region ''openly scorn,'' of course, referring, as my friend just said, to Hugo Chavez. The letter goes on to praise Uribe personally for his ''great personal courage'' in aggressively going on the offensive in fighting narcoterrorists and dramatically increasing drug interdiction and eradication of criminals to the United States, or extradition of criminals. Eradication of criminals too, we want to do that. It also praises his substantial progress in the issue of violence against trade unionists, pointing out that Uribe has provided special security protection to some 9,400 individuals. This number says including 1,900 trade unionists. I said 1,500, and this letter that these officials of the Clinton administration and former Democratic Members of the United States Congress said 1,900 trade unionists have been able to receive this kind of protection.

And that's why I implore my colleagues in the Democratic leadership to bring this up for a vote.

Mark my words, and I would ask any of my colleagues who are here if they disagree with my assessment, if after we go through these arguments, which we have begun talking about tonight and we talked a little bit about last week, is there any doubt that we would have strong bipartisan support with many Democrats joining with us in support of this?

□ 2130

I would be happy to yield to any of my colleagues who have any thoughts or comments on that at all. I suspect you might agree with me, but if you have any thoughts on it, I would be happy to.

Mr. BRADY, you look like you would like to cast your vote.

Mr. BRADY of Texas. Absolutely. There have been a number of Democrat colleagues who have traveled to Colombia to see that remarkable progress firsthand, who have assessed it themselves rather than playing the politics of it, and who have been both public and private in their support for this agreement. I think all they would like is an up-or-down vote, a fair chance to debate this issue and bring it to the floor. I am confident with it would pass. And I am confident we would send a completely different signal to our allies like Colombia and the rest of the world.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, my friend is absolutely right. And it is very interesting. We have heard the Speaker, Speaker PELOSI, talk about the need for trade adjustment assistance, a second stimulus package. And Madam Speaker, I would argue that the Colombia free-trade agreement, which will create an opportunity for more U.S. workers to sell their goods and agricultural products into Colombia is, in fact, trade adjustment assistance itself. And I would argue that this agreement, job creating, is in fact an economic stimulus package in and of itself. So if the commitment is to trade adjustment assistance and economic stimulus so that we can create more jobs in the United States of America, the answer is, pass the U.S.-Colombia free-trade agreement.

I would be happy to yield to my friend from Texas.

Mr. CARTER. I agree wholeheartedly that I think an up-or-down vote and we will have a Colombia free-trade agreement. I think that our Democratic colleagues will be reasonable and understand this. And I think we have the votes to get it done.

But I think Speaker PELOSI needs to release this and let us have a vote. That is the key thing. And you notice that letter you just read kept talking about national security. What we really have here, if you look at it closely, is a contest of two socialist—we used to call them Communist—a regime in Hugo Chavez, and we have Uribe who is trying to create a free democracy, and a free enterprise system. These are two, side-by-side competing systems that will influence that entire continent.

And that is why this is in our national security interest. It is not just a trade agreement which is going to benefit American workers. It is a security agreement that points to the direction that we stand up for what we believe in, democracy and free enterprise.

Mr. DREIER. My friend makes a very good and important point here. And I was talking to my colleague, Dan Lungren, who served here, I was pleased to serve with him during the 1980s when we were in the midst, and I know my friend from California came in 1986 to this institution. We have spent time, energy, resources and weapons in dealing with the expansion of Communism in Central America as we were providing resources to the Democratic resistance in Nicaragua known as the Contras. And we regularly hear criticism from Democrats that what we should be doing in Iraq is we shouldn't be using weapons, we should, in fact, be engaging and using trade and other things.

And what is it we have here? We have Democrats, the Democratic leadership, unfortunately, saying that as we seek to build a stronger relationship with a country that is standing up to narcoterrorists, that is standing up to the expansion of Hugo Chavez on their borders trying to extend into the country, and they are saying ''no'' to this. They are saying ''no'' to this because somehow they believe it is going to hurt U.S. workers.

