Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I took a trip to Kabul, to Bagram in Kabul, about a week after the

invasion, a week or two after we invaded Afghanistan. I cannot tell you

how proud I was of the men and women who are serving in our forces

there, doing what they had to do in order to deal with that particular

threat.

But Afghanistan, when we now read the books that have come out about

how the administration rushed to war against Iraq, and how they

essentially were planning a conflict in Iraq even before September 11

and how immediately after September 11 Secretary Rumsfeld was

suggesting, find some evidence that Saddam Hussein was somehow

connected so that we can attack Iraq as quickly as possible, it is very

clear this administration was not living in the real world, the real

world of evidence and information. They had a contempt for the State

Department and for the expertise of those who had spent their entire

lives in the Middle East.

So what they did was essentially, and this I think has to be laid

particularly at the feet of Vice President Cheney and Secretary

Rumsfeld, they wanted to try out a new theory in Iraq, and that was to

go in with a minimum amount of force, and basically go in, take out

Saddam Hussein, and leave, with no thought given to what would be left,

and now we know what was left.

I mean, people like Paul Wolfowitz, the Defense Secretary, who said

to a congressional committee before the invasion, fortunately, Iraq has

no history of ethnic conflict. Somebody who has studied Iraq for as

many years as he had, ought to know better than to say that. They

wanted to do the war. They had a war of choice. They chose it and they

wanted to go, take out Saddam Hussein.

I just wanted to say a couple of things about where we go from here.

We have had all sorts of debates in here, not a lot on the floor but a

few debates, at least one debate one day, on where we go from here.

I think there is a case to be made for a draw-down this year and a

withdrawal next year. The most important part of that case to me is we

do not want the Iraqi politicians to be dependent on us. We want to put

them under a timeline, some pressure to come to an agreement.

You read the press and you see some of the comments out of the

administration. It sounds like major trickery that they were able,

after 5 1/2 months, to agree who would be the defense minister and who

would be the interior minister. Well, they have got another issue in

front of them: how are they going to divvy up the oil. That is a lot

tougher than any decision that the Iraqi Government has made to date,

and they are making it in the face of ongoing violence every day in

Baghdad and other dangerous places in the country.

I think what we need to do is we need to refocus our attention on

diplomatic solutions. We need to get people in other countries in the

Middle East engaged, and we have to give the Iraqis a sense that we are

not going to have permanent bases there and we are not going to stay,

we are going to be drawing down our forces. The responsibility

rests on them to make the very tough political compromises that need to

be made to give that country a chance, and that is all they have got

now is a chance for some greater stability than they have today.

With that, I thank the gentleman for the yielding.