Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be here with the other

Democratic Members who are veterans to talk about this resolution.

I want to start off by saying what Allen Boyd said. I was on active

duty during the Vietnam years. The problem here is not the troops; the

problem is the competency of the civilian leadership that has gotten us

into this mess.

This resolution supports our troops and calls for a different

strategy by our civilian leadership with respect to Iraq.

When I was on active duty when I was in the military, I followed

orders. That was my job. My role here in Congress as I see it is to try

to help formulate some sort of competent civilian leadership and

strategy so the troops can be successful. We have not seen that in 4

years. The war began in Iraq in March of 2003. Since then, we have lost

3,124 people dead and over 23,000 wounded, and it is not a bit better

today than it was the day we started.

The war has cost Americans almost $400 billion, with another request

for $285 billion more, with no end in sight. Competent civilian

leadership for our men and women in uniform on the diplomatic and

political fronts must be demanded by Congress and the American people

if we are to properly honor the sacrifice of the dead and the wounded

and their families.

Instead, what do we have? We have unbelievable reports that the

Pentagon can't identify 170,000 guns issued to the Iraqi forces in

October of 2005; some of our soldiers buying their own body armor; up-

armored Humvees sitting in Bosnia or Herzegovina while we needed them

in Iraq. And David Walker, the Comptroller General, says he believes

that almost 30 percent of the money spent over there has been wasted,

stolen, or otherwise unaccounted for.

I think any patriotic American ought to come to this floor if he or

she has the opportunity and ask questions about the incompetency of the

Pentagon and civilian leadership thus far.

I believe any viable Iraqi strategy to be successful must contain

clearly defined goals to hold the Iraqi leaders accountable for their

own security. Mr. Boswell, a helicopter pilot in Vietnam, said as much

earlier.

Our men and women in uniform have performed magnificently. They have

completed every task assigned to them. But impressive military might

alone is not enough if the Iraqi people cannot or will not make

progress in securing their own country and establishing a civil

democracy.

Western-style democracy works because we have a theory called

separation of church and state. When people don't go to the same

church, they nonetheless can get together Monday through Friday and

build a civil society and get along with each other. If these folks are

unwilling or unable to do that for philosophical or psychological

reasons, then we can only try to force a square peg into a round hole

for so long. It has been going on for 4 years, and they are seemingly

incapable. And I say that what we need to do is rethink our strategy

and that a pullback to the perimeter is preferable to prolonging a

costly and deadly military strategy toward a political goal that is out

of reach.

Whether or not this new strategy works, I am glad to see that General

David Petraeus will be commanding our men and women on the ground. He

has proved himself a strong military commander, and I wish him well. It

is not his strategy that I question.

Here is why this resolution is important to me: not only do the

majority of the Iraqis in every poll that has been taken over there say

they will be better off if we leave or get out or pull back, or however

one wants to talk about it, but what it is doing in Iraq to our effort

in Afghanistan. I am going to be leading a delegation to Brussels next

Saturday to talk about Afghanistan. We are losing our momentum in

Afghanistan because of the Iraqi whirlwind that is sucking everything

into it in terms of our military supplies, our military approach, and

so forth. Almost everyone who has looked at this situation agrees, from

the Baker-Hamilton Report to everybody else, that we need to radically

change our strategy.

Listen to these words from the Council of Foreign Relations. They

say: ``The United States' interests in the Middle East and Persian Gulf

region can be more effectively advanced if the United States disengages

from Iraq. Indeed, the sooner Washington grasps this, the sooner it can

begin to repair the damage that has been done to America's

international position.''

Speaking of Afghanistan, they also say: ``Iraq is siphoning off so

many resources that we could end up failing in Afghanistan as well.''

The report warns that Iraq is all consuming and makes it difficult for

the United States to address other priorities.

That is exactly what we are talking about here, a different strategy

for Iran, for our troops to be successful; an accountability from them

as to their own security, so that we can concentrate with 26 other

nations in NATO who are helping us fight the war in Afghanistan, a war

that we can win, a war that we must win, and a war that is every bit as

important if not more so in the war on terror than Iraq ever was.