Mr. Speaker, tonight I wish to speak about Iraq, a

separate and distinct war from the war on terrorism. Those who are

terrorists with their genesis in Afghanistan have a goal of creating a

fundamentalist Muslim caliphate all across the Middle East. The

insurgents are Baathists and Sunnis in Iraq who have as their goal a

separate and distinct one of toppling the government that is there and

creating their own.

My friends on the other side of the aisle wish to confuse the battle

against terrorists and the battle against insurgents in the country of

Iraq. Tonight I wish to speak about Iraq because we are at a strategic

crossroads as a Nation regarding that war.

I wish to speak about the health of our military that is being

drained by the war in Iraq. As a matter of fact, we are sustaining a

battalion's worth of casualties every month wounded and killed in Iraq

and Afghanistan. The number of attacks on the American and allied

forces is at the highest level since the insurgency began despite the

increase of America combat operations and the introduction of some 40

new Iraq security forces and battalions.

An ABC poll shows that 60 percent of Americans disapprove of the

situation in Iraq. What is responsible for us arriving at this point? I

have to say a lot of good words about our military, the finest we have

ever had, they are doing a superb job. I am proud of them, and every

American should be. But there have been operational strategic mistakes

sadly made by the administration that has brought us to this point at a

crossroads in Iraq.

First, allowing the looting; second, not having a plan for the

aftermath, although duly warned; by dismissing the Iraqi Army rather

than giving them a paycheck and a shovel; failure to plan and have

American civilian professionals from the State Department,

Transportation Department, Agriculture Department, and Judiciary with

the right skills to advise the Iraqis when they took over their

governmental ministries; the failure to react to the wartime collapse

of the Iraqi military and security police forces; and the decision to

disband the Army, as I mentioned; failure to have a

sufficient number of American troops at the beginning and later as

General Eric Shinseki warned.

This is a year of transition in Iraq. The bill that we passed last

year, the defense bill, stated that calendar year 2006 should be a

period of time of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty with

Iraqi security forces taking the lead for the security of a free and

sovereign Iraq, thereby creating the conditions for the phased

redeployment of the United States forces from Iraq.

If we are not able to redeploy our forces from Iraq, the health of

our military will be seriously endangered. We are wearing the troops

out. Not just the troops, but the equipment. As a matter of fact, Mr.

Speaker, 13,849 members of the selected reserves have had three

deployments, and 10,408 have been deployed more than three times. Well,

where do we go from here?

We have to do our best to train those Iraqis, let them and their

government know that the ball is in their court. We have to make sure

they are properly equipped, and I might also say that the equipment of

the Army and Marines Corps ground equipment is wearing out. Some of it

is wearing out from two to nine times the peacetime rate.

We have global interests, potential threats from elsewhere, North

Korea, Iran, Taiwan Straits and the like. We must be prepared for any

future threat. That is why it is important that this be a transition

year, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts

(Mr. Meehan).

I thank the gentlewoman from California. This is the

year of transition. It is up to the Iraqi people. It is up to the Iraqi

Government. It is up to the Iraqi forces. They are going to have to

take it upon themselves with the assistance of the wonderful Americans

that are there to make this transition work.

I yield to the gentleman from Arkansas, Dr. Snyder.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman.

Victory in Iraq is of primary importance. But it is really up to the

Iraqi Government, the Iraqi security forces, and the Iraqi people. We

are and we have been doing and, of course, we will continue to be of

great assistance. The primary importance is that the Iraqis assume more

and more of their own security and of their own destiny.

Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr.

Spratt).