To me it is absolutely outrageous that this has taken place. And Madam Speaker, let me express my appreciation to my colleagues for the time that they have spent here this evening. And I hope very much that Speaker PELOSI and the Democratic leadership will, in fact, schedule a vote on the U.S.-Colombia free-trade agreement before the August recess. Let's begin the process of debate and voting right now.

I thank again my colleagues, Madam Speaker, and with that I yield back the balance of my time.

IRAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. WATERS. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

Ms. WATERS. The subject of my Special Order is Iran.

Madam Speaker, at the time the war in Iraq began in March of 2003, who would have thought that we were being led into perhaps the worst foreign policy disaster in America's history? Many of us voted against the war authorization in the first place. But many more Members wish they had voted against it. We now know that this country was led into this war with faulty intelligence and a deafening war drum from the administration.

The question that we raise tonight is this: Could the Bush administration possibly be planning for a war with Iran? There isn't any empirical evidence to prove that the Bush administration is planning for war. But there are experts that are indeed worried that the same playbook that was used to bring this country into the Iraq war is now being used to toward Iran. The administration is pushing suspect intelligence. And it has severely increased and sharpened since their rhetoric first began toward Iran.

We come to the floor tonight to resist efforts by this administration to paint war with Iran as a necessary next step in our so-called war on terror. A vast majority of foreign policy and military experts agree that war with Iran would be a colossal error.

Allow me to spend a few minutes to explain why I feel that U.S. strikes against Iran are a real possibility. Let us look at some of the signs that we may be headed for war. The increased rhetoric. The administration is building the volume of inflammatory rhetoric toward Iran in a similar fashion to the run-up to the Iraq war. Strong statements about Iran's intervention in Iraq could set the stage for U.S. attack on Iranian military or nuclear facility.

Surrogates in the administration, including the President himself, have increasingly stressed a full range of negative Iranian behavior, including that Iran is killing U.S. soldiers in Iraq, supplying weapons, training and funding to special groups.

They also say that Iran is interfering with the peace process in the Middle

East. And they go on to talk about General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker as they argued that Iran is the major future threat to stability in Iraq.

Iran seeks to build nuclear weapons. When this point was dismissed by the recent National Intelligence Estimate stating that Iran had long since halted their nuclear enrichment, the administration criticized the report.

Allow me to read a short selection of clips from recent press clippings that expose the irresponsible rhetoric coming from the Bush administration. This headline from the Daily Telegraph on April 7, 2008: British Fear U.S. Commander is Beating the Drum for Iran Strikes. ''British officials gave warning yesterday that America's commander in Iraq will declare that Iran is waging war against the U.S.-backed Baghdad Government. A strong statement from General David Petraeus about Iran's intervention in Iraq could set the stage for a U.S. attack on Iranian military facilities, according to a Whitehall assessment.''

Another headline: Petraeus Says Iranian-Backed Groups Are Greatest Threat to Iraq. This is in the Bloomberg News April 9, 2008. ''The so-called 'special groups,' which are funded, trained and armed by Iran, played a 'destructive role' in the recent clashes between extremist militias and Iraqi Government forces in Basra and Baghdad, Petraeus said. 'Iran has fueled the violence in a particularly damaging way,' he told the House Armed Services Committee today in Washington, his second day of testimony to lawmakers. 'Unchecked, the 'special groups' pose the greatest long-term threat to the viability of a Democratic Iraq.''

Again, that was the Bloomberg News, April 9, 2008.

Another headline, the Voice of America, April 2, 2008, Israel to Redistribute Gas Masks Amid Fears of War with Iran.

''Israel's security Cabinet has decided to redistribute gas masks to the entire population amid fears of a nonconventional war with Iran. The last distribution was just before the U.S. invasion of Iraq 4 years ago.''

Another headline in the New York Times, April 12, 2008. The headline reads, Iran Fighting Proxy War in Iraq, U.S. Envoy Says.

