Mr. Speaker, there have been too many dark days in Iraq

of late, but today is not one of them. The removal of Abu Musab al

Zarqawi is a welcome event.

Zarqawi was a blood thirsty thug and an indiscriminate killer of

innocent men, women and children. All Americans join in congratulating

the American military and the Iraqi people for their success in

tracking, finding and eliminating the most vicious terrorist in Iraq.

It is too early to predict what the effect of the elimination of

Zarqawi will have on the counterinsurgency effort that the Iraqi and

coalition forces are engaged in.

On the one hand there is ample historical evidence that eliminating

terrorist and insurgent leaders does not necessarily cripple their

movements. New leaders rise up to take their places. In the Iraqi case,

however, Zarqawi's form of jihad, which has resulted in the slaughter

of so many innocent civilians has alienated most Iraqis and helped to

foster reported back-channel negotiations between the U.S., the Iraqi

Government and some of the insurgent groups over the past few months.

Whether the confluence of Zarqawi's death and the completion of the

new Iraqi cabinet can accelerate the prospects for some kind of more

open negotiations remains to be seen. Especially as the sectarian

violence that Zarqawi sought has continued to grow in recent months.

Even as we celebrate Zarqawi's death and recall the horrors he

perpetrated, the videotaped beheadings of helpless hostages, the mass

casualty suicide bombings of Shiite mosques, and the horrific

destruction of the UN headquarters, we cannot turn away from the grim

reality, that the war the President declared over in the spring of 2003

has been bloodier, costlier, longer and more difficult than the

administration anticipated or planned for.

We need a new way forward in Iraq, and that is what we would like to

talk about tonight. The Democratic ideas for a new way forward in Iraq

are part of an overall effort to reconfigure America's security for the

21st Century, a plan we call Real Security.

Earlier this spring, Members of our party from both the House and the

Senate unveiled a comprehensive blueprint to better protect America and

restore our Nation's position of international leadership.

Our plan, Real Security, was devised with the assistance of a broad

range of experts, former military officers, retired diplomats, law

enforcement personnel, homeland security experts and others, who helped

identify key areas where current policies have failed and where new

ones were needed.

In a series of six special orders, my colleagues and I have been

sharing with the American people our vision for a more secure America.

The plan has five pillars, and each of our special order hours have

been addressing them in turn: Building a 21st Century Military, Winning

the War on Terror, Providing for Our Homeland Security, A Way Forward

in Iraq, and the Achievement of Energy Independence.

Tonight we address a New Course in Iraq, to make 2006 a year of

significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty, with the Iraqis

assuming primary responsibility for securing and governing their

country with a responsible redeployment of U.S. forces.

Democrats will insist that Iraqis make the political compromises

necessary to unite the country and defeat the insurgency, promote

regional diplomacy and strongly encourage our allies and other nations

to play a constructive role.

I have been to Iraq three times to visit our troops there, and I have

spent time with our wounded here and in Germany. They have done

everything we have asked of them, and they have done it magnificently.

Whatever success we have had in Iraq, every village that was secured,

every public works project that was completed, every school that was

reopened, is due to the efforts of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and

marines.

But, Mr. Speaker, these heroes are still being killed and wounded

daily. Over 2,450 American troops have been killed and thousands more

have been injured. American taxpayers are paying approximately $194

million a day for the war, according to the CBO. That is more than $1

billion a week.

A recent Congressional Research Service report puts the current cost

of continued operations in Iraq and Afghanistan at close to $10 billion

a month, with most of that money going to Iraq.

This is a conflict that has come to grief in so many ways. In the

fall of 2002, Congress voted to authorize the use of force against Iraq

because of the threat that Saddam Hussein had stockpiles of chemical

and biological weapons, and because we were told he had an active

nuclear weapons program.

If you go back and look at the debate in the House and Senate, this

was a decision taken by the Congress to prevent Iraq from acquiring and

using or transferring nuclear weapons.

