrong course. Our

resolution reverses that course.

Mr. Speaker, it is too late to go back and make right all that has

gone wrong in Iraq, and clearly carrying on with more of the same will

do no good. But the administration has yet to learn that you cannot

unscramble an omelet. Instead, it is trying to add to the mix another

21,500 men and women who deserve better than that.

In pursuing its policies in Iraq, the administration cannot

unscramble and undo its many mistakes: buying into rogue and flawed

intelligence; disbanding the Iraqi Army; conducting mindless and

extreme de-Baathification; permitting the early looting and destruction

and violence; allowing the growth of a government based on hate-filled

sectarianism; allowing waste, fraud and abuse in the use of U.S.

taxpayer funds; and on and on ad nauseam and ad infinitum.

While we all hope that the goal of a quiet and stable Iraq will be

achieved under General Petraeus, I am deeply skeptical. It will be

incredibly difficult, if not impossible. The place is just too much of

a mess.

Our continued heavy presence in Iraq has not forced Iraqi leaders to

take the requisite actions on power-sharing, resource-sharing, and

national reconciliation. In fact, it has done the exact opposite. They

have made minimal and cosmetic efforts in the knowledge that we will

fill the gaps.

In the meantime, there are so many other fronts, globally and here at

home, on which we might have made much more progress if we had not been

fixated these last 4 years on Iraq. Domestic and foreign problems have

festered while we invested blood and treasure in Iraq. As our Iraq

problems have mounted, our commitment and ability to resolve other

pressing issues have vanished.

Last November, the American people sent a loud and unmistakable

message. With the announcement of an escalation of the war in Iraq, it

is obvious that the administration did not get it. So we are trying one

more time.

The resolution before the House is the second chance for this

administration to hear a strong and clear message on Iraq, one it

ignores at its peril and at ours as a country.

The majority of Congress wants de-escalation. The majority of the

American people want de-escalation. Many Republicans throughout the

Nation, and even our Republican colleagues in this Congress, want de-

escalation. Poll numbers show that the Iraqi people want the United

States to gradually withdraw, and Prime Minister al-

Maliki has indicated in virtually every way that he can that he, too,

opposes the surge.

But the administration wants escalation. So it is going its own way,

nearly alone.

There is a clear-cut policy difference here, Mr. Speaker. It is

reflected simply and unambiguously in our resolution. Those of our

colleagues who oppose escalation should vote for the resolution. Those

of our colleagues who stand with the administration in supporting

escalation should oppose it.

Along with 52 hearings on Iraq in the House and the Senate over the

past 5 weeks, this resolution represents the first phase in a long

overdue process of congressional oversight of the war in Iraq. It is

not the last phase. Congress will be dealing with the Iraq issue for

months to come, in fact, for as long as it takes to end this nightmare.

But this simple resolution will establish the first marker. Those who

want to draw down the U.S. presence will be on one side of that marker.

Those who want to take further steps into the quagmire will be on the

other.

Mr. Speaker, we are throwing our soldiers into the midst of a civil

war, particularly those whom we are sending to Baghdad. It is utterly

unrealistic and grossly unfair to expect soldiers straight out of Iowa,

Alabama, or California to be able to differentiate between Iraqi Sunnis

and Iraqi Shias, much less to be able to tell at a glance which of

these groups are with us and which are against us. But that is exactly

what we are asking them to do, and we are asking them to do it in an

urban terrorist setting and to do it without any linguistic or cultural

background.

The first sentence of the recent National Intelligence Estimate tells

us everything we need to know on this issue: ``Iraqi society's growing

polarization, the persistent weakness of the Iraqi security forces and

the Iraqi state in general, and all sides' ready recourse to violence

are collectively driving an increase in communal and insurgent violence

and political extremism.''

Every day we read another article illustrating the impossibility of

the situation into which we have inserted our brave men and women. One

day, we read how the Iraqi Army is infested with militia members.

Another day, we read that countless members of al-Sadr's violently

anti-American Mahdi Army have actually been trained by U.S. soldiers

unaware of the trainees' true affiliation. On yet another day, we read

that U.S. soldiers cannot even tell their Iraqi counterparts the object

of their joint military missions for fear that the mission will be

compromised.

This weekend, we read an interview with a U.S. soldier who

acknowledged that he had no idea whatsoever whether an arrest he

witnessed by Iraqi security forces was justified or merely another

instance of sectarian revenge.

Mr. Speaker, Iraq is a hall of mirrors, and the administration has

utterly lost its way. More troops will not help. The United States

wants Iraq to be a state based on the rule of law, but too many Iraqis

prefer score-settling, chaos, and civil war. We cannot create a stable

Iraq when the Iraqis themselves do not seem to want it.

Let us not leave our finest young men and women literally stranded in

an Iraqi maze. Let us make this resolution the first step on their

journey home. We must begin a reduction in force at the fastest

responsible rate possible, consistent with the safety of our troops.

And then it will be time to rebuild our battered military and, just

as importantly, rebuild the battered reputation of the United States.

For the sake of our troops and our national interests, I strongly

support this resolution and urge all of my colleagues to do likewise.