I thank the distinguished vice chairman for

his leadership, his consistent leadership, along with my colleagues.

And I particularly thank Congresswoman Waters for the vision of the Out

of Iraq Caucus.

As I listened to many of you isolate or emphasize intelligence

failures, leadership failures, generals who had the expertise of war, I

wanted to bring as we talk this evening, to the forefront the whole

concern, the human toll.

As I know that we are speaking tonight, there are thousands of

military families who are about the American fabric across the land. We

already know that some of them are barely making ends meet. Some of

them are on food stamps.

But just this past weekend we sent 140 more of those from my

congressional district out of Ellington Field. Some have been

redeployed before. Some are on their first, second, third redeployment.

If you speak to our Armed Services Committee, they will tell you that

we have depleted most of the back-up of our military prowess. The

battalions that were in Kuwait are not one, two, three and four. They

are down to maybe one battalion, if you will, that is in reserve. And

so we have a crisis not only that is impacting the direction of the

Iraq war, but the overextending of our military.

The 20,000, 15- to 20,000 injured, who are physically maimed and

mentally maimed; resources in the Department of Defense appropriations,

not enough to cover the mental health needs of these individuals, and

as well, the silence of their injury, not being seen by the American

people, and the cost that will be put upon society without, I believe,

any direction in any harvesting of dollars that will help these

military personnel.

The very crux of where we are today in Iraq has a lot to do with some

of the misdirection, the political misdirection of our soldiers. They

won the war, but yet they were expected to be policemen. They are

expected to be political officers, if you will; they are expected to

build infrastructure with no guidance. And so out of that frustration

comes Haditha. Out of that frustration comes the brutal murder of a

young woman and her family, because you are talking about redeploying

soldiers once, but then two, three, four, times.

I met a soldier in the airport, and they said, four times I have been

redeployed.

So as I look at the crisis in Israel and Lebanon and now to the other

side of us, North Korea, frankly, any talk about attacking Iran begs

the question of whether or not we have the kind of military resources

to even engage in that kind of conversation.

I think we failed in Iraq because we did not engage. We did not first

develop a political and foreign policy that could engage the region.

Not Saddam Hussein. We know he was a despot. But the region, to ask for

our allies' support, to ensure that the inspections had gone forward.

And now with Israel our hands are tied. We know that we want to

ensure that soldiers are sent back to their sovereign country. Israel

has a right to defend herself. But we also realize that the United

States has to show a balanced perspective, calling for a cease-fire,

sending an envoy team of high-level reporting directly to the

President, and engaging in foreign policy that says we realize that the

region is important. A secure and safe Israel, a two-state response to

the Palestinian issue, but the region is important.

And when we went into Iraq, we said to the region you are not

important. We can be an aggressor. We can go in and attack. We thought

we could go in without any fallback, with impunity. And now we see that

our generals are now disagreeing with us, that our allies in the Arab

states are now falling away from us, that the crisis is at such a level

that our credibility is so shattered that when the region needs us

most, which is now, there is a question of whether or not we have the

kind of leadership and credibility going in. This is what Iraq has

brought to us and the American people.

I commend my colleagues for organizing this special order to discuss

the conduct and costs of the war in Iraq. I look forward to engaging in

dialogue with my colleagues about the most important issue facing the

country today and the most fateful and ill-considered decision of this

Administration.

A few weeks ago we learned the sad news that the 2,500th soldier has

been killed in Iraq. More than 19,000 others have been wounded. The

Bush administration's open-ended commitment of U.S. troops to Iraq has

weakened the U.S. Army, the National Guard, and the Army Reserves. The

extended deployments in Iraq have eroded U.S. ground forces and overall

military strength. A Pentagon-commissioned study concluded that the

Army cannot maintain its current pace of operations in Iraq without

doing permanent damage to the quality of the force. So more than three

years of a continuous deployment of U.S. troops to Iraq has:

Contributed to serious problems with recruitment, with the U.S. Army

missing its recruitment targets last year;

Forced the Army to lower its standards for military recruits; and

Led to military equipment shortages that hamper the ability of U.S.

ground forces to do their job in Iraq and around the world.

