Madam Speaker, I am proud to join my colleagues in

appreciation of our troops' exceptional service and sacrifice, and to

voice my opposition to President Bush's plan to send more forces into

what amounts to a civil war.

As a former member of the House Armed Services Committee and a new

member of the Intelligence Committee, I recognize that our next steps

in Iraq present one of the greatest security decisions our Nation has

faced in decades.

The Iraq Study Group called the situation grave and deteriorating and

said it requires a new approach. I agree. We can all conclude that an

unstable Iraq, torn by sectarian conflict, would lead to continued

violence and civilian casualties, provide combat training opportunities

to those who would do us harm, and pose increased challenges to the

region.

Yet I disagree with President Bush's misguided belief that sending

more Americans into combat will solve the problem.

Our military has served valiantly for nearly 4 years, particularly in

some very challenging and nontraditional missions, in some cases for

which they were never trained. However, we have done all that we could

do militarily to help the Iraqi people, and their problems no longer

require a U.S. military solution. The underlying causes of violence are

primarily political and must be addressed in that framework. Sending

more troops would simply be a continuation of the same failed strategy.

In October of 2002, I expressed my concerns that President Bush's

approach to Iraq could have dangerous ramifications in the region and

America's own efforts in the war on terrorism. For those reasons and

many others, I voted against authorizing use of force against Iraq, a

war that was mismanaged by civilian leadership from the start.

Now, to address our troops' lack of protective gear and up-armored

Humvees, I supported legislation to provide additional funding for

proper equipment, as well as other efforts to assure our forces would

be safe and effective. Now, however, we can best support our troops by

changing our mission in Iraq and adopting a new strategy that reflects

the realities on the ground. The Iraqis must now take the lead in

providing for their own security, and we must reduce our presence to

let them do so.

The President's claim that by adding 21,500 additional combat troops

we can force a greater stability in Iraq is an argument that ignores

some basic truths. Not only have past surges of U.S. forces proved

unnecessary in reducing sectarian violence among Iraqis, but the

addition of more troops would further inflame anti-American sentiment

and turn popular opinion even more against us in our efforts. We have

no proof that another surge would lead to a different outcome than in

the past, but we do know that it would have negative consequences.

Now, perhaps of greatest concern is the impact of the surge on our

military readiness. The President's estimate of 21,500 more combat

troops does not count the additional 15,000 to 28,000 support troops

that would be needed, spreading our military even more dangerously

thin.

Madam Speaker, we have asked much of our forces, included repeated

deployments, and a surge will only exacerbate that problem. Operations

in Iraq have also taken their toll on our equipment.

According to the Government Accountability Office, 40 percent of the

Army's and Marine Corps' equipment is now located in the Central

Command theater of operations. Our National Guard/Reserve units are

underequipped to deal with emergencies, and we have depleted our

preposition stocks, which we need to respond quickly to other

contingencies.

Now, in testimony before the Armed Services Committee in January,

General Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps, noted that an increase

in forces in Iraq would increase our strategic risk and possibly lead

to slower and less effective response to another potential threat.

Madam Speaker, sending more troops to Iraq is a dangerous gamble with

our national security, and we need a new approach. A number of experts,

including the Iraq Study Group, had made important recommendations, and

they must not be ignored.

It is clear that the President's plan for escalation would harm our

national security and ignores the will of the American people. I urge

my colleagues to support this resolution so that we can promote a new

strategy for Iraq and bring our troops home.