Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlelady from

California for her leadership.

Mr. Speaker, before we can even consider sending more of our young

men and women into harm's way, we must first determine what our mission

is in Iraq. Only then will it be possible to intelligently discuss the

number of troops necessary to meet that mission. But 4 years after

going to war in Iraq, the administration has yet to clearly articulate

a mission. Without a mission and a strategy with a credible chance of

success, we should not even be discussing an increase in troop levels.

Mr. Speaker, before we respond to the President's call for an

escalation of the war in Iraq, we must first put his speech in the

context of the history of the war in Iraq. We need to begin with a

discussion of what the current 130,000 troops are doing in Iraq now

before we can discuss what 20,000 additional troops might do.

The original reasons which were provided as the rationale for going

to war, Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, Iraqi leaders were

connected with the 9/11 attacks, and that Iraq posed an imminent threat

to the United States, all turned out not to be true.

We have found no weapons of mass destruction, and we know that Iraqi

leaders were not connected with the 9/11 attacks. And we were told

before the invasion into Iraq that, in the opinion of the CIA, Iraq

posed no imminent terrorist threat to the United States. In fact, a

letter from the Director of the CIA to the Chair of the Senate

Intelligence Committee, dated October 7, 2002, specifically stated that

the CIA believed that Iraq and Saddam Hussein did not pose a terrorist

threat to the United States and would not be expected to pose such a

threat unless we attacked Iraq.

Last night, the President once again attempted to associate our

presence in Iraq with the so-called war on terrorism. The truth is that

our presence in Iraq has actually increased our risk to terrorism.

Furthermore, the term ``war on terrorism'' is a rhetorical term without

any relationship to reality. ``Terrorism'' is not an enemy; it is a

tactic. The enemy is al Qaeda. We attacked Afghanistan because al Qaeda

was there.

But after the initial reasons turned out to be false, we have been

subjected to a series of excuses for being in Iraq, such as the need to

capture Saddam Hussein, the need to capture al-Zarqawi and the need to

establish a democracy.

Well, Saddam Hussein was in jail for almost 2 years before he was

recently hanged. Al-Zarqawi was killed over 6 months ago, and Iraq held

Democratic elections over a year ago. Yet we remain in Iraq, with no

apparent end in sight. And here we are talking about increasing, not

decreasing, troop levels.

So what are we doing in Iraq? Why did we go in? What do we expect to

accomplish? And what will our strategy be for getting out? After we

receive truthful answers to these questions, we can intelligently

discuss appropriate troop levels.

Last night, the President said he was laying out a new mission for

Iraq, thereby clearly acknowledging that whatever the old mission was,

it wasn't working. But there is still no clearly defined end goal and

clearly defined explanation of how failure or success can be measured.

So we remain where we were before the speech, which is on an unclear,

undefined path, while continuing to put more troops in harm's way.

If our mission is to stabilize Baghdad, military experts have already

said that an additional 20,000 troops is woefully insufficient, so

sending these troops will not accomplish that goal. And what happens if

Iraq fails to meet its responsibilities, or Baghdad remains unstable

and the price is more American deaths? Will we send even more troops?

Or will we just cut and run?

And how will we know the new initiative will work? Before our

invasion into Iraq, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld predicted that the war

would last, and I quote, ``six days, six weeks. I doubt 6 months.'' It

has been almost 4 years, and we are still in Iraq with no end in sight.

At the outset of the war, the administration advised the House Budget

Committee that it expected the cost of

the war to be so minuscule that it advised the committee not to include

the cost of the war in the Federal budget, and the administration

official who suggested that the cost of the war might exceed $100

billion was fired.

To date, the cost of the war to the United States is over $375

billion, with no end in sight. Over 3,000 courageous Americans have

already lost their lives. How many more will die if this new strategy

falls as far from the predicted result as the original time and cost

estimates? We need to be honest in clearly stating the likelihood that

this initiative might fail.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, as far as developing a new mission and

strategy, it is imperative that we ask where these additional troops

will come from. Many will have to come from the National Guard and

Reserve, and the escalation will mean longer and multiple deployments.

But our troops already in Iraq have served for above-average

deployments, and many have already completed multiple tours. Other

troops may be redeployed from other assignments. So we must ask what

moving these troops will mean to our global national security. We

cannot assess the wisdom of an escalation without first answering these

critical questions.

We need to develop a coherent plan for Iraq, and that can only begin

with truthfully acknowledging our situation there. Unfortunately, all

we have gotten from this administration is essentially ``Don't worry,

be happy. Success is around the corner. And if you don't believe that,

then you are not patriotic.''

Last November, the American people sent a powerful message that they

wanted a real change in Iraq, not more of the same. This Congress needs

to hold substantive hearings on why we entered Iraq in the first place,

what the present situation is, what we can now expect to accomplish and

what the strategy is to accomplish it, and only then can we

intelligently discuss the troop levels necessary to accomplish that

goal.

It is absurd to discuss troop levels first before we have answers to

these critical questions. The American people and our courageous men

and women on the front lines deserve a clear, articulated and sensible

approach to ending the war in Iraq. Starting with an escalation of

military forces is a step in the wrong direction.