Quotes from the retired generals calling for the ouster of Defense

Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld:

The killing of Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi was a major success for U.S.

troops, but it is not likely to diminish Iraq's insurgency. Iraqis make

up 90 percent of Iraq's insurgency, unlike foreign fighters like

Zarqawi, and a primary motivation for Iraq's insurgency is the U.S.

troop presence. Even after the Samarra shrine attack in February

threatened to push Iraq into all-out sectarian civil war, the vast

majority of attacks still target U.S. forces.

Outside of Iraq, the Bush administration has failed to present a

realistic strategy for countering the threat posed by the global terror

networks. In a recent survey of more than 100 of America's leading

foreign policy experts conducted by Foreign Policy magazine and the

Center for American Progress, eight in 10 (84 percent) do not think

that the United States is winning the war on terror. The War in Iraq

has not helped America win the broader fight against global terrorists.

Instead:

By invading Iraq without a realistic plan to stabilize the country,

the Bush administration created a new terrorist haven where none had

previously existed.

By maintaining an open-ended military presence in Iraq, the Bush

administration is presenting U.S. terrorist enemies with a recruitment

tool and rallying cry for organizing attacks against the U.S. and its

allies.

According to the National Counter-Terrorism Center, the number of

large-scale terrorist attacks in Iraq increased by over 100 between

2004 and 2005, with a total 8,299 civilians killed in 2005.

Osama bin Laden remains at large and Al Qaeda offshoots proliferate.

By diverting resources and attention from Afghanistan to an

unnecessary war of choice in Iraq in 2003, the Bush administration has

left Afghanistan exposed to a resurgence of the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

The United States needs to complete the mission in Afghanistan and

cannot do it with so many troops bogged down in Iraq.

By focusing so many U.S. resources on Iraq, the Bush administration

has taken its eye off the ball in places like Somalia, which was

overrun by Islamist militias tied to Al Qaeda last week.

Over the last three years, the United States has spent more than $300

billion in Iraq, yet the investment has failed to stabilize Iraq or

improve the overall quality of life for most Iraqis. According to the

Congressional Research Service, total assistance to Iraq thus far is

roughly equivalent to total assistance, adjusted for inflation,

provided to Germany--and almost double that provided to Japan from 1946

to 1952. Yet on key metrics like oil production, Iraq has failed to

advance beyond pre-war levels, and quality of life indicators remain

dismal:

Oil production is below pre-war levels (2.6 million barrels per day

in 2003 vs. 2.1 million barrels per day in May 2006);

The majority of water sector projects and health care clinics planned

in 2003 remain not completed, despite spending hundreds of millions of

dollars;

One in three Iraqi children is malnourished and underweight,

according to the United Nations Children's Fund.

Rather than a record of progress and achievement, the Bush

administration's record is one of corruption and waste:

Remaining unaccounted for is $8.8 billion given to Iraqi ministries

by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), according to the

Congressional Research Service;

Iraqi Defense Ministry officials spent $1 billion on questionable

arms purchases;

The Interior Ministry has at least 1,100 ghost employees, costing

$1.3 million a month.

In short, we have no strategy, no support from allies or friends in

the region, a nascent civil war in the country we are supposed to be

helping, an overstretched military, a misdirected counterterrorism

effort, and a massive diversion of funds in support of a failed effort.

Military families need greater psychological, emotional, and

organizational assistance according to the results of a new survey

released March 28 of this year by the National Military Family

Association (NMFA).

The study, ``Cycles of Deployment Report,'' which focused on the

needs of military families, shows service members and military families

are experiencing increased levels of anxiety, fatigue, and stress. In

response, NMFA outlined recommendations for meeting these challenges

amid multiple and extended deployments, increased rates at which

service members are called upon for service,

and the heavy reliance on National Guard and Reserve forces.