Months later as American forces pushed across the Kuwaiti frontier

and into Iraq, we were told by the President that our troops were on a

hunt for weapons of mass destruction. Delivering the Iraqi people from

the brutality of Saddam Hussein was a noble act, but the promotion of

democracy in Iraq was not our primary reason for going to war.

Similarly, we knew that the Shiite majority had suffered terribly

under the Ba'athist regime, and freeing them from the oppression of the

Sunni minority was an added benefit of the invasion. But reordering the

ethnic balance of political power in Iraq was not our primary purpose

for going to war.

Soon after the fall of Baghdad, it became clear that many of the

prewar assumptions that had guided the President and his advisors were

wrong. There were no chemical or biological weapons. There was no

nuclear program. And while many Iraqis celebrated the ouster of Saddam

Hussein, they did not line the streets of Baghdad to greet our troops

with flowers. In fact, within days, there emerged the beginnings of

what would be an organized, deadly insurgency that would quickly put an

end to General Tommy Frank's plan to pare down the 140,000 troops in

Iraq in April of 2003 to 30,000 by September of 2003.

In recent months, the nature of the struggle in Iraq has changed yet

again. Long-simmering ethnic tensions which had been suppressed under

Saddam's totalitarian regime have threatened to tear the country apart.

While the full-scale civil war that many feared in the wake of the

bombing of Askariya mosque in Samarra has not come to past, not yet,

most observers believe the country is currently in the grip of a low-

level civil war that could erupt into full-scale conflict at any time.

As first, much of the sectarian violence was perpetrated by Sunni

insurgents who saw continuing violence and instability in Iraq as their

best hope to gain power in a country dominated by Shiia Muslims.

Shiite political factions have responded by creating militias, and

these have become more active in targeting Sunnis over the past few

months. In recent weeks I have been concerned by media reports that

Shiite militias have been deploying to Kirkuk, Iraq's third largest

city, in a bid to forestall any attempt by Kurds to assert control over

this major center of Iraq's oil-rich north.

In Baghdad, Shiite units, some of them nominally under the control of

the Ministry of Interior, have acted as death squads, and the streets

of the capital have become a dumping ground for bodies.

We have a moral obligation to do what we can to avoid having Iraq

spiral into all-out civil war. But now is the time for Iraqis

themselves to decide whether they wish to be one country. That is the

decision we cannot make for them.

Accordingly, the first element of the Real Security Plan for Iraq

calls for

the United States to take the necessary steps to ensure that 2006 is a

year of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty.

There is a broad consensus among experts here and abroad that Iraq's

future will be determined politically and not by force. The formation

of a permanent Iraqi government, one that will have power, legitimacy

and vision, to assume primary responsibility for securing and governing

the country is a necessary precondition to ending the insurgency,

preventing civil war and allowing large scale reconstruction to begin.

Consequently, our role in Iraq must become more political and less

military for if there is one thing that Iraqis of every religious,

political and ethic stripe can agree on, it is that they do not want

foreign troops in their country indefinitely.

The second element of the Democratic Real Security plan for Iraq is a

responsible redeployment of our troops during the course of 2006 so

that we are not drawn into sectarian conflict, and so that Iraqis are

forced to take primary responsibility for securing and governing their

country. The process of training Iraqi security forces has gone more

slowly than many had hoped and few Iraqi units are capable of taking a

leading role in combating the insurgency and remain almost wholly

dependent on coalition forces for logistical support.

We must redouble our efforts to train Iraqi forces in order to allow

for the responsible redeployment of American troops without a

consequent loss of security in the areas we leave. A responsible

redeployment of American coalition forces will have to be done in

stages to build greater Iraqi sovereignty and control over security,

not civil war.