''Iran is engaging in a proxy war with the United States in Iraq, adopting tactics similar to those it has used to back fighters in Lebanon, the United States ambassador to Iraq said Friday. While Bush administration officials have long denounced what they have described as Iran's meddling in Iraq, Mr. Crocker's language was unusually strong from Mr. Bush down, administration officials this week have been turning up the volume on Iran.''

A further sign that the U.S. may be headed for war is Admiral Fallon's resignation. In the aftermath of the disastrous invasion of Iraq, there has been discussion within media and in the military that senior military officers should have resigned when they knew the White House to be heading to a reckless war in Iraq.

Some are speculating that the recent retirement of Admiral Fallon is a direct result of his steadfast opposition to war with Iran. He even made his disagreements with the administration public before his retirement.

In a now-famous profile that Admiral Fallon agreed to do for Esquire magazine, he was characterized as the only man standing between war with Iran.

Let me read an excerpt from that article.

This was Esquire magazine, March 11, 2008. The title is ''The Man Between War and Peace.'' The article goes on to say that if in the dying light of the Bush administration, we go to war with Iran, it will all come down to one man. If we do not go to war with Iran, it will all come down to one, that same man. So while Admiral Fallon's boss, President George W. Bush, regularly trash-talks his way to world war III and his administration casually casts Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as this century's Hitler, a crown it has awarded once before, to deadly effect, it's left to Fallon, and apparently Fallon alone, to argue that, as he told al Jazeera last fall, this constant drumbeat of conflict is not helpful and not useful.

Another sign that the U.S. may be thinking about war is the offensive against the Mahdi Army. Moqtada al Sadr has promised full-scale attacks on America's interests in Iraq in the event of strikes on Iran. As commander of the multinational force in Iraq, General David Petraeus still presides as the commander of the Iraqi security forces as well. Any operation against the Mahdi Army would have been authorized by him. What motivation did the United States have in fueling a violent confrontation with the powerful militia at a time when al Sadr had declared a truce and the progress of the surge was being reported to Congress?

One explanation is that recent operations against al Sadr's militia, the Mahdi Army, may have been meant to neutralize possible resistance inside of Iraq in the event of a strike on Iran.

□ 2145

The following five reasons are taken verbatim from an article in U.S. News and World Report that was published on March 5th entitled ''Six Signs the U.S. May Be Headed For War in Iran.''

Before I go into the five reasons that I have taken verbatim from this article in U.S. News and World Report, I am going to recognize the Congresswoman from Oakland, California, BARBARA LEE, who is cochair of the Progressive Caucus. She is one of the co-founders of the Out of Iraq Caucus. She has been consistent in her resistance to this war in Iraq.

She is an organizer. She is a constant speaker on the speaking engagement circuit, speaking with groups and organizations all over this country who want to hear from BARBARA LEE about what is going on in Congress.

The question she is most confronted with is when will this Congress end the war and bring our soldiers home? What are you going to do about a President who is ignoring the will of the people and ignoring the will of Congress in their attempts to resist the continued funding of the war? Every weekend, somewhere in this country, BARBARA LEE is attempting to answer those questions and engage the American citizens about what is happening here.

I yield to BARBARA LEE.

Ms. LEE. Madam Speaker, let me begin by thanking my colleague Congresswoman MAXINE WATERS, the gentlewoman from California, for organizing this very important special order tonight. Let me just say to you, Congresswoman WATERS, your clear voice and your sound judgment as the co-founder of the Out of Iraq Caucus has helped guide this antiwar movement, not only here in the House of Representatives, but throughout the country.

Your boldness and your vision in organizing those of us who knew that this war was wrong from day one in putting together over, what, some 77 members now of the Out of Iraq Caucus, I have to salute you and thank you for that, because we will never go back again. All we can do is go forward to try to end this occupation and try to prevent another preemptive war against Iran.

