Mr. Speaker, Mr. Tanner is right. It is not

the war we haven't won; it is the peace. And I want to encourage my

friends on the other side of the aisle, join me in a bipartisan stand

to bring our troops home now.

I didn't support this bill originally, but I support it now because I

understand that we make steps one by one. But I don't want to be

chastised about bipartisanship because I want us all to work in a

bipartisan way to, one, bring our troops home, and to recognize that it

is not only the military power but it is the diplomatic power.

This legislation is the right direction. It commands an intervention

by the Congress, a 60-day report, how are we going to redeploy, and a

90-day update.

But, Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to our troops coming home as

heroes, and I'm working every day for them to come home with their

families, a proclamation of their military success, a welcome home

party in every single hamlet and village, and all the flowers that they

can tolerate. That's what I call a declaration of the end of this

tragedy.

But this is a good step today because we are in the mix. We're

fighting to get them home. We are demanding that they come home. We are

getting a report. We are forcing the Pentagon to think, and that is

what we need to do.

But I look forward to my colleagues joining us and having a

bipartisan vote on a time certain for these troops to come home.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R.

3087, which requires the President, in coordination with the Secretary

of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and

other senior military leaders, to develop and transmit to Congress a

comprehensive strategy for the redeployment of the armed forces in

Iraq. I am in favor of requiring the President to develop a

comprehensive strategy for the redeployment of American forces out of

Iraq. A good plan is a good thing. A bad plan is a bad thing. But worst

of all, is having no plan at all, which has been the sad state of

affairs in Iraq for the past four years. So H.R. 3087 represents a

small step in the right direction. However, there is more to be done,

much more.

While I am not opposed to this legislation requiring the

administration to develop and transmit to the Congress a comprehensive

strategy for redeploying our troops out of Iraq, I believe I speak for

most Americans when I say that what we really want is to have the

160,000 brave men and women wearing the uniform in the service of their

country reunited with their families and friends and contributing to

their communities back here in America.

I am working toward the day when our soldiers, marines, sailors, and

airmen can leave Iraq and return to the United States where they can

receive the heroes welcome they deserve. I am working toward the day

when the President of the United States issues a proclamation calling

upon the people of the United States to observe a national day of

celebration commemorating military success in Iraq. I can foresee the

day when our troops who have known heat and hardship and horror in Iraq

are again returned to their own land where they can be with family and

friends and enjoy freedom and faith and fun. If H.R. 3087 hastens that

day by just 24 hours, I can support it. But I will never be satisfied

until our troops have been delivered out of Iraq and back to their

loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, the administration has consistently placed far too great

an emphasis on military objectives and solutions, and has consequently

not allowed diplomacy the role it was intended to play in our global

system. The administration stated, ``In the coming months, the United

States will continue to operate along four lines of operation--

security, political, economic, and diplomatic--to advance our

objectives.'' In our war on terror, diplomacy cannot be used as a last

resort. A war on terrorism is, as the Bush Administration has stated, a

war for the ``hearts and minds,'' which simply cannot be won through

military action.

Mr. Speaker, our troops in Iraq did everything we asked them to do.

We sent them overseas to fight an army; they are now caught in the

midst of an insurgent civil war and political upheaval. I have, for

some time now, argued the importance of the Congress going on record

acknowledging for all the world to know the success of the America's

armed forces in Iraq. Our brave troops have completed the task we set

for them; it is time now to bring them home. Our next steps should not

be a continuing escalation of military involvement, but instead a

diplomatic surge.

As the former chairman and vice chairman of the 9/11 Commission,

Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton, recently stated, ``Military power

is essential to our security, but if the only tool is a hammer, pretty

soon every problem looks like a nail. We must use all the tools of U.S.

power--including foreign aid, educational assistance and vigorous

public diplomacy that emphasizes scholarship, libraries and exchange

programs--to shape a Middle East and a Muslim world that are less

hostile to our interests and values. America's long-term security

relies on being viewed not as a threat but as a source of opportunity

and hope.''

Despite the multitude of mistakes committed by President Bush and

former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, our troops have achieved a military

success in ousting Saddam Hussein and assisting the Iraqis in

administering a democratic election and electing a democratic

government. However, only the Iraqi Government can secure a lasting

peace. Time and time again, the Iraqi Government has demonstrated an

inability to deliver on the political benchmarks that they themselves

agreed were essential to achieving national reconciliation. Continuing

to put the lives of our soldiers and our national treasury in the hands

of what by most informed accounts, even by members of the Bush

administration, is an ineffective central Iraqi government is

irresponsible and contrary to the wishes of the overwhelming majority

of the American people.

Last month, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, of which I am a

member, heard testimony on the Government Accountability Office report

on Iraqi progress toward the 18 legislative, economic, and security

benchmarks. The Comptroller General of the GAO informed members that

only three of these benchmarks have been met by the Maliki government.

Despite the surge, despite increasing U.S. military involvement, the

Iraqi government has not made substantial progress toward stabilizing

their country. The more than 3,750 U.S. casualties and the $3,816 per

second we are spending in Iraq have not bought peace or security.

