Mr. Speaker, our country is facing a

difficult, even desperate, situation in Iraq with an insurgency that

seems to be gaining strength, a reconstruction effort that is lagging,

and an international coalition that is deteriorating.

President Bush seems determined to put the best face on the

situation, but the American people are increasingly pessimistic and

distrustful of what they hear. We are overdue for a major course

correction. It is my intent today to make the case for such a

correction and to outline what its major elements should be.

What are our objectives in Iraq? A careful reading of the President's

Fort Bragg speech of June 28 reveals a shift of emphasis, from standing

up an independently functioning democracy to preventing Iraq from

becoming a basing point for international terrorism. That is ironic,

for most analysts, including the 9/11 Commission, agree that the Iraqi

regime had no discernable link to the perpetrators of 9/11. It is our

invasion and its chaotic aftermath that have attracted al Qaeda and

other international terrorists to Iraq.

In any event, by whatever definition of the American mission one

chooses, our effort is falling short, dangerously short, of what it

will take for Iraq to achieve self-rule and the capability of self-

defense and for the American occupation to end.

The news of recent days leaves little doubt that the insurgency,

which Vice President Cheney described as in its ``last throes,'' is

anything but. In the last 2 weeks, insurgent attacks have intensified

again, killing more than 200 people in Baghdad and towns to the

south. Last weekend we read of gunmen ambushing a wedding party,

killing the bride and wounding the groom, apparently because of his

Iraqi army affiliation--a heart-wrenching account that underscores the

insurgents' brutality and their continuing ability to launch lethal

attacks.

General Abizaid, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, recently

acknowledged that the insurgency has not diminished. In fact, estimates

of the number of hardcore insurgents now range from 20,000 to 40,000,

up from original U.S. estimates of 5,000. Attacks now average 70 per

day, up from 25 per day 1 year ago. And car bombs average 135 per

month, up from an average of 20 per month last summer.

We are getting better at identifying potential attacks. Only 25

percent of car bomb attacks are now successful compared to 90 percent

last year. But while we have been able to reduce the insurgents'

success rates threefold, they have increased the number of attacks

sixfold. So the number of lethal attacks has actually doubled over the

last year.

How far have the Iraqi police, security forces, and officer corps

come toward being able to secure the countryside and control terrorists

and criminal activity? ``About half of Iraq's new police battalions are

still being established and cannot conduct operations, while the other

half of the police units and two-thirds of the new army battalions are

only `partially capable' of carrying out counterinsurgency missions,

and only with American help, according to a newly declassified Pentagon

assessment'' the New York Times reports.

The administration claims that approximately 170,000 Iraqis have been

trained to assume security responsibilities. U.S. commanders in Iraq

have stated that the training is limited, and Joint Chiefs Chairman

Myers has publicly said that only about 40,000 are fully capable of

deploying anywhere in Iraq. Other estimates go as low as 10,000 Iraqi

security forces that are actually trained and capable of performing

their security responsibilities.

The equipping of these forces is also deficient. According to the

Brookings Institution, the Iraqis only have 42 percent of required

weapons, 24 percent of required vehicles, 19 percent of required

communications equipment, and 29 percent of required body armor. The

Iraqis are not now ready to provide their own national security, handle

civil policing duties, or deal with the continuing and strong

insurgency, nor will they be ready in the near future.

What is the state of the reconstruction of Iraq? Successful

reconstruction is critical to gaining the support of the Iraqi people

and denying the insurgents the benefits of widespread popular

discontent. We have made substantial headway in rebuilding bridges,

roads, and railways; in rehabilitating the seaport of Umm Qasr, and

installing and repairing telecommunications infrastructure both inside

of Baghdad and for the international satellite gateway system.

Despite these efforts, we have a long way to go. Nationwide, Iraq is

only generating 75 percent of its electricity production goal and the

nation only has an average of 12 hours of electricity per day. Oil

production has barely reached 80 percent of its pre-war levels, and

Iraqis are experiencing gas lines up to a mile long. Iraqi government

sources cited in the Pentagon's report of July 21, 2005, put the

unemployment rate at 28 percent, up from 22.5 percent 6 months ago.

Most independent estimates of unemployment are closer to 40 percent.

The top five problems Iraqis identified in an April, 2005, IRI survey

are inadequate electricity, unemployment, health care, crime, and

national security, all significant indicators of major reconstruction

needs.