It is very timely that Congresswoman WATERS has called us here tonight to sound the alarm on Iran. It is truly disturbing to me to hear many of the same drumbeats on this administration 's march to war with Iran as we saw 5 years ago in the run-up to the war in Iraq. So I want to provide just a little bit of history on Iraq to draw out some of these parallels, in the hope that they will provide Congress and the American people with a clear warning signal.

Madam Speaker, this discussion is also timely today because today is April 15th, and millions of Americans across our country are right now racing the clock to beat the tax filing deadline. Lots of them are asking, how much do they owe and what is the government doing with their money?

One answer, Madam Speaker, is that in the last 5 years, this administration has spent nearly a half trillion dollars on the Iraq war and occupation. This Iraq tax, and that is what it is, an Iraq tax, comes out to approximately $16,500 for every American family of four. Has the tax been worth it? Let's look at what we have gotten in exchange.

More than 4,000 of the Nation's best and bravest have been killed. More than 30,000 others have been wounded, many suffering permanent and debilitating injuries. Tens of thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians have died, and millions have been internally displaced or sought refuge in neighboring countries. Meanwhile, the occupation of

Iraq has caused serious damage to America's international reputation and created a generation, mind you, a generation of future enemies incensed by the endless occupation of their country by a foreign power.

Madam Speaker, compounding the folly of this strategic blunder, the $500 billion which American taxpayers already have spent on this occupation is now undermining our ability to finance the investments needed to address the pressing domestic needs of the American people and to revive our sagging economy. Given what the Iraq tax has brought American families, and this $500 billion is quickly mounting to almost $3 trillion very soon, is anyone really surprised that the American people are angry and demanding change?

The saddest aspect of this whole story and this whole episode, Madam Speaker, is it did not have to be that way. Along with 125 of my colleagues, a substantial majority of House Democrats, I opposed the war, like Congresswoman WATERS did, from the beginning, and we voted against the resolution authorizing the use of military force.

I offered an amendment Congresswoman WATERS supported, we got 72 votes during that period, to the original use of force resolution to prohibit the administration, remember this, Congresswoman WATERS, we tried, we tried, we did everything we could do to try to keep the administration from taking military action until the United Nations could complete their inspections and confirm that Saddam Hussein's regime indeed possessed weapons of mass destruction which it intended to use against us or to give to our sworn enemies.

Had the Lee amendment been adopted, we would have learned much sooner and at far less cost what the whole world knew, that evidentially we didn't know, but some of us knew, but the whole world now knows, including the American people, that Iraq did not pose an imminent threat to the United States, was not involved in the September 11th attacks, had no ties to al Qaeda and had no weapons of mass destruction.

The war and occupation has also exacted an awful toll on our military force, our structure, our readiness, and the men and women in uniform and their families. General Richard Cody, the Army Vice Chief of Staff, testified before the Congress that the Army is out of balance. The current demand of our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan exceeds the substantial supply and limits our ability to provide ready forces for other contingencies.

Because of this administration's mistake, tens of thousands of servicemen and women have been required to undertake lengthy deployments into the war zone, two, three, and some even four times. This has placed enormous strain on them and their families and increased their risk of struggling with mental health issues, including when they return home many, many posttraumatic stress issues that we have never seen before. Nearly 60,000 veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder, and most experts in the field believe the numbers could be much higher.

Some may ask, why is it necessary to review this history? Well, as the old saying goes, those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. The other reason for reviewing this history is because it goes straight to the veracity and the credibility of this administration that brought us this debacle and which may be maneuvering to reprise its strategic and geopolitical incompetence by taking preemptive military action against Iran.

If you listen carefully, you can hear the same distant drumbeats of a coming war with Iran. The signs are very familiar. Nearly on a daily basis we read or hear these from the administration, and let me just repeat a few of these drumbeats that we hear.

They say Iran is the single greatest threat to the stability in Iraq, although when I asked General Petraeus last week if Iran was in Iraq 5 years ago, he said they weren't really ''kissing cousins.'' I think that is what his comment was. No, Iran was not in Iraq 5 years ago.

Iran is building nuclear weapons.