This report clearly shows the range of support programs for families

has expanded since the start of the War on Terror. However,

multiple deployments and a high operations tempo mean different types

of support are needed for families' continued success before, during,

and after deployment. The survey results provide the Department of

Defense a detailed roadmap for making sure families are taken care of

during this important time.

Key findings from this study about the impact of deployment includes:

Almost half of respondents reported they have used or would use

counseling services such as anger management classes and family

counseling. Three quarters of those who stated they were better able to

deal with subsequent deployments found counseling services to be

helpful.

Two-thirds of military families surveyed did not have contact with

their unit or unit network volunteer during the critical pre-deployment

stage.

Less than one-half reported a consistent level of family support

through the pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment phases.

Seventeen percent reported no support was available.

Many respondents are concerned that volunteers who help families

adjust to life during deployment and what to expect after the reunion

are becoming fatigued and subject to ``burn-out.'' They stated that the

leaders of unit family groups should be paid or have paid professional

support personnel assigned.

Military family members with civilian jobs face pressure to avoid

taking time off before, during, or after deployment. Sixty percent of

military spouses are employed outside the home and many have either

quit their jobs or are considering it.

Military families are worried about how the reunion will go with

their deployed family member even as they are worrying about their

service member's safety in the field. Unfortunately, many families are

not taking advantage of specific return and reunion briefings and

activities.

Many respondents expressed that when entering a second or third

deployment, they carry unresolved anxieties and expectations from the

last deployment(s). While they may have gained knowledge of resources

available to them, respondents whose service member deployed multiple

times reported being more fatigued and increasingly concerned about

their family relationships.

Although challenged by the demands of deployment, families noted they

are proud of their service member and their service to our country. They

understand that family support is primarily their personal

responsibility, but they expect ``The Military'' to provide support as

well.

The National Military Families Association has developed a series of

recommendations for how the Department of Defense (DoD) can better

train and support military staff and civilian volunteers to assist

military families, including:

Expand program and information outreach. Create formats for families

to access support services and maintain touch with their commands and

unit family group that live too far from either the unit or from other

military families.

Assist families in developing in realistic expectations and then meet

them. Educate military families about what to expect before, during,

and after deployments.

Direct more resources to support family volunteers. Increase the

level of resources and paid professionals both counselors and

administrative, to support the logistics of family support and

conducting family readiness activities.

Address return and reunion challenges throughout the deployment

cycle. Help with the reintegration of a service member with the family

after deployment.

Recognize that family time is important. Encourage service leaders to

give family time a higher priority when planning operational

activities, especially for service members who have only been back from

deployment for a few months.

Continue deployment briefings throughout the year. Never assume

families have all the information they need. Ongoing deployment

briefings can especially help new spouses or the parents of new

recruits. Experienced family members also may find new challenges

during a subsequent deployment or find the accumulated stress from

multiple deployments creates the need for re-engagement with the family

readiness/support group or for accessing different support personnel.

In addition, Madam Speaker, the large and extended deployment of

National Guard units overseas has undermined the ability of the United

States to deal with terrorist attacks or natural disasters. For

example, State officials in Louisiana and Mississippi struggle to

overcome the absence of National Guard members from their States in the

wake of Hurricane Katrina. In Louisiana, about 100 of the National

Guard's high-water vehicles remain abroad--even as the State continues

to rebuild from Hurricane Katrina. Coastal North Carolina is missing

nearly half its Humvee fleet, and Guard officials there say shortages

have forced the State to pool equipment from different units into one

pot of hurricane supplies.

In addition, the equipment the Guard needs to help in the aftermath

of natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina is in shorter supply

because the gear is in use in combat zones, is battle-damaged, or has

been loaned to cover gaps in other units.

Madam Speaker, our troops in Iraq have never faltered and they have

never failed. They were never defeated in battle. They won the war they

were sent to fight. They completed their mission. They performed

magnificently.

They have earned the right to return home and be reunited with their

families and loved ones. Now is not the time for us in Congress to

falter or fail. Now is the time to embrace a plan for our troops in

Iraq that offers a chance of success. We need a plan that will work.

There is only one such plan. It is the Murtha Plan I support.