We are not here today to debate whether there has been some decrease

in violence in Baghdad. The United States military is a skilled and

highly proficient organization, and where there are large numbers of

U.S. troops,

it is unsurprising that we see fewer incidents of violence. However, it

is our responsibility to take a longer-term view. The United States

will not and should not permanently prop up the Iraqi government and

military. U.S. military involvement in Iraq will come to an end, and,

when U.S. forces leave, the responsibility for securing their nation

will fall to Iraqis themselves. And so far, we have not seen a

demonstrated commitment by the Iraqi government.

Mr. Speaker, President Bush stated in June 2005, ``Our strategy can

be summed up this way: As the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down.''

Instead of concentrating on building local capacity and applying

pressure to the Maliki government to force them to take responsibility

for the destiny of their nation, the Administration has chosen to

pursue policies, namely the Baghdad security plan, that focus on

continued combat by U.S. forces, rather than transferring

responsibilities to Iraqis. As a result, Iraqi security forces, ISF

remain entirely dependent upon U.S. troops; the August 2007 National

Intelligence Estimate reports that the ISF ``have not improved enough

to conduct major combat operations independent of the Coalition'' and

``remain reliant on the Coalition for important aspects of logistics

and combat support.'' With the New Way Forward strategy, American

troops continue to shoulder the majority of the war effort.

How will we know when the American forces are no longer needed? In

testimony before a Joint Foreign Affairs-Armed Services Committees

hearing last week, both General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker painted

an optimistic picture of the situation in Iraq, making frequent

reference to the progress and success in the Anbar province. However,

Iraqi Parliament member and leading Shi'a cleric, Jamal Al-Din, said in

a Congressional Briefing the following day that he did not recognize

the country they described as the Iraq he represents, an Iraq that

continues to be riddles with factionalism, extremism, and domestic

strife. Even the administration's report projects a daunting list of

challenges that face American troops on Iraq as well as Iraqis. These

include: communal struggle for power between Shi'a majority and Sunni

Kurd and other minorities; Al-Qaeda extremists in Iraq acting as

accelerants for ethno-sectarian violence; Iranian lethal support to

Shi'a militants; and foreign support to extremists in Iraq. And while

General Petraeus and the Bush administration have been stressing the

progress made in the region and the need for more time, they failed to

note that sizeable increase in ethno-sectarian deaths in July and

August and the fact that ethno-sectarian violence presents a

substantial challenge to stability in the region, particularly in rural

areas where security presence is light.

And while the situation in Iraq presents an open-ended military

challenge to our forces abroad, our presence in the region may be

hindering the security of our Nation. Evidence suggests that not only

is increased U.S. military presence in Iraq not making that nation more

secure, it may also be threatening our national security by damaging

our ability to respond to real threats to our own homeland. The

recently released video by Osama bin Laden serves to illustrate that

President Bush has not caught this international outlaw, nor brought

him to justice. Instead, he has diverted us from the real war on terror

to the war of his choice in Iraq.

Recently, the former chairman and vice chairman of the 9/11

commission, Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton, published an op-ed in

the Washington Post examining the question of whether our nation is

safer today, six years after 9/11. Kean and Hamilton concluded, ``We

still lack a sense of urgency in the face of grave danger.'' The

persistence of this threat is attributed to ``a mixed record of reform,

a lack of focus, and a resilient foe,'' and the authors note that our

own actions have contributed to a rise of radicalization and rage in

the Muslim world. Kean and Hamilton write that ``no conflict drains

more time, attention, blood, treasure, and support from our worldwide

counterterrorism efforts than the war in Iraq. It has become a powerful

recruiting and training tool for al-Qaeda.''

Mr. Speaker, Iraq faces a severe crisis. With a factionalist

government in which parties are based on religion, a qualification that

is strictly forbidden within the Iraqi constitution, religious, tribal,

and ethnic tensions remain high and mere subsistence has become a

challenge to the average citizen. The UNHCR has recently said that more

than two million Iraqi's have claimed refugee status abroad since the

invasion, while an additional 60,000 people flee their homes each

month. In a recent statement, Ambassador Crocker the admission of

refugees was ``bogged down by major bottlenecks.''

The Administration has spent so much time and money on its military

strategy that it is ill-equipped to handle the human rights atrocities

that are occurring. And while the United States delays admission of

refugees based on a myriad of bureaucratic security checks, Ambassador

Crocker states, ``refugees who have fled Iraq continue to be a

vulnerable population while living in Jordan and Syria.''

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw attention to the lack of

adequate oversight of the American war effort. Given the enormous

amount of resources involved, coupled with the catastrophic costs in

human lives, we would certainly expect adequate management of U.S.

funds and military supplies. We would expect clear records of exactly

where those $10 billion a month is going, and to whom it is being

given. And yet, the GAO reports that the Pentagon has lost track of

over 190,000 weapons, given to Iraqis, particularly in 2004 and 2005.