Iran is killing American soldiers in Iraq, arming, training and funding insurgents and terrorists.

Iran is interfering with the peace process in the Middle East.

I am reminded how the administration sent General Colin Powell, do you remember that, Congresswoman WATERS, the Secretary of State, by far the most effective and respective spokesman, before the United Nations Security Council to make the case to the world that Iraq posed an imminent threat to regional peace and security. The case presented by General Powell accomplished its mission, but its factual foundation rested on falsehoods, misinformation and speculation masquerading as evidence. To this day, General Powell regards his performance that day as really a mark on an otherwise distinguished career of public service to our Nation.

General Petraeus is the 2008 version, quite frankly, of General Powell. He inspires more confidence than President Bush and is far more credible than Vice President CHENEY. But so did General Powell inspire and bring this credibility to this administration, and he turned out to be wrong; terribly wrong.

Again last week, General Petraeus testified that Iranian-backed so-called special groups posed the greatest long-term threat to the viability of a Democratic Iraq. He testified that it was these groups that launched Iranian rockets and mortar rounds at Iraq's seat of government two weeks ago, causing loss of innocent life and fear in the capital and requiring Iraqi and coalition actions in response.

This is starting to sound like the groundwork being laid for the need to take defensive action against Iran. This is unacceptable. We should not be looking for an excuse to attack Iran. Congress should not stand for yet another so-called preemptive military strike, and we should take action to clearly prohibit any such attempt against Iran.

As I stated, we have been down this road before. We have learned a simple truth from five hard and bitter years in Iraq. No unjust war ever produced a just and lasting peace. It has not worked in Iraq. It will not work in Iran.

What is needed is not another rush to unwarranted, unnecessary and misguided military action, but rather a strong diplomatic surge for peace and reconciliation. And, yes, I do believe that a nuclear-armed Iran poses a danger. I believe we need to move forward with nonproliferation efforts, including looking at our own arsenal of nuclear weapons in our own country. Nuclear weapons should not be an option at this point, given the dangers of the world. So we need to address nuclear nonproliferation in the context of a strong diplomatic initiative.

One of the most important first steps we should take is to have direct, comprehensive and unconditional bilateral talks with Iran. To facilitate this goal, it is imperative for the administration to show that it is serious in this endeavor by appointing a special envoy. I think we need to appoint a special person, an individual who does nothing but ensure that we move forward to reduce the tensions in the region, and this envoy should receive the necessary support to carry out his or her mandate.

That is why I introduced H.R. 5056, the Iran Diplomatic Accountability Act of 2008. Among other things, this bill directs the President to appoint a high level envoy empowered to conduct direct, unconditional, bilateral negotiations with Iran for the purpose of easing tensions and normalizing relations between the United States and Iran. No one says this is going to be easy, but we must start somewhere.

The latest National Intelligence Estimate released last week representing the consensus view of our 16 intelligence agencies clearly indicates that Iran is nowhere close to having nuclear weapons capability. The NIE assessment underscores why it is critical for Congress to ensure that this administration's saber rattling against Iran does not turn into a march to war. We have been down this path before.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, the last 5 years in Iraq demonstrates the folly of rushing off to start a war. We don't need another war in Iran. We need to end the war in Iraq and fully fund the redeployment of American troops so that they may be reunited with their families in the United States. We need to use our funds to support them, protect them, and bring

them home. And we need to begin to move forward to address the real issues with regard to Iran and begin to take the military option off of the table, because our President, this country always has the military option, and it makes no sense to use this or to talk about it if we truly intend to reduce tensions and look for some form of global peace and security.

Thank you, again, Congresswoman WATERS for calling us together today.

Ms. WATERS. I would like to thank the gentlewoman from California for her consistent and persistent leadership on this issue of war in Iraq, and I thank her for coming to the floor this evening to help sound the bell against a possible march to war with Iran.