In the first phase of redeployment, I believe our forces should be

gradually withdrawn from urban centers where their mere presence in

large numbers has earned the animosity of the local population. Our

troops should be moved to smaller cities where reconstruction is

supported by the local population and to remote bases where our troops

will be able to support Iraqi units if necessary but will not become a

buffer between warring sects bent on killing each other.

Over time, these troops will be withdrawn from Iraq altogether and

redeployed outside the country, either in the region or back to the

United States. We should publicly declare that the U.S. does not seek

to maintain a permanent military presence in Iraq and many of us have

co-sponsored legislation to prevent the establishment of bases which

can only serve as a catalyst for the insurgency and for foreign

jihadis.

A redeployment of American troops cannot succeed if the Iraqis

themselves are not willing to find the political solution to counter

the forces that threaten the unity of the country. There is to doubt

that Iraq's ongoing sectarian strife has been exacerbated by the

protracted struggle among and inside Iraq's political factions over the

formation of a permanent government.

The real key to a better future for the Iraqi people and the third

element of the Democratic Real Security plan for Iraq is the promotion

of political compromise to unite the country. The recent formation of a

national unity government by the prime minister is a positive step.

While Zarqawi's death has grabbed most of the headlines today, the

prime minister's announcement that he has filled the crucial vacancies

in the interior defense and national security ministries may prove more

important to Iraq's future, which will be determined politically and

not by force.

The Iraqi government must demonstrate to its people that it can

actually bring Iraq's rival factions together in a common effort to

confront the foreign jihadis and bring the insurgents into the

political process. This is the best hope for maintaining the unity of

Iraq. But Mr. Speaker, we cannot do it alone.

American soldiers, American diplomats and American reconstruction

experts are shouldering almost the entire burden in Iraq. This is

unfortunately a problem wholly of our making. The President made little

effort to bring others on board before we went into Iraq. And after the

fall of Baghdad, he rebutted an offer by the United Nations to assume a

central role in rebuilding the country.

Finding a way to internationalize the struggle to stabilize Iraq is

the fourth element of the Democratic Real Security plan for Iraq. It is

not surprising our allies and others are reluctant to send their

solders and contractors to help us. It is dangerous and we have not

been amenable to listening to the suggestions of others. Unfortunately,

the situation in Iraq has deteriorated to the extent that the world

must reengage if only because the alternative is too horrible to

contemplate. At a minimum, our allies should be willing to assume a

greater role in training Iraqi security forces, as well as provide

long-promised economic support.

Finally, the last element of the Real Security plan is the need to

hold the administration accountable for its conduct of the war. More

than any other variable under the control of Congress, our failure to

perform this oversight has been a major factor contributing to the

difficult situation in Iraq.

The failure of oversight and the need to hold accountable people that

are responsible for those failures has plagued the Iraq war from the

beginning. And because this Congress, this Republican-controlled

Congress refuses to hold the President to account, we keep making the

same mistakes over and over again.

For years, the administration and majority tried to cow into silence

anyone who dared to question the conduct of the war by calling them

unpatriotic. It is not disloyal to ask these questions. Oversight is a

core responsibility of Congress. The great strength of a democratic

system with built-in checks and balances is that mistakes are caught

and corrected. Every Member of this House, Republican and Democrat,

wants a stable and representative Iraqi government. But, Mr. Speaker,

we cannot hope to change course in Iraq until and unless we are willing

to acknowledge mistakes, until we hold the administration accountable

and force change.

Devising and implementing a successful end game in Iraq will be

difficult, but the President's open ended commitment to remain in the

country is untenable and unwise. The American people want Iraq to

succeed and for a representative government there to survive and lead

to a better future for the Iraqi people, but that success requires a

new direction.

I now yield to two of my colleagues, my fellow co-chairs of the

Democratic Study Group on National Security their thoughts on the way

forward in Iraq. First, I would like to turn to Mr. Israel of New York

who has been a great leader on this issue, who is the Chair of the

Democratic Task Force on National Security. I yield to the gentleman

from New York.

