Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague Mr. Cooper for

yielding this time to me.

I just returned from my fourth visit to Iraq with Speaker Hastert and

two other Members of Congress, and after this recent trip, I am more

convinced than ever that the time has come to change U.S. strategy in

Iraq.

The ultimate goal is to establish a free, open and democratic Iraqi

government and bring our men and women in uniform home.

I believe the best way to do this is to have the Iraqi security

forces, specifically the Iraqi Army and military, take on

responsibility of patrolling and securing their own country. I believe

we must move American and coalition troops to the perimeter of the

urban areas and let the Iraqi military patrol the streets of their

cities.

Since the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, more than 2,400 American

troops have been killed and more than 20,000 injured. The insurgents

and al Qaeda are using IEDs, which are roadside bombs, and suicide

bombers. We, at this point, have not been able to defend our military

as we should because of these tactics.

I believe a change in strategy in Iraq is now necessary. By moving

our troops to the perimeter, it will accomplish numerous things. Number

one, it will allow the Iraqi military to be less dependent on the

American military and our other coalition forces. It will send a

message to the Iraqi people that now they have a new government that

has been formed, it will give them the message that this is their

country, this is their government, and this is also their Iraqi

citizens providing their security.

By moving to the perimeter, it will also allow us to change strategy,

to show the Iraqi people and the American people and the world that

there is a change in strategy, that we are moving ahead and that the

Iraqi people and the Iraqi military will now have less dependence on

us.

In order for the Iraqi military to be able to provide the security

necessary, we must cut the apron strings. By going to the perimeter, we

will be able to do that.

Now, how will we be able to do that? Number one, this is the

beginning step to bringing our troops home. We will also continue to

backup the Iraqi military when they need help. If they are being

overrun, they can contact us. You can be anywhere, and many of us who

have been to Iraq know, in a Black Hawk helicopter in Baghdad, as an

example, within 10 to 15 minutes.

We have the best special operations forces in the world. Our SEAL

teams, our rangers, our marines, we have the best in the world. They

have the ability to backup the Iraqi military when they are in need.

But this will also allow our American forces to start using our

technology, our air power, our abilities that have made us the

strongest country in the world to backup the Iraqi military, but it

will also, by doing this, going to the perimeter, it will allow us to

be able to focus on high-value targets and let us again start bringing

our men and women home.

It will not be necessary anymore for our military to patrol the Iraqi

urban areas and get blown up or injured by suicide bombers or roadside

bombs because the Iraqi military will now be in those same streets.

This is a very important plan. It is something we should consider

very strongly.

Now, it is important that we get our information from our military to

make sure that we move forward with this type of plan. I was in Iraq

about 2 months ago, and I talked to four of the generals who are really

in charge of running everyday operations in Iraq, starting with General

Casey, and I asked them, is the Iraqi military ready to start taking on

the responsibility of patrolling the urban areas. Their comments to me

2 months ago was that they feel that they are getting close, that they

are not ready yet.

When I just came back a week ago, when I went to Iraq with the

Speaker, I asked the same generals, how are we doing now, is the Iraqi

military, who we have trained for two-and-a-half years, is the Iraqi

military ready to take on responsibility of patrolling the urban areas.

They said to me, basically, they feel that the Iraqi military could

take on responsibility of patrolling at least 70 percent of the urban

areas. If this is the case, then it is extremely important and urgent

almost that we let the Iraqi military start doing the job, and we will

then back them up.

Now, after I came back from Iraq, we were asked by President Bush to

come and to brief him about the issues and what our observations were.

I explained to the President a month-and-a-half ago about my strategy

of moving to the perimeter. He said he would consider that.

When I brought up the issue this time about a week ago, his comment

was it could be a good idea but he has to rely on his military, on the

strategy of his military commanders, and I understand that. And I told

him that my conversation with the military commanders in the presence

of other Members of Congress was basically they felt they could start

the process of letting the Iraqi military starting to patrol the

streets, starting to implement this perimeter plan, which will, again,

allow the Iraqi military to start providing the security in their

country. It will allow us to start bringing troops home, because if we

go to the perimeter, we will not need all of the men and women, our

military, to patrol the urban areas. Yet, we will still be there in the

perimeter, it would be the green zone, to backup the Iraqi military

when in need.

I think this strategy should be considered. I hope it will be

considered, and by considering this strategy, it will change our

mission. It will be a new strategy. It will say to the American people,

it is not the same old-same old, and we know that the American people

are getting pretty frustrated when they see in the media every day that

men and women are being injured, our men and women are being injured or

being killed.

This will then allow us to fight the war on our terms, using our air

power, our intelligence to be able to go after the high-value targets

like Zarqawi and also to fight the war on terror, because we are in a

war against terror, not only in Iraq and Afghanistan but throughout the

world, and we must focus and use our specialty and our expertise to

fight this war on terror.

Remember, our ultimate goal is to turn this government over to the

Iraqi people. Let them start creating job. Let us help them create

jobs. Let us start helping them deal with the issue of infrastructure.

If you do not have a job, you are not going to have a community, and we

have to show to the Iraqi people that their quality of life is better

under a democracy than it was under Saddam Hussein, but in order to do

this, they must have security. They

must have jobs, and I think we can help them do this.

Our ultimate goal is to bring our men and women in uniform home. This

perimeter plan is the first step. I respect Congressman Murtha. I think

Congressman Murtha put this issue on the table so that we in this

country and in Congress could start debating the issue about what is

the appropriate strategy. My only issue with respect to Congressman

Murtha's issue about a time certain is that I do not believe that we

should give any enemy a time certain on when we are going to leave Iraq

or Afghanistan, but I do believe that this perimeter strategy is first

step to bringing the troops home.