We have been joined by another one of our colleagues who too has been consistent in his opposition to this war. From the very day that he first came to this chamber, he made it clear where he stood on this war. He has joined with us on the floor on many other occasions and it is a constant part of his agenda wherever he is to remind people that we are in a war that makes no sense, where lives are being lost, and hopes and dreams are being dashed.

He brings a special kind of understanding about what is going on because of his familiarity with the Arab nations and with Islam, and he has done a wonderful job of helping to teach and introduce to the Members of this Congress other cultures and helping us to understand how they operate, what they are all about, and helping us to gain respect for those that sometimes are singled out for war, when, of course, problems and issues could be handled with diplomacy.

I am proud to yield time to Representative KEITH ELLISON to sound the alarm.

□ 2200

Mr. ELLISON. I would like to thank you, Congressman WATERS and Congressman LEE. Before I got to Congress I thought both of you just were towering heroes of peace. Now that I have been here and had the chance to get to know both of you, I am certain that I was right from the very first impression I had of you. Thank you for standing up and calling this special order tonight.

The point I would like to make is simply this. We see in Iran a country we have not had any open diplomatic relationships with since 1979, except for brief moments around IEDs last summer. The meetings have not been continued, and, in essence, we have had no real diplomatic relationships with Iran in many, many years.

Many Americans don't remember the day when we did have relationships with Iran. Yet, despite all these years of having no diplomatic ties to Iran, no open communications, channels of communications, it really has not solved any of the problems. Not talking has not helped.

I want to join with Representative WATERS and Representative LEE in calling for an open dialogue, unconditional bilateral dialogue. Dialogue is not a gift, dialogue is not a present, dialogue is not a reward.

Dialogue is a tool that can help us stabilize the world, bring peace to millions and millions of people all over the world. Dialogues should not be used as some sort of a gift. It doesn't make sense for any nation to say capitulate to our demands, and then we will talk to you. The very purpose of negotiation is to say, let's talk, and the first agenda item could be serious problems we have with one another.

But the start is talking, unconditional talking, talking with a clear agenda in mind, talking with no illusions about differences. But talking, nonetheless, is something that I think we need, and we need it now.

I want to say that our effort to isolate Iran by not talking to Iran, reminds me of our effort of trying to isolate Cuba by not talking to Cuba. Now everybody in the world does business with Cuba except the United States. American farmers wanting to sell grain, Cubans want to buy stuff from the U.S., people wanting to see family, those things are hampered because we are the only ones in the world maintaining this policy of nondialogue. I fear that we could end up in the same way with Iran.

Let me just point out an article in the Times online from March 3, 2008. The headline is, ''Four kisses, then the band played: the day former foes became friends.''

It starts out describing a meeting between Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Nouri al-Maliki. It goes on to talk about how a young girl dressed in a white dress clutched a bouquet of flowers as she waited with a small boy in a smart suit to greet President Ahmadinejad of Iran, who began a historic visit to Iraq.

Earlier today, we heard a speaker who I won't name say that, oh, the United States needs to get with China and Russia to isolate Iran. China and Russia, we can't even get Iraq to isolate Iran.

We can't even get Iraq, a country we have invaded and essentially have taken over, though it does operate under the guise of sovereignty, we can't even get them to say don't talk to Iran. They have open relationships with Iran and are building them more and stronger every day. It doesn't make any sense.

Now, it's not just Iraq that has a welcome mat for Iran. But let me just say that when Americans, Members of Congress go to Iraq, all of us know we go into military aircraft that takes evasive maneuvers into Baghdad, because we are concerned about our safety.

This is a fact. So much for isolating Iran from Iraq. Okay, well, then, what about another country, Pakistan. We send a lot of money to Pakistan. Yet Pakistan announced in a March 5, 2008 article, the Times of India, Iran, on Wednesday, said it was ''ready to sign the India-Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline deal,'' but technical issues between the two are hindering the process.

''We are ready to sign the agreement as soon as possible,'' Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Affairs said. ''Everything is okay from our side. There are some technical issues between India and Pakistan,'' he said.