The report states that the U.S. military does not know what happened to

30 percent of the weapons the United States distributed to Iraqi forces

from 2004 through early this year as part of an effort to train and

equip the troops. These weapons could be used to kill our American

troops.

In addition, only yesterday, the Iraqi government stated that it

would review the status of all private security firms operating in the

country. This announcement came after a controversial gunfight on

Sunday, involving the U.S.-based firm Blackwater USA, left eight

civilians dead. Mr. Speaker, reports indicate that there are currently

at least 28 private security companies operating in Iraq, employing

thousands of security guards. This incident suggests the need for

superior oversight and accountability for contractors in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, the real tragedy of this war has been the deaths of so

many of our American sons and daughters. At current count, the

Department of Defense had confirmed a total of 3,808 U.S. casualties.

In addition, more than 28,009 have been wounded in the Iraq war since

it began in March 2003. June, July, and August have marked the

bloodiest months yet in the conflict, and U.S. casualties in Iraq are

62 percent higher this year than at this time in 2006. This misguided,

mismanaged, and misrepresented war has claimed too many lives of our

brave servicemen; its depth, breadth, and scope are without precedent

in American history.

Before I close, Mr. Speaker, I would like to discuss briefly an

important legislative proposal that I will soon introduce. This

legislation, the ``Military Success in Iraq Commemoration Act of

2007,'' recognizes the extraordinary performance of the Armed Forces in

achieving the military objectives of the United States in Iraq,

encourages the President to issue a proclamation calling upon the

people of the United States to observe a national day of celebration

commemorating the military success of American troops in Iraq, and

provides other affirmative and tangible expressions of appreciation

from a grateful nation to all veterans of the war in Iraq.

There are many interesting and important legislative proposals

relating to the war in Iraq. Most of them, however, are contentious and

divisive making it difficult for them to attract broad support across

the aisle. In this respect my legislation is different. That is because

it involves an issue over which there should be widespread and broad-

based consensus. We should all be able to agree that one good and

sufficient reason to redeploy U.S. troops out of Iraq is because they

have achieved their mission objectives. They have been victorious in

every battle and have won the military victory they were sent to win in

March 2003. They are victors and heroes who have never been defeated on

the battlefield.

Blaming the current chaos in Iraq on our military is like blaming the

Continental Army for the outbreak of the Civil War. In each case, the

armed forces did their jobs--they won the war they were sent to fight;

in each case, it was the civilian leadership that failed to win or

maintain the peace.

The Armed Forces of the United States are not to be used to respond

to 911 calls from governments like Iraq's that have done all they can

to take responsibility for the security of their country and safety of

their own people. The United States cannot do for Iraq what Iraqis are

not willing to do for themselves.

When our heroic young men and women willingly sacrifice life or limb

on the battlefield, the nation has a moral obligation to ensure that

they are treated with respect and dignity. One reason we are the

greatest nation in the world is because of the brave young men and

women fighting for us in Iraq and Afghanistan. They deserve honor, they

deserve dignity, and they deserve to know that a grateful nation cares

about them.

Outside of my office there is a poster-board with the names and faces

of those heroes from Houston, Texas who have lost their lives wearing

the uniform of our country. I think to myself how lucky I am to live in

a nation where so many brave young men and women volunteer to the

ultimate sacrifice so that their countrymen can enjoy the blessings of

liberty. Now is the time to remind our heroes they have not been

forgotten. More importantly, America has not forgotten them.

My legislation, the Military Success in Iraq Commemoration Act of

2007, pays fitting tribute to the valor, devotion, and heroism of

those who fought in Iraq in the following ways. First, my bill provides

an express finding by the Congress that the objectives for which the

AUMF resolution of 2002 authorized the use of force in Iraq were

achieved by the Armed Forces of the United States.

Second, my bill authorizes the President to issue a proclamation

calling upon the American people to observe a national day of

celebration commemorating the Armed Forces' military success in Iraq.

This will help ensure that the Iraq War does not suffer the fate of

other open-ended engagements like the Korean War, which is often called

the ``Forgotten War.''

Third, my bill authorizes funds to be appropriated and awarded by the

Secretary of Defense to state and local governments to assist in

defraying the costs of conducting suitable ``Success in Iraq''

homecoming and commemoration activities and in creating appropriate

memorials honoring those who lost their lives in the war. Many of the

casualties in the Iraq War come from small towns and villages in rural

or economically depressed areas. The local governments are already

facing substantial fiscal pressures and need help coming up with the

necessary funds.

Finally, my bill creates a program and authorizes funds to be

appropriated pursuant to which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall

award to each veteran of the Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring

Freedom a grant of $5,000 to facilitate the transition to civilian

life. We don't want veterans to end up homeless or unemployed or unable

to take their kids on a vacation or start a business. This $5,000 bonus

is but a small token of the affection the people of the United States

have for those who risked their lives so that we may continue to live

in freedom.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps no issue will more define this Congress than how

we conclude this misguided conflict. I am proud to be a part of a

Congress that is listening to the clearly expressed will of the

American people, and I remain, as ever, committed to ending this truly

tragic conflict.