Mr. Speaker, for over a year, the American people have

asked in increasing numbers for the Congress and the President to work

on a real plan for Iraq. As we all know, the American people have been

increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress both there and here.

For one thing, the battle lines have grown beyond Iraq's borders. The

continuing U.S. presence in Iraq has inflamed tensions throughout the

Arab world, and hostile sentiment is growing. That makes it harder to

deal effectively with Iran and harder to achieve stability and security

for Israel and the Palestinian people. In other words, the

casualties in the Iraq war are spreading to U.S. strategic and

diplomatic interests throughout the Middle East.

The price we pay continues to escalate, and so does the violence.

Iraq has become an unlimited front without battle lines and without a

visible enemy. That is the Iraq war our soldiers face every single day.

On any given day, the level of violence may be more or less than the

day before, but no one doubts that the United States' soldiers patrol

and rest a heartbeat away from certain violence and potential death.

They live the Iraq war 24/7 and patrol an unlimited front in an open-

ended commitment of U.S. forces.

While the President waits for the Iraqi clerics to declare themselves

ready to take up government, some in the Iraqi Government itself are

demanding to know when the U.S. forces will leave. Now, that might

sound ungrateful after all the sacrifice by our soldiers and all the

money we have spent. On the other hand, it may be the clearest sign yet

that the Iraqi leaders are emerging who recognize that Iraq will never

stand alone until it is on its own.

They are not alone in this desire. It is what the American people

want. It is what they want to see, an end to the unlimited sacrifice by

U.S. soldiers, unlimited expenditures by the U.S. Government, and

unlimited battle lines surrounding our troops.

Despite the nature of last week's debate, the American people finally

have begun to see this House take a step forward, with 153 Members

voting in favor of the Murtha plan for strategic redeployment. It

begins to address the military issues associated with projecting U.S.

power in a region without keeping U.S. forces in the middle of Iraqi

sectarian violence. The Murtha military option does something else. It

offers a realistic opportunity for diplomacy to take root in ways both

familiar and effective in the region.

For some time I have urged the involvement of the United Nations as a

first step to diffuse the focus on hostility directed towards the

United States. The more the U.S. is seen as directing people,

government, and events in Iraq, the more we prolong the violence. That

has been a familiar theme in the Middle East and one that I heard

repeatedly last August when I met with civic and business leaders at a

prestigious Arab leadership forum in Amman, Jordan.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, who served as National Security Adviser under

President Carter, has outlined a vision for Iraq that is a thoughtful

roadmap for peace. The nations of the Middle East, including Iraq, have

relied for centuries on a gathering of regional leaders to resolve

conflicts. It is time to establish a way for that historical process to

occur.

Adopting the Murtha plan is the first step. U.N. leadership is

second, because it sets the stage for the nations to become involved

without military forces and without the balance tipping to any one

ideology, including some we absolutely do not support.

Finally, the roadmap leads to a regional conference where those

closest to the problem have the most to gain and/or lose in solving it.

Now, the role of the United States at this point would be a role the

United States can play better than any other nation in the world. We

can help broker peace from the sidelines instead of fighting the war on

the front lines. U.S. diplomacy has accomplished miracles over the

years. Israel today is better off than it was before President Carter

called the parties to Camp David. It is time we make a similar

commitment to a peace process in Iraq.

Let the Murtha plan be the foundation block on the road to peace in

Iraq. One hundred fifty-three Members of the House voted to support

what the American people believe: We can protect the American interests

without automatically ordering our soldiers into combat. We can project

American military might without occupying a country.

We have a realistic plan for Iraq and a growing desire to see it

implemented. It may take an election to start the real discussion about

Iraq, but the American people are ready, willing, and determined to

have it. The election is coming.