''The India-Pakistan-Iran pipeline, which is dubbed as the 'Peace Pipeline,' is stuck over issues such as price and transition fees.''

So much for isolating Iran from Pakistan and India. All right, so Iraq, they are talking to them, Iran, Pakistan and India are talking, but, okay, maybe we can still get Russia and China, countries that have militaries, countries that have economies, countries that have been freestanding and independent for many, many, many, many, many years.

Okay, what about Afghanistan? Isn't that country essentially a failed state which we invaded and kicked out the Taliban and now are trying to reconstruct today?

''In the electricity substation just outside of Herat, western Afghanistan, there's the loud hum of power—Iranian power,'' that's right. ''More electricity reaches Herat than the city can use, but the industrial park just across the road from the NATO military base is putting it to good use.

''Small plastic bottles of fizzy orange juice shuffle along the conveyor belt to be labeled and packed—the building is noticeably Iranian in design and the markings on the machinery show exactly which country helped these Afghan businessmen.

''The camels grazing outside cautiously cross the fast, straight, asphalt road—one of the best roads in Afghanistan stretching 120km to the border.

''Soon a railway will link Afghanistan to Europe, or so boasts the Iranian government.''

I would just mention, with a quick Google search, Iraq, India, Pakistan and, now, Afghanistan are all coalescing economically with Iran. We are not talking to Iran. We don't talk to Iran. We don't want to try to get into that market of 70 million people. We don't want to try to open up diplomatic ties and work on issues.

We are not trying to solve this nuclear conflict with dialogue, discussion and open conversation. We are just trying to isolate them, but nothing suggested we are being successful at doing that.

The fact is maybe isolation of Iran is not the right tactic. Maybe the right tactic is to try to talk to them, to try to build a better relationship, to try to have cultural exchange, try to have exchange of views, different though they may be, with an eye toward a more peaceful world, with an eye toward a world in which people can have security and in which an eye toward which the world can rest and feel their children are safe at night.

The fact is this saber rattling, I remember that it was about maybe 16 months ago that I sat in my first meeting that I ever had with the President, with, I believe, Representative LEE and Representative WATERS. I think it was Representative LEE who said, are you, Mr. President, planning on hitting Iran? He gave us a sure statement that he was not.

Yet ever since that time, all we have been hearing, time and time again is that Iran is the problem.

I don't know how Iran could be the problem in Iraq without the complicity of the Iraqi government. I mean, I need somebody to correct me on this point because I just don't get it. How can Iran be an issue in Iraq unless Iraq wants them in the country. It just doesn't make any other kind of sense to me, and I need somebody to explain that, because maybe I have just not been in Congress long enough to get it.

Let me just say, I want to move aside now, and I want to thank the two Members who have been leading the charge, along with Congresswoman WOOLSEY, who is recovering from back surgery. I know if she was feeling better she would be right better with you, the triad, the triad for peace. I admire you so much.

Ms. WATERS. Thank you very much, I am so pleased and proud to have been joined by my colleagues here this evening to sound the alarm. Let me say that again, we are sounding the alarm. We are opening up the debate. We are raising the questions. We are challenging this administration on the issue of war with Iran.

We are saying, Mr. President, we have watched, we have listened, and we have learned. We are smarter people when we hear talk about war, when we hear accusations being made. When we hear a march to war we now recognize it for what it is. It is a given that we have this knowledge that we have acquired since we have been here since the start of the war with Iraq. We do not intend to sit idly by without opening up the discussion, without making the challenge, without raising the questions.

As I said, prior to the opening lines of the presentation that was just given by Congresswoman BARBARA LEE, there were signs of war that have been identified, not only by some of the experts that we have been talking to, but by those who have been writing and watching what has been going on.

As I mentioned before, there is talk, and there are news articles.

U.S. News & World Report, published on March 11, title, ''6 Signs the U.S. May Be Headed for War in Iran.'' Let me repeat that, U.S. News & World Report published on March 11 titled ''6 Signs the U.S. May Be Headed for War in Iran.''

