Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak against this

politically motivated resolution. Our country is under a real and

serious threat from extremists. We do not have time to waste on cheap

political resolutions that distract us from the unity and sense of

purpose that we should all have together, as Americans, in confronting

the real threat.

We need to have a real debate on real solutions to determine an

effective course of action in Iraq. An honest debate does not undermine

our soldiers' morale, as some have suggested in an attempt to silence

all questions. What is actually demoralizing to our service men and

women is to be sent into harm's way lacking body armor and supplies and

a definitive plan for success; and then coming back as veterans only to

be harassed by creditors because the VA did not take steps to protect

them, or not receiving the necessary treatment for medical issues like

PTSD.

In fact, a real, open discussion of the facts on the ground and the

challenges we face globally would show our soldiers that we are serious

about this endeavor and their safety and that we want to be successful.

That is good for our troops.

The way our current debate on Iraq is conducted, with resolutions

like this, hurts all of us--this is political grandstanding. We can no

longer allow political leaders to shield a badly conducted policy in

Iraq behind the cloak of

9/11.

We were attacked on 9/11, and we had a united country and a united

world join together in approval as we sought to stop the terrorists in

Afghanistan. This had nothing to do with Iraq. And now, five years

later, we find ourselves with a divided nation, and few allies who

support our policies. This has everything to do with Iraq.

Despite the courage, dedication and professionalism of our men and

women in uniform, our military has been strained as a result of the

poor and extremely shortsighted leadership of the Secretary of Defense.

Recruitment is down. Our National Guard has assumed a greater burden in

military operations than ever before and as a result our homeland

security is weakened.

The invasion of Iraq and our continuing occupation has damaged our

standing in the world. Abu Ghraib, massive civilian casualties,

lawlessness and little economic hope in Iraq have undermined the global

support that we had to hunt down and destroy terrorists around the

world. The war has not made us safer from terrorists--it has created

more terrorists. 90 percent of the insurgents in Iraq are Iraqi. The

sad reality is that we have created thousands of terrorists where there

were none before.

But a review of these errors does not solve the problems. Now, we

must look forward. We must ask, what is the best course for our Nation,

our soldiers, and the Iraqi people? A policy of ``Stay the course''

does not address the real situation on the ground in Iraq. It does not

provide a clear and understandable path to success and to bringing our

troops home. It does not help us to address the damage that we have

seen to our moral authority around the world and it certainly does not

provide a plan to destroy al Qaeda and similar terrorist organizations.

Instead, we must have a new course in Iraq, a way of instituting

fundamental change in our role there, and a way of removing our

military presence. It is time for the Iraqi people to take full control

of their country. The United States military cannot act as the dominant

security force in Iraq indefinitely. I believe, as many leading

military experts do, that our presence in Iraq incites and perpetuates

the violence. We need a timeline for withdrawal so that the elected

government of Iraq can fully assume its duties in the political,

economic, and security arenas.

The principle of our efforts must be this: that we cannot want a free

and stable Iraq more than the Iraqis themselves do. It is time for them

to take control of their own country, and their own destiny.

I strongly believe that we must continue to support the efforts of

the Iraqi people to establish a free, secure and sovereign state, but

we cannot do this by occupying the country and dominating its internal

security and economic development. International cooperation, economic

aide, security training, and assistance for infrastructure development

should be our aims.

Too many American and Iraqi lives have been lost. Too much money has

been diverted to this endeavor instead of going toward hunting down al

Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, who are the true enemies of

our American freedom.

It is time for us to move forward together, in support of our

soldiers, in support of the Iraqi people, with the support of our

allies, and in the firm belief that with a change in approach in Iraq,

we can secure greater freedom and prosperity here and abroad.