Mr. Speaker, the escalation of the conflict in Iraq is an

exercise in futility. It has been 3 years now since the President

declared that our original mission was accomplished in Iraq.

And then the President let victory escape from our grasp. He confused

the toppling of Saddam Hussein with accomplishing the mission.

But there is a more important question being raised here on the House

floor. It is an issue which has confused our mission in Iraq from the

beginning. And it is the preposterous argument that Iraq is part of the

war against al Qaeda.

The al Qaeda attack on America killed almost 3,000 innocent Americans

in New York, at the Pentagon, and in a field outside of Shanksville,

Pennsylvania. We pursued al Qaeda into Afghanistan, dislodged the

Taliban and cornered Osama bin Laden at Tora Bora. We had al Qaeda on

the run. We had the world united against terror and in favor of freedom

and democracy.

But then the President switched his focus at a critical time. He

dismissed the factors which had brought success in Afghanistan, a just

cause, clear evidence, and a community of nations, and instead pursued

his Iraqi adventure based on faulty intelligence and employing a

strategy rejected by his own Army Chief of Staff and numerous other

generals.

Thus, the President gave al Qaeda breathing room; he let them

regroup, because he lost focus on the war on al Qaeda, to wage war on

Iraq. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, al Qaeda and the Taliban regrouped.

Iraq is not the central front in the war on al Qaeda. Iraq is a

distraction from the war on al Qaeda. Each day we spend in Iraq is a

day we are not working to bring the perpetrators of 9/11 to justice.

Whatever happened to Osama bin Laden? Why aren't we looking for him?

We have a direct connection to 9/11. The families of those who

perished on 9/11 are still waiting for an answer.

This escalation is an appalling display of our weakness. We are

sending only 21,000 combat troops to Iraq because, after stretching our

military thin for 4 years, that is all the troops we have available at

the moment.

The President cannot tell us what victory is or when he hopes to

achieve it. What is really our goal in Iraq? What are we trying to

achieve? And are we going to leave this mess for the next President?

Today, Iraq is consumed by civil war. Her neighbors, including our

allies, Jordan, Kuwait and Turkey, are overwhelmed with refugees, and

Iran is strengthened and emboldened. If that is not already

destabilized, then the word truly has no meaning.

The occupation itself is what is destabilizing Iraq. The occupation

is placing Americans on the killing fields. The occupation undermines

American prestige and authority, and the occupation in Iraq makes it

harder to defeat al Qaeda.

The military battle is over. Our only hope is to change course, to

acknowledge the reality that we have lost the military struggle in

Iraq. Only then can we reengage with a strategy to give us a political

victory.

We must remove our forces and move forward with a political and

diplomatic strategy to engage both our allies and our adversaries in

the region. This will mean talking to Iran, not capitulating to Iran.

Even at the height of the Cold War, Reagan was willing to talk to

Moscow. Until we are willing to engage with Iran, our friends in the

Middle East, who fear Iranian dominance as much as we do, will not

believe we are serious about confronting the Iranian threats.

Last, and most appalling, is the desperation accusation that we are

going to cut off funds for our troops. Simply not true.

This attack is especially galling when it has been a Republican

Congress and a Republican President who, for 4 years, left our troops

vulnerable, without proper equipment, without proper armor, and in an

effort to fight this war on the cheap.

I will never vote to leave our troops without the support they need.

But neither will I vote to continue down a path that is putting them at

needless risk.

Vote for this bill.