Warships off of Lebanon, with the Army fully engaged in Iraq, much the contingency planning for possible military action has fallen to the Navy, which has looked at the use of carrier-based war planes and sea launch missiles as the weapons to destroy Iran's air defenses and nuclear infrastructure.

''Two U.S. warships took up positions off Lebanon earlier this month, replacing the USS Cole. The deployment was said to signal U.S. concern over the political stalemate in Lebanon and the influence of Syria in that country. But the United States also would want its warships in the eastern Mediterranean in the event of military action against Iran to keep Iranian ally Syria in check and to help provide air cover to Israel against Iranian missile reprisals. One of the newly deployed ships, the USS Ross, is an Aegis guided missile destroyer, a top system missile defense against air attacks.''

This article goes on to talk about ''Vice President Cheney's peace trip: Cheney, who is seen as a leading hawk on Iran, is going on what is described as a Mid East trip to try to give a boost to stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. But he has also scheduled two other stops: One, Oman, is a key military and ally and logistics hub for military operations in the Persian Gulf. It also faces Iran across the narrow, vital Strait of Hormuz, the vulnerable oil transit choke point into and out of the Persian Gulf that Iran has threatened to blockade in the event of war. Cheney is also going to Saudi Arabia, whose support would be sought before any military action given its ability to increase oil supplies, if Iran's oil is cut off. Back in March, 2002, Cheney made a high-profile Mid East trip to Saudi Arabia and other nations that officials said at the time was about diplomacy to Iraq and not war, which began a year later.''

Vice President CHENEY has been on that trip, as we pretty well know, based on the advanced intelligence revealed by this very, very well-placed article.

They go on to talk about the Israeli air strike on Syria.

□ 2215

Israel's air strike deep in Syria last October was reported to have targeted a nuclear-related facility, but details have remained sketchy, and some experts have been skeptical that Syria had a covert nuclear program.

An alternative scenario floating in Israel and Lebanon is that the real purpose of the strike was to force Syria to switch on the targeted electronics for newly received Russian anti-aircraft defenses. The location of the strike is seen as on a likely flight path to Iran. That is also crossing the friendly Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. Knowing the electronic signatures of the defensive systems is necessary to reduce the risk for warplanes heading to targets in Iran.

They go on to give the other identification markers that should be watched and should be vetted.

Israeli comments. Israeli President Shimon Peres said earlier this month that Israel will not consider unilateral action to stop Iran from getting a nuclear bomb. In the past, though, Israeli officials have quite consistently said that they are prepared to act alone if that becomes necessary to ensure that Iran does not cross a nuclear weapons threshold. Was Peres speaking for himself, or has President Bush given the Israelis an assurance that they won't have to act alone?

Israel's war with Hezbollah. While this seems a bit old, Israel's July 2006 war in Lebanon against Iranian-backed Hezbollah forces was seen at the time as a step that Israel would want to take if it anticipated a clash with Iran. The radical Shiite group is seen not only as a threat on its own, but also as a possible Iranian surrogate force in the event of war with Iran. So it was important for Israel to push Hezbollah forces back from their positions on Lebanon's border with Israel and to do enough damage to Hezbollah's Iranian-supplied arsenals to reduce its capabilities. Since then, Hezbollah has been able to rearm through a United Nations force that polices a border buffer zone in southern Lebanon.

So as you can see, there is quite a bit of reason to be concerned about the administration's saber-rattling towards Iran. There is no way to prove their intentions, and I hope we are wrong, but we really can't afford to be wrong.

Another encounter like in January between the U.S. Navy and an Iranian speedboat could be used as an excuse for retaliation similar to the Gulf of Tonkin incident that began the Vietnam War. The White House would simply claim that we were ''provoked'' and were defending ourselves.

I would like to stop at this time and yield time to the gentlelady from Houston, Texas, who has been consistent in her work with the Out-of-Iraq Caucus in an attempt to bring our soldiers home. It is