Are we on schedule for getting an Iraqi Constitution adopted and a

legitimate, broadly representative government established? The National

Assembly is to draft a Constitution by August 15, 2005, to be put to a

national vote by October 15. On May 10, the National Assembly appointed

a 55-member committee to begin drafting the permanent Constitution. The

committee missed its own deadline to produce a preliminary draft by

July 15. However, several working drafts have surfaced that have

sparked serious complaints regarding constriction of the rights of

women and a strict interpretation of Islam as a source of legislation.

Despite these conflicts and the missing of the self-imposed deadline,

Iraqi leaders say that a draft will be completed by the August 15

deadline. Six subcommittees are working on specific issues of the new

Constitution, including the thorny questions of Kurdish autonomy and

the role of Islam in law. Many other contentious issues remain to be

negotiated. There is a provision for a 6-month drafting extension if

the Assembly cannot complete a draft by the specified deadline, but

exercising this extension would delay all subsequent stages of the

transition.

Given the enormity of the task we face in Iraq, what is the condition

of the Coalition of the Willing on which our efforts depend? The

coalition has always been a pale imitation of the one the first

President Bush assembled for the first Iraq war. For Operation Iraqi

Freedom, the U.S. share of overall troop numbers has never been less

than 84 percent. And now the coalition is deteriorating further.

Spain's troop commitment has gone from 1,300 to zero. Italy's 3,120

troops will go to zero by early next year, as will Poland's 1,500.

Other countries that have withdrawn their forces or are in the process

of doing so include Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, Honduras,

Hungary, Moldova, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, the

Philippines, Portugal, Thailand, Tonga, and Ukraine. In most cases,

these withdrawals have taken place amid overwhelming public opposition

in these countries to the war.

Troop contingents of 12,000 from the United Kingdom and 2,800 from

South Korea remain, but this war and occupation have mainly had an

American face, and that has become more and more the case as erstwhile

allies have fallen away. American troops strength now stands at about

135,000, and many say that is not sufficient to complete the mission

unless the training of Iraqis can be greatly accelerated. American

casualties number 13,657, including 1,790 deaths. Of these, 1,653

deaths have occurred since President Bush landed on the aircraft

carrier U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln to proclaim major combat operations

successfully concluded.

While there is no definitive source of information, we know that the

human toll in Iraq is enormous. Estimates of noncombatant Iraqi deaths

have reached 25,000, and the Pentagon reports that Iraqi Security

Forces (ISF) combat deaths have now exceeded 2,000.

As for the budget impact, outlays for Iraq operations are now about

$1 billion per week. The cumulative cost of the Iraq war, occupation,

and reconstruction has already exceeded $200 billion.

In the face of all this, the American public's confidence is waning.

This is not because Americans are cowed by the challenge we face in

Iraq. Fully 57 percent in the NBC News-Wall Street Journal poll of July

11 said it was important that America ``maintain its military and

economic commitment there until Iraq is able to fully govern and police

itself.'' But the public is increasingly skeptical of President Bush's

rationale for going to war. They are doubtful that the administration

has a plan for success, and they wonder if they are being told the

truth by our country's leaders. More than half say they do not think

the war was ``worth it.'' Only 40 percent say the Iraq war has made us

safer from terrorism; 54 percent say less safe. Nearly 60 percent now

disapprove of the job President Bush is doing in Iraq. This has helped

drive his overall disapproval rating to 56 percent.

The President's June 28 speech was widely anticipated as an

opportunity for the Commander in Chief to give an honest assessment of

progress to date and to chart a realistic and compelling course going

forward. The setting of the speech, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was

well chosen, giving the President the opportunity to express the

admiration and the gratitude we all feel ``to our servicemen and women

across the globe . . . for [their] courage under fire and service to

our Nation,'' and for the sacrifices of their families as well.

In other respects, however, the speech was a disappointment, offering

neither a candid assessment nor a specific strategy for success. The

President spoke of ``significant progress,'' while glossing over the

state of the insurgency and ignoring the falling off of international

support. He furnished fewer details than I have already given in this

presentation this afternoon. He offered no benchmarks by which success

might be measured or his administration might be held accountable. He

was defensive about past decisions and oblivious to the obvious need

for course correction. As others have observed, he exposed the weakness

of his arguments by rhetorically falling back on 9/11, despite the lack

of any significant al Qaeda connection to prewar Iraq.

The President asked Americans to stay the course, to continue to pay

the heavy price of this war, without holding up his end of the bargain.