I thank the gentleman for yielding and for sharing the

experience of your constituent. I think each of us has sat down with

troops returning from Iraq and heard the stories of the lack of

lifesaving equipment that they have had to cope with. I had lunch with

a guardsman from my district a couple of weeks ago who told me during

the year he was in Iraq, the Humvees they were riding in had no doors,

and they had to jerry-rig sheets of plywood separated by sacks of sand

or concrete, what we call hillbilly armor, to protect themselves as

they went from base to base, asking each other, why are we having to do

this?

And when we consider all of the misspent and unaccounted for billions

of reconstruction dollars and how many coagulant bandages that would

pay for or body armor or uparmored vehicles, I think it is the case of

going to war with the leadership you have, not the leadership you would

like. And I thank the gentleman. If the gentleman has time, we can have

a colloquy later on but let me turn to my other colleague from Georgia,

Mr. Scott, one of our great leaders on national security issues, and I

yield to the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia.

I think most of the American people really do not have a firsthand

sense of the kind of sacrifice that our troops are making, which is

nothing short of extraordinary, with the multiple deployments that you

mentioned, with the uncertainty for their families of when they will

come home, if they will come home and in what condition they will come

home, the economic sacrifices the families make.

One of the concerns I have is not only the problem making sure that

there is enough coagulant bandages while they are there, but what about

when they come home? Our VA system is already over capacity. The

administration is talking about closing Walter Reed. I do not know how

that can be done. Every time I have been there it is been brimming with

patients.

We, I do not think, have even begun to think about the demands on our

health care system for veterans. This young Guardsman that I mentioned

earlier, he told me that he still has to resist the impulse to drop to

the deck when he hears someone close the door behind a Civic. There is

something about the closing of a door behind a Civic that sounds a lot

like a mortar going off at 2,000 meters. He said he was pretty well-off

in Iraq; he was not one of the people who had to bust down doors every

day and go through that kind of stress.

Imagine the mental health care needs, the physical health care needs.

I do not think we are prepared yet to meet them, and I want to ask my

colleague from New York, a member of the Armed Services Committee,

someone who is a military historian and studied the kind of strain we

are placing on our active duty and our reserve, what are your thoughts

on this subject?

The gentleman and I were talking just this morning, all

three of us, about the need to sacrifice, the need to have leadership

in this country, and ask the American people to make a sacrifice.

Right now, the people sacrificing are the people in uniform and their

families, but the rest of us can contribute, too. I know you have been

at the forefront of calling for our national sacrifice, and we could

start by balancing the budget so that these young soldiers, sailors,

marines and airmen do not come back, in addition to having to try to

put their lives back together, have that huge national debt hanging

over their heads.

If I could ask of the gentleman from Georgia, prior to

the Memorial Day weekend, you shared a short anecdote about meeting one

of your constituents in Iraq. Can you tell us about that because I

think it so characterizes the sacrifice we are talking about.

I am sure that both my colleagues have had the experience

of visiting our troops in the hospital in Ramstein, Germany, and here

in Washington. Their thoughts are with their colleagues they left

behind. They want to get back to their troops to make sure they are

there for their buddies.

I had one soldier who was so concerned, could I do something about

the fact that one of the people in his battalion really deserved

recognition for what he had done, and since he wasn't there to make the

report this other soldier would not get the recognition they deserved.

This is what he was worried about as he lay in the hospital.

I yield to the gentleman from New York.

I want to thank both my colleagues for joining me this

evening and helping to further elucidate the Democratic plan for the

way forward in Iraq, for talking about the sacrifice our troops are

making, for being there for our troops, and also raising the call that

this be a shared sacrifice in the war on terror; that we not force

those who have borne the battle to look out for themselves and to pay

off our national debt when they get back; that we heed the injunction

of Lincoln that we ``look after him who has borne the battle and his

widow and his orphan.''

I want to thank you again for all your leadership.