Mr. Speaker, the President likes to say as the Iraqi

people stand up, the U.S. will stand down. He has changed the mission

from finding weapons of mass destruction to removing a dictator and

bringing democracy to Iraq, saying the Iraqi people would decide what

is best for their country. The President essentially likes to point to

the recent formation of a new Iraq government as vindication of his

policies and a turning point in bringing peace to a troubled land.

Last week, Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki announced a 24 point

reconciliation to stabilize the country, his government's first major

independent initiative. Within hours, we learned the U.S. had been

deeply involved in watering down what the administration did not like

about the Iraqi reconciliation plan, including two key elements, an

offer of amnesty for insurgents and calling for a timetable for U.S.

troop withdrawal.

Well, Mr. Speaker, you can't have it both ways. U.S. troops will

never be able to leave Iraq as long as we stay the course of allowing

the Iraqi government to make decisions only so long as we agree with.

After all the sacrifices made by the American people, after all the

American soldiers lost in combat, wounded and psychologically scarred

in combat, the President's Iraq strategy is evolving into a corporate

subsidy strategy. Influential leaders at home and abroad are beginning

to raise questions about the President's intentions.

Mr. Speaker, I will enter into the record three recent articles from

the mainstream influential news media in the Mideast and the U.S.

``Sovereignty is just a word on paper until Iraq is allowed to run its

own affairs,'' is the title of an editorial published in the Daily

Star, a distinguished newspaper in Lebanon.

On the same day, the Daily Star reprinted a commentary originally

published in the Los Angeles Times entitled: An Iraq Amnesty Will Split

the Insurgency. The Arab News published a commentary entitled

Reconciliation in Iraq: If Only Maliki Had Freedom of Action.

Thoughtful people are raising troubling questions. This is the

conclusion of the Daily Star's editorial: ``The Iraqis need the space

to make hard decisions that will help them restore stability in their

country. But they will never find this space so long as the U.S.

officials continue to micromanage the Iraqi government according to

their own plan. What the Iraqis really need most now is what the

Americans promised them long ago, freedom. And that ought to include

the freedom to govern their own country in a way that would benefit the

Iraqi people.''

The President keeps telling Congress and the American people that it

is stated policy to let Iraq stand up. If that is the case, then the

President cannot instruct the administration to hold the Iraqi

government down. Otherwise, we are installing a U.S. government, run by

Iraqis, and that is one of the worst fears of the Middle East.

If the President is going to follow his own policy, then Iraqi

leaders may make decisions we don't like. If the President is calling

the shots behind the scenes, then the new Iraqi government will have no

credibility. Without credibility an Iraqi government is living on

borrowed time, and we know it.

This Nation has some history with attempts to install or prop up

governments around the world beholden to the United States, and the

record is dismal. How many times have we thrown billions at so-called

friends, only to see these leaders ousted or ignored because they are

seen as puppets of the United States?

The Arab News commentary says, ``If left to his own devices Iraq's

new Prime Minister Maliki has a good chance of uniting his fractured

country and stamping out the violence. But there is just one problem.

U.S. internal politics appear to be thwarting his efforts.''

Running Iraq from behind the scenes cannot be the President's

definition of stay the course, or the U.S. will stay in Iraq

indefinitely. The Iraq war has divided this Nation, and the Iraq

government's decisions on difficult issues like amnesty for insurgents

will divide America even more.

The President said he wanted a free and independent Iraq. Well,

perhaps he got what he wanted. Now what is he going to do about it?

Finding a way to end the war can be as difficult as finding a way to

start a war. It will be impossible unless the President starts talking

straight to the American people and to the Iraqi people. You cannot

install a puppet government and think that that is going to fool the

Iraqis. They will continue to attack, which will keep our troops there

and keep the death going.

We must be honest about what our policy in Iraq really is.