He and his administration owe these brave men and women in uniform and,

indeed, all Americans more than glib assurances and exhortations to

steadfastness. He owes all of us a plan for success, for turning Iraq

over to the Iraqis, avoiding a reversion to tyranny or chaos, and

terminating the American occupation.

The President's speech has now been improved on somewhat by the

Department of the Defense's congressionally mandated report,

``Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq,'' dated July 21, 2005. The

report states, ``The criteria for withdrawing coalition forces from

Iraq are conditions-based, not calendar-based. The development of the

Iraqi Security Forces to a level at which they can take over primary

responsibility for their own security is the threshold condition. ISF

development in turn will be helped by progress in political, economic,

and other areas.''

This is only slightly more specific than the standard suggested in

the President's speech, ``As the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down.''

Only in limited instances does the report measure present performance

against a defined goal, much less specify the conditions under which

American responsibility can be scaled back. Moreover, the Pentagon

almost always chooses the more optimistic among analysts' conclusions

as to conditions in Iraq and apparently sees no need to defend those

choices. Congress has required that this report be updated every 90

days. Our leaders should insist that future reports meet a higher

standard of candor and of relevance to future policy choices.

The coherence of administration policy was thrown further into doubt

this week by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the Commander of

U.S. forces in Iraq, General George Casey, in their comments reported

from Baghdad. Rumsfeld, who last month suggested that the insurgency

might last as many as 10 to 12 years, displayed a new urgency about

moving the constitutional process and the training of security

personnel along. Meanwhile, General Casey emerged from a meeting with

Rumsfeld and U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalizad to declare that ``fairly

substantial reductions'' in U.S. troop levels might be possible by next

spring and summer.

That may be a tantalizing prospect politically, but the Pentagon owes

the Congress and the public an accounting of the conditions that must

be met, and how they are to be met, in order for such a policy to

succeed.

Mr. Speaker, the challenge of Iraq calls for leadership of a high

order, leadership that is determined and confident, but does not

mistake confidence for rigidity, or does not mistake determination for

an unwillingness to acknowledge and learn from past mistakes.

The Bush administration's Iraq policy has been plagued by far too

many misjudgments and mistakes, and it would compound those mistakes to

fail to learn from them now. We went to war with defective intelligence

on the threat posed by Iraq, evidence selectively and sometimes

misleadingly presented to Congress and the public. We went to war

virtually unilaterally with too few allies and unwarranted disdain for

the United Nations' program of weapons inspection and destruction. We

went to war with unrealistic expectations as to how our occupation

would be received, and with grossly deficient postwar planning. We

undertook a war of choice, allowing ourselves to be diverted from the

war on terrorism and other more dangerous international challenges, and

foregoing other means for containing and controlling whatever threat

Saddam Hussein represented.

Our current situation in Iraq bears the marks of these past mistakes,

and I believe history will judge George Bush and his administration

harshly for them. In much of this, Congress was complicit, and I am

even more convinced than I was on the day I cast my ``no'' vote that

this body abdicated its responsibility when it gave the President,

months in advance, open-ended authority to invade Iraq. But, while we

must learn from the past, we must face resolutely forward. That means

transcending past grievances, rethinking past positions, confronting

the unvarnished truth as to our present situation, and weighing our

realistic options.

What alternative possibilities, in fact, lay before us? The President

has proposed more of the same: persevere on our present course, despite

abundant evidence that we are falling short. Others are urging

unilateral withdrawal of American forces, some say on a preannounced,

fixed timetable. More and more politicians and commentators are

expressing this view. They point out that the presence of American

troops is not only challenging the insurgency, but also fueling it. Our

alien ``infidel'' presence is itself a rallying point for Iraqi

insurgents and international terrorists. Moreover, some argue, Iraqis

will be more likely to assume responsibility for assembling a workable

government and developing their own security forces if they know that

their dependence on U.S. troops is coming to an end.

These arguments have merit, but they underestimate factors beyond the

American military presence that are feeding the insurgency and could

plunge Iraq into a civil war, or even the conditions of a failed state,

after we are gone. They also underestimate the danger of encouraging

our enemies to wait us out and then to strike with devastating force.

There is, I believe, a better way. We should indeed signal clearly

that we intend ultimately to bring our troops home, that we expect the

Iraq Government to assume responsibility for the country's security,

and that we have no plans for permanent bases or an ongoing military

presence. But we should also put forward a strategy for success--a plan

for course correction in Iraq, for recognizing and correcting policies

that are not working, and for moving Iraq decisively towards self-

defense and self-rule.

