I will begin my remarks by saying that I hope that these 3

days of debate, Mr. Speaker, are characterized by civility and respect.

Without doubt, this is the most difficult issue that we will confront

in this Congress.

Iraq is terribly complex. The stakes for our national security are

great, and the sacrifice in American lives and the loss of Iraqi lives

have been very painful.

This is a war unlike any other we have fought, and it has been

vexing. All of us, supporters and opponents of this resolution alike,

Republicans and Democrats, all Americans, have a vital interest in our

Nation succeeding in helping to build a stable Iraq and defeating

Islamist terrorism. That is the challenge of our time.

As we have heard, mistakes have been made. There is no doubt about

that. I have been dismayed by some of them: the lethargy in training

Iraqi troops, the inability to meter oil and protect civilian

infrastructure. But we can't allow this to cloud our strategic

judgments.

To my mind, this resolution, indeed our struggle in Iraq, can be

boiled down to two questions: Are Iraq and the global struggle against

Islamist terrorism separable? And is Iraq hopeless? The answer to both

questions is no, which leads me to a ``no'' on this resolution.

The rationale for this war has changed, whether we like it or not. We

are now fighting for stability and moderation against the Islamist

terrorism that is now host in Iraq.

Our Civil War didn't start out as a battle against slavery. It was a

fight to save the Union.

We started out fighting Saddam and to stop what the majority of this

House believed was his weapons of mass destruction program. We are now

fighting Islamist terrorism. It is a different and more daunting fight,

but the consequences of our success or failure are no less critical

because the stakes of this battle have changed.

Let there be no doubt about this: Defeat in Iraq will be a terrible

blow to our national security. It will psychologically boost the

Islamist terrorists who we are fighting there and elsewhere.

The bipartisan Iraq Study Group reported Ayman al-Zawahiri, deputy to

Osama bin Laden, has declared Iraq a focus for al Qaeda. That

declaration is more than words.

While not all fighters in Iraq are jihadists, many are. Some have

wrongly denied that here on the House floor today. Jihadists are coming

from all over the world. The report reads, ``They will seek to expel

the Americans and then spread the jihad wave to the secular countries

neighboring Iraq.'' Chaos in Iraq will allow for more terrorist safe

havens there.

The 9/11 Commission stated that every policy decision we make needs

to be seen through the lens of terrorist sanctuaries. My colleagues, I

would ask if we are doing that.

And that report stated that if Iraq becomes a failed state, it will

go to the top of the list of places that are breeding grounds for

attacks against Americans abroad.

We saw what happened when Afghanistan descended into chaos. Al Qaeda

emerged out of the ruin to strike America on 9/11. That is the type of

threat we are facing today, which will be supercharged if Iraq fails.

We have to confront the potential disaster scenario in the region

that U.S. failure in Iraq could bring, which would be worsening strife

which could engulf the entire region, sparking a wider war in this

resource-rich area.

Saudis have warned that they are prepared to aid Sunni militias.

Jordan could move troops into Iraq's western desert to serve as a

buffer. The Turks are increasingly worried about the independent

Kurdish movement. Iran could move to secure the oil fields to the

south.

In describing the consequences of continued decline in Iraq, the Iraq

Study Group wrote, ``Such a broader sectarian conflict could open a

Pandora's box of problems, including the radicalization of populations,

mass movement of populations, and regime changes that might take

decades to play out.''

This is the powder keg that is Iraq today. The status quo is nasty.

But the consequences of failure, while unpredictable, is far worse.

So to the second question: Is Iraq hopeless? I can understand why

many Americans may feel that way. Every day there are horrific car

bombings, the sectarian violence has intensified. We will hear many

assessments that Iraq is hopeless in this debate.

No one is going to argue that success is guaranteed. But arguments

that we have no chance of bringing stability on the ground in Iraq are

also extreme arguments.

Are the forces of chaos so strong, and are the forces of stability

and moderation so weak as to doom with certainty our efforts?

But I have spoken with too many people in the field, people with some

optimism, that I am not ready to conclude that with certainty. And I

don't think this House should reach that conclusion.

And that is my read of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group which, while

recognizing the grave challenges, spoke of improving the process for

success. The fact that the consequences of our defeat would be so great

also leads me to persist.

Let's consider more about the implications of defeat. Look at

neighboring Iran. Most Americans remember the 1979 Iranian takeover of

our embassy in Tehran. That led to 444 days of captivity for our men

and women. Unfortunately, relations with Iran have only worsened since.

Iran today is a state sponsor of terrorism. It aids Hezbollah, and it

backed this terrorist group's war on Israel this summer. With Iranian

backing, Hezbollah is the A Team of terrorism, running highly

sophisticated operatives worldwide, including here.

Some terrorism experts consider Hezbollah to be a more challenging

foe than al Qaeda. Iran is backing the insurgents fighting our men and

women in Iraq. Iran is also storming ahead with a nuclear weapons

program.

The embassy takeover was a big morale boost for Islamist terrorists;

some trace the beginning of Islamist terrorism to that embassy

takeover. The shattering of the Iraqi state in our hands would be that

1979 morale boost magnified. It would also prove the way for tremendous

Iranian influence in the region.

We must face our responsibility to the Iraqi people. Yes, we have

given them 4 years to come together; it has been beyond frustration

that they haven't. Tens of thousands of Iraqis have died during this

time. What happens if we leave or operate without the manpower our

military leadership says it needs? I don't think anyone believes that

the carnage won't be several times what we have seen.

We often hear calls to intervene in countries for humanitarian

reasons. Some would like our military to go to Darfur in Sudan. Maybe

we should take decisive military actions to stop that genocide, but

what about trying to finish a job where we have already made a huge

military commitment, knowing full well that Iraq's withdrawal would

lead to a brutal humanitarian crisis?

We also often hear from some about how unpopular our country is

worldwide. This is said to greatly harm our influence and interest. And

there is truth to that. Just wait if our withdrawal precipitates a

horrific scale of ethnic cleansing. Is that the Iraqi legacy we want? I

am not ready to concede the inevitability of this.

It is very important that our Nation be united. Our success depends

upon it.

We need to be sowing discord among the enemy, not ourselves. We have

had successes against Islamist terrorism worldwide.

This resolution states that Congress disapproves of the January

decision of the President to deploy more troops to Iraq. The bipartisan

Iraq Study Group panel, but one month earlier, said it could support a

short-term redeployment of American combat forces to stabilize Baghdad.

This resolution goes in the opposite direction.

I have heard the argument about why this resolution isn't a retreat,

but it is a nonbinding rebuke of the President's tactics, that it

doesn't cut off funding. That may be the case on paper, but the

symbolism is far greater. I don't see how opposing our professional

military's call for more troops at this pivotal time is anything but a

signal of permanent retreat. It is also congressional micromanagement.

The war is horrible. The easy thing would be to just say out. But we

can't wish away the Islamist terrorists will take great strength from

our defeat. That is what they are saying. These individuals in groups

are as persistent as they are brutal. They must be fought and defeated.

So let's not give these forces a win on the floor of the U.S. House.

I ask my colleagues to think through these implications and vote down

this resolution