Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer my reflections on a

trip I recently took with the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Pelosi),

leader, and the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. Hayes) to Iraq and

Afghanistan. I think it is important to publicly discuss the situation

in those countries because events there have implications for all of us

here in our country, as well as for the future of our foreign policy.

We are less than 5 months from the planned transfer of sovereignty to

a new Iraqi government. Yet it seems clear from talking to many groups

in Iraq that the administration's proposed deadline for the transfer of

power is unrealistic. Commanders we talked to indicated it would be

logistically difficult, if not impossible, to conduct an election

before July 1. There is no census. There are no registered voters. The

likelihood of fraud would be great, and I think there is a strong

likelihood that the United Nations representatives now in Iraq will

reach the same conclusions. By the same token, Shia religious leaders

in Iraq do not support the caucus system for choosing a new government

that the administration has advocated.

Finally, I do not think we can transfer sovereignty to a new Iraqi

government until the rules of engagement for our forces are agreed

upon. We simply cannot afford to have restrictions on the ability of

our forces to pursue terrorists and to protect themselves.

Simply put, we must handle the transition right, even if it means

rethinking our original timeline. The outcome must be a government with

legitimacy, a process that prevents civil war from erupting, and rules

of engagement that leave our forces free to continue to fight against

the insurgents.

A second related conclusion from my trip is that it is clear that

whatever new government assumes power must not be seen as a puppet of

the United States Government or it will lack legitimacy. One way to

help build that legitimacy is to get NATO involved in helping to

establish security and provide stability in Iraq, as they are already

doing constructively in Afghanistan. NATO involvement will reinforce

the perception that it is the international community, not just the

United States, that wants a new representative government in Iraq to

succeed. Bringing NATO troops to Iraq to supplement our forces will

also likely reduce the number of American military casualties,

something I know we are all concerned about.

My third conclusion about Iraq is that we are in a guerilla war

there. It is not really terrorism because I do not think the attacks

against Iraqi citizens and our forces are aimed just at terrorism.

Their purpose is to prevent the installation of a new, stable regime

and to expel our forces, a classic goal of guerrilla warfare.

I also want to mention Afghanistan. The simple truth is we are

shortchanging our effort to establish a viable Federal government and

rebuild the country of Afghanistan. I understand that, on the face of

it, Afghanistan is not as strategically as important as Iraq, but our

efforts there are critical.

Mr. Bin Laden and other leaders of al Qaeda and the leadership of the

former Taliban regime remain at large. In the near term, the United

States must bring renewed attention to our offensive operations there

to flush those forces out. Over the long term, we need to ensure that a

terrorist harboring the regime never again gains hold. If we poured

half as many people and resources into Afghanistan as we have into

Iraq, I think that country would be well on the way to recovering from

the 20-plus years of warfare that have plagued that country.

With few natural resources, little infrastructure, and a long history

of tribalism, Afghanistan has a long way to go. I do not think we are

making progress as fast as we need to in order for the Karzai

government to survive in the long term. Simply put, we need to do more

in Afghanistan.

My final observation concerns our great men and women in uniform.

They are doing a fantastic job under the most trying circumstances.

They are living under the most arduous of conditions, and are literally

putting their lives on the line every day. They are superbly trained,

superbly led, and they are the finest force the world and our country

have ever seen. We owe them a deep debt of gratitude. As we go into

this budget cycle, we owe it to them to provide them everything they

need in order to succeed, in Iraq as well as Afghanistan.