A strategy for success requires benchmarks by which we can measure

progress and hold our own government accountable. One useful

formulation was suggested by the House minority leader as an amendment

to the fiscal year 2006 defense appropriations bill, but was,

unfortunately, denied a vote by the Republican leadership. The

amendment would have required the timely submission by the President to

the Congress of a report specifying:

``(1) the criteria for assessing the capabilities and readiness of

Iraqi security forces; goals for achieving appropriate capability and

readiness levels for such forces, as well as for recruiting, training,

and equipping such forces, and the milestones and timetable for

achieving such goals.

``(2) The estimated total number of Iraqi personnel trained at

[these] levels . . . needed for Iraqi security forces to perform duties

currently being undertaken by United States and coalition forces,

including defending Iraq's borders and providing adequate levels of law

and order throughout Iraq.

``(3) The number of United States and coalition advisors needed to

support Iraqi security forces and associated ministries.

``(4) The measures of political stability for Iraq, including the

important political milestones to be achieved over the next several

years.''

I would augment this list with benchmarks and goals for the

reconstruction effort and for the involving of allies and multilateral

organizations.

What of the other ingredients of a strategy for success? Senator

Joseph Biden, ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee, gave a wide-ranging speech on June 21 that stressed the need

to take advantage of

legitimate foreign offers to help Iraqi security forces and to share

responsibility for Iraqi reconstruction internationally.

Egypt has offered to train Iraqi police. The Jordanians have offered

advanced military training for the officer corps. Even the French have

offered to train 1,500 paramilitary police in France and send them back

to Iraq. NATO is establishing an ISF training mission, and the alliance

and its member states should be encouraged to do more. Senator Biden,

for example, has proposed a small NATO force dedicated to border patrol

and protection.

We must have an ongoing crash course in the training and equipping of

Iraqi police, security forces, and the officer corps. And the Bush

administration should be far more aggressive in enlisting international

partners in these efforts.

The same goes for Iraqi political development and reconstruction. The

Pentagon's July 21 report commends United Nations support of the

constitutional development process and assistance in preparing for

approaching referenda and elections. Recent international donors'

conferences in Brussels on June 22 and Amman on July 18 made only

limited progress in securing financing for Iraqi reconstruction and

economic development.

Most of the effort was aimed at getting donors to follow through on

the approximately $33 billion pledged in 2003 in Madrid. Many potential

donors conditioned future support on improvements in the security

situation.

Unfortunately, both the military and the reconstruction efforts

continue to bear the marks of the Bush administration's early

unilateralism. This must be overcome, as a matter of burden sharing and

of ensuring the legitimacy and eventual success of the effort.

Our reconstruction programs should have a steady focus on improving

the lives of ordinary Iraqis. This will often require us to emphasize

smaller-scale projects that have an immediate local impact, and/or that

mainly employ Iraqis.

It also means we should continue to provide reconstruction funds

directly to our midlevel military officers. The Commanders Emergency

Response Program (CERP) provided for the disbursement in fiscal year

2004 of $549 million by U.S. commanders at the tactical level. Many

Members of this body have returned from visits to Iraq, as I did from

Kirkuk, impressed by the education and health facilities and the other

projects these funds have made possible, with a minimum of red tape,

and the trust and good will they have generated.

Among the worthwhile Iraqi projects sponsored by the U.S. Agency For

International Development, I am particularly familiar with the local

government and civil society work of North Carolina-based RTI

International.

These projects have been forced to use a substantial portion of their

funding to provide security, and some efforts have succumbed in a

hostile environment. Yet RTI staff, many of them Iraqis, have helped

establish representative and accountable governments in many localities

and are currently implementing a training and management program for

150 model health care centers in Iraq. This is difficult but important

work, and it deserves our continuing support.

In the midst of the challenges in Iraq, and the course correction we

must undertake there, it is critical that we not lose sight of related

undertakings in the region with a direct bearing on our prospects in

Iraq. I will here mention only Operation Enduring Freedom in

Afghanistan and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Over the past 3 years, the Afghan mission, directly related to 9/11

and to the denial of a support structure or sanctuary to al Qaeda and

other terrorist groups, has suffered by virtue of the President's

initial fixation on Iraq and the human and material resources required

by Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar remain at large. And it has often

fallen to this Congress to augment administration budget requests for

Afghanistan.

