Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to the resolution before

us.

Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 861 is a whitewash justification of every

erroneous action of the Bush-Cheney administration in their war of

choice on Iraq.

It's no surprise that Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld seek this late

coating of whitewash that this resolution attempts to provide. The war

on Iraq was unjustified, has been egregiously mismanaged, and has made

all Americans less safe.

Americans were told repeatedly by President Bush and Vice President

Cheney that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. None were ever found.

President Bush and Vice President Cheney repeatedly implied that Iraq

was involved in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the

Pentagon on September 11, 2001. The preponderance of intelligence

before the attack on Iraq contradicted that and no such evidence has

been found.

The conduct of President Bush's war of choice has been plagued with

incompetent civilian leadership decisions that have cost many lives and

rendered the war on and occupation of Iraq a strategic policy disaster

for the United States. The incompetence and corruption involved in the

reconstruction have rendered that expensive effort largely ineffective.

The most critical, much-cited incompetent decision on the part of the

Bush administration was to commit far too small a force for the huge,

dangerous and multifaceted tasks at hand. Because of that egregious

blunder in judgment and planning by the Bush administration, our

severely overextended troops took many more casualties than necessary,

and they could not:

Stop the looting of the treasures of Iraq's ancient culture and the

public institutions of present day Iraq--its schools, universities and

hospitals;

Seize control of Saddam's huge conventional weapons depots which have

been used to kill our service men and women throughout the insurgency;

Control the borders against the influx into Iraq of senior terrorists

from Bin Laden's international network who wanted to be part of killing

Americans;

Provide the Iraqi civilian population security from the Sunni-

Baathist insurgency as it grew in strength; and

Hold the ground fought over with insurgents in search and destroy

missions which left whole cities in ruins and whatever remained of the

civilian population a fertile recruiting ground for more insurgents.

The incompetence regarding body and vehicle armor rises almost to a

level of criminal negligence.

The military's own report says that one-third of deaths and

casualties could have been avoided if proper body armor and vehicle

armor had been provided from the start of the war. Our

soldiers' civilian leaders did not follow a first maxim of war: protect

your troops. American service men and women deserved better, and the

civilian leaders who failed them should be held accountable.

But instead of honoring our soldiers now with an honest debate about

the war, its conduct and its prospects, we are presented today with a

thick coating of whitewash. This resolution is dishonest on its very

face.

Even though there was no connection between Afghanistan and Iraq, H.

Res. 861 seeks desperately to make that false connection. It seeks to

transform the bad decision to wage war on Iraq as a valid component of

the global war on terror. It seeks to cast the missteps and

incompetence in Iraq as progress in the global war on terror. Even

though there was never any philosophical or operational connection

between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, the President and his Republican

allies in Congress seek by this resolution to re-write history and re-

cast the war on Iraq as having positive implications in the war on

terrorism.

Exactly the opposite is true.

After 9/11, in part because so many nations lost citizens in the

World Trade Center, America enjoyed virtually total global support and

willingness to collaboratively destroy the Bin Laden Al Qaeda network.

The opportunity was there to work carefully with the entire world,

including almost all Muslim nations, to make Americans and the whole

world safer by isolating and shutting down Al Qaeda.

Did we complete that mission? No; Bin Laden is still at large and the

conditions in Afghanistan are deteriorating. Instead, President Bush

started a second war unrelated to 9/11 and the hunt for Bin Laden's

networks and his followers.

We've now spent well over $350 billion on an effort that has not

achieved its own goals and, due to its astronomical cost and resource

drain, has severely undercut our ability to pursue and destroy Bin

Laden's international terrorist network with its many cells that

existed in 2002, continue to exist today and certainly will exist into

the future.

Twenty-five hundred fine young American men and women have lost their

lives, 95 percent of whom have been killed since President Bush

declared ``Mission Accomplished'' more than 3 years ago.

America has also forever lost the service of thousands of good

soldiers who are now disabled as a result of battle wounds in Iraq.

Many others will need mental and emotional rehabilitation before they

can return to normal life. The multiple re-deployments of Guard and

Reserve troops have severely undercut the retention and recruitment

prospects for the fighting force we depend upon to protect us.

President Bush and his administration have defended torture and

rendition and ignored the Geneva Conventions. America has lost the

moral high ground with the rest of the world, and we have fewer allies

as a result. President Bush and his administration have undermined the

war on terror by using tactics outlawed by international treaty and

condemned by even our closest friends.

And, finally, President Bush's war on Iraq has provided Al Qaeda a

training and recruitment ground that it could not have hoped for in

its wildest dreams, as well as a golden opportunity to target Americans

right in the unprotected center of the Middle East. President Bush's

war on Iraq is viewed broadly in Islamic communities as an attack on

Islam, and thus the President has alienated a large part of one fifth

of the world's population. The most extreme individuals and factions in

Islamic countries are now more motivated than ever to kill Americans,

and the number of potential terrorists has greatly expanded.

So a truthful assessment of how America is doing in the war on terror

as a result of President Bush's war on Iraq is that we have been set

back by decades. Bad decisions and incompetence have achieved a vast

determination in countless desperate, impoverished, disaffected and

oppressed young Muslim men and women to take out their anger and

express their fundamentalism and radicalism by attacking Americans and

American interests. We are far less safe as a nation and will remain so

throughout our lifetimes and our children's lifetimes.

Clearly, a stable, unified and democratic Iraq cannot be achieved

militarily by the U.S. Our servicemen and women have done the best job

that can be done in the situation into which their civilian leaders

have placed them, and they deserve the highest level of gratitude from

all Americans. They have already taken too many casualties--too many

dead, too many wounded--because they were too few and too poorly

provided with the armor they needed to succeed safely.

If a unified and stable Iraq is to emerge out of the ethnic and

sectarian violence that is so perilously close to civil war, the Iraqi

people and their government must make the political compromises

necessary to secure a successful democracy. They must find in

themselves a new nation. We cannot do that for them; we can only give

them the opportunity to do it.

Nor should we accept the President's mantra, ``When the Iraqis stand

up, we will stand down.'' A nice slogan, but that is simply a recipe

for an unlimited occupation.

We need to make it clear that we will withdraw from Iraq within 6 to

9 months--so that the Iraqis will know that they must stand up and

defend the opportunity given to them.

We should immediately state that we will seek no permanent military

bases in Iraq. In the remaining months, we should focus on achieving

more robust international involvement in training of Iraqi soldiers,

police officers, judges, teachers, and doctors--all key elements needed

to end the sectarian and civil conflict and build Iraq's future. And we

should prepare for the safe and orderly withdrawal of our troops.

The Bush administration has made many grievous and costly errors in

Iraq over the past 3 1/2 years and made little, if any, progress in

the war on terrorism thereby. It is time to bring our young people

home.