Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of our

extraordinary troops and oppose sending over 20,000 additional U.S.

forces into the middle of Iraq's violent sectarian conflict. I oppose

the President's plan because it will not end the insurgency, halt

military activity, or accelerate our departure from Iraq. The plan is

not a strategic change.

Rather, it is the continuation of a failed policy. When Congress

voted to authorize the use of military force, I voted ``no.'' I felt at

that time that we had not exhausted all diplomatic avenues and that

unilateral action would have a grave effect on our strategic position

in the world. More significantly, it could undercut the broader long-

term war against Islamic extremism. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, many of these

predictions have come through. We now find ourselves in a position

where only grim choices remain.

The war in Iraq has indeed strained our military, drained taxpayer

dollars and damaged our credibility in the international community. As

a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I have heard from a

number of administration officials and academic experts on the way

forward in Iraq. And many of these experts have warned against

increasing the number of troops.

Last November, General Abizaid told Congress that an increase in U.S.

troop levels would only delay the ability of Iraqis to take the lead.

Mr. Speaker, what changed between November and today? Even the most

ardent proponents of the troop increase acknowledge that to work all

pieces must come together.

First, the military must be able to quell sectarian and insurgent

violence. And then if the violence subsides long enough for a window of

opportunity to open, the economic and political components must be

executed flawlessly.

Even if our forces are successful in reducing violence in the short

term, assurances cannot be given that other parts of the government

will be able to address the economic and political components of the

President's plan.

Well, the track record of the administration and the Maliki

government make it hard to believe that such a plan will bring real

results. One of the most egregious errors of our entire experience in

Iraq has been the failure to put trained experts in critical civilian

positions.

To accomplish this new mission, civilian agencies have been asked to

send several hundred experts to Iraq to carry out the plan. However,

the military has reported that because of hiring delays, DOD will have

to assign their own personnel because U.S. civilian agencies are unable

to fill the much needed positions.

Mr. Speaker, it should not be the role of the military to rebuild

nations on their own. We should have been leveraging our talented and

experienced Federal workforce all along. Many of my colleagues have

already discussed key issues such as readiness and equipment levels,

but two of the greatest concerns I have with the President's plan are

the effect on our volunteer force and the strategic risk that is

created by putting more military assets into Iraq.

By adding more troops, the administration leaves our Nation with

fewer resources to deal with Afghanistan and future contingencies. Will

we be able to respond if our military is needed elsewhere? With more of

our troops bogged down, will our allies around the world continue to

have faith in our ability to respond to extremist and military threats

around the globe?

We must answer these questions. But I have not heard satisfactory

responses from the President or military officials. Mr. Speaker, I also

oppose the surge because the present administration has not

sufficiently answered questions about the impact on military personnel.

For those in the military, this war hits close to home every day.

While we have asked few Americans to sacrifice during this conflict,

service members and their families continue to face the uncertainty of

repeated deployments, injury and in some cases the death of a loved

one. They deserve better.

Mr. Speaker, I told President Bush that veterans in my district have

said, ``We are a military at war, not a Nation at war.'' And military

leaders agree. Mr. Speaker, if we truly want to create a situation

where we can withdraw our troops, we need to escalate our diplomatic

efforts and call on Iraq's neighbors to help the Iraqi Government make

the tough political decisions needed to reduce the violence.

We must not give in to the President's diversion, but develop a

multipronged strategic plan the American and the Iraqi people deserve