Mr. Speaker, recently I met with veterans in New Jersey,

some of whom had served in the Second World War, and earlier in the day

that I met with them, I had returned from a fact-finding trip to Iraq

with Representative Thompson of California, a colleague on the House

Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

I told these veterans that they would not recognize this war in Iraq.

From a technological standpoint, the kind of battlefield sensors and

intelligence analysis capabilities available to our troops in Iraq are

so far beyond anything that was fielded by the military in the Second

World War or, in fact, even in more recent conflicts. That's the good

news.

The other thing that they would not recognize, the not-so-good news,

is that unlike say the Second World War, the United States cannot

control the outcome in Iraq or achieve success because we do not know

who the enemy is and what constitutes success.

While part of our trip involved classified briefings in which we

examined how the intelligence community is supporting our troops, we

also had the opportunity to meet at length with General David Petraeus

and Ambassador Crocker to discuss the situation on the ground,

including the status of the political reconciliation among Iraq's

warring factions. The two gave a positive report and spoke of a great

deal of progress.

Two outstanding patriots, a good general, a good diplomat, but the

presentation that America is making progress toward a successful

outcome in Iraq makes sense only if we continually redefine what we

mean by success. And for over 5 years, we've been redefining both our

rationale for invading Iraq and how we propose to measure success.

First, it was to go after those responsible for 9/11. Then it was to

remove Saddam Hussein from power and track down his WMDs. And then it

was to bring stability to the region. And then it was to bring free

elections and bring all the warring factions together in a model of

democracy for the Middle East. Then it was to create a road to peace in

Israel through Iraq. And then it was to give the Iraqis more time to

organize their government. Now, it seems to be to reduce the number of

members of al Qaeda in Iraq, the AQI, which was, of course, zero before

it all started.

These repeated rationalizations and redefinitions serve no one's

interests, particularly the interests of our men and women of our Armed

Forces who we've sent in harm's way in Iraq.

In Baghdad, I met with active duty soldiers, including some from New

Jersey. American troops are performing superbly in Iraq under difficult

conditions. As I told them, they, and the New Jersey National Guard

members who will be deploying later this year, deserve not just our

gratitude, but all the support they need to do their job, the

wherewithal they need to do their job, and I would say just as much

support when they return home as veterans.

Of course, we want our soldiers to succeed. We want the Iraqis to be

peaceful and prosperous. We want terrorists and other enemies of the

United States to be defanged and defeated. But for that to happen, it

must be in Iraq, at least the Iraqis, the Iraqi political factions who

must take the lead in ending their civil war.

It's impossible to hide the fact that the limited security gains

achieved since last fall have not been matched by political

reconciliation on the part of the Iraqis.

Unfortunately, Iraq's central government continues to lack legitimacy

in the eyes of its people, as the recent combat in Basra and Baghdad

have clearly shown. It is clear that the Iraqi government is, so far

anyway, unwilling or unable to take the steps necessary to reach a

political settlement that will end the violence.

One of the reasons I voted against the war resolution to go into Iraq

in the first place was that Iraq was not a threat to the United States

in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and that attacking Iraq would unleash

forces we could not control. I was not alone in making those arguments,

which tragically have been validated by events.

My latest trip to Iraq has, sadly, reinforced my belief that success

is being redefined only once again, and what we need to do is to take

decisive action to end our combat involvement in Iraq and refocus our

efforts on destroying al Qaeda and eliminating the conditions that

breed international terrorism and refocusing our resources on pressing

domestic and international needs.