The Taliban has managed to partially reconstitute itself in recent

months. Insurgent attacks and government offenses since March have

killed more than 800 in Afghanistan. The obvious intent at present is

to disrupt the September 18 parliamentary elections, a critical step in

Afghanistan's political development.

In Afghanistan more than in Iraq, however, U.S. troops have the

benefit of international assistance. The International Security

Assistance Force (ISAF) has operated under NATO command since August

2003, providing security and supporting nation-building activities.

The ISAF currently numbers about 8,800 troops from 26 NATO and 11

non-NATO partner countries, including Canada, Spain, France and

Germany, all noticeably missing from Iraq.

The provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), military-led groups that

secure enclaves for the work of reconstruction, aid, and Afghanistan

interior ministry personnel, also display increasing international

participation. Of the 21 now in operation, 11 PRTs are U.S.-run, 10 are

run by partner countries, and several U.S. teams are slated for

takeover by NATO/ISAF forces.

The Kabul government is still far from exercising effective authority

throughout Afghanistan, and the Taliban and other enemy forces are

displaying a disturbing resilience. Our Afghan mission is under severe

challenge. We must not again be diverted.

We must also expand the mission's international character and apply

the lessons of multilateralism in Afghanistan to Iraq.

Also critical to a strategy for success is determined U.S. diplomacy

aimed at the two-state solution President Bush has advocated for the

Middle East. The immediate challenge is to make certain the evacuation

of Israeli settlers from Gaza undertaken by Prime Minister Sharon comes

off successfully and peacefully, despite predictable attempts at

sabotage from extremists on both sides.

This will require redoubled Palestinian efforts to rein in terrorist

groups and prevent attacks against Israeli troops and communities. The

Israelis must give such efforts a chance and work with the Palestinian

Authority to coordinate the logistics of the withdrawal and the freedom

of movement in and out of Gaza after the withdrawal.

Longer term, the parties must follow the path of mutual accommodation

outlined in the Road Map, eventually undertaking final status

negotiations. ``Gaza First'' must not become ``Gaza Last.'' But none of

this will be easy, and it is unlikely to move forward without skillful

and persistent U.S. diplomacy.

The peace process has languished for 4 years, partially because of

the disengagement of President Bush and his administration. This has

been terribly costly to the Israelis and the Palestinians, who have

endured 4 years of dashed hopes and recurring violence. But it has also

been damaging to American interests in the region.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict fuels extremism and anti-American

attitudes across the Middle East. It greatly complicates our prospects

for success in Afghanistan, Iraq, and beyond.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has signaled that the second term

will be different. To her credit, she returned to Israel and the West

Bank last week as violent attacks escalated dangerously--a suicide

bombing, rocket attacks, retaliatory air attacks--and Israeli tanks

were lining up at the Gaza border.

It is extremely important that she and the President stay the course,

understanding that Israeli-Palestinian peace-making, important in its

own right, is also critical to any strategy for success in the region.

Mr. Speaker, the war in Iraq has been terribly costly in terms of

lives, resources, and our country's diplomatic and security interests.

Our challenge now is not merely to cut our losses, but to extricate

ourselves in such a way that prevents Iraq from reverting to tyranny or

chaos, that denies a basing point to international terrorism, and that

leaves the country intact, able to defend and govern itself.

We are not now on course to achieve this objective. The Bush

administration neither has a strategy for success nor even acknowledges

the need for course correction. We must do better. And it is the duty

of this Congress to demand candor, accountability, and a strategy

calibrated to achieve our goals.

We must have an honest accounting of the state of the insurgency, the

readiness of Iraq forces, the progress of the country's reconstruction

and political development, and the extent of international

collaboration and support.

Where there are deficiencies, and the deficiencies are serious in all

of these areas, the administration must provide benchmarks by which

success can be measured and a plan specifying what it will take to

reach our goals.

Glib reassurances from the President are dangerous, postponing and

preventing corrective action and opening wider the credibility gap with

the American public.

Those who commit troops to battle on behalf of this great country owe

them and us an intelligent and realistic plan to succeed.

Members of this body should demand such a plan and a frequent,

truthful accounting of our success in reaching its goals from the

President and his administration. A midcourse correction in Iraq is

worthy of our Nation's best efforts, and the window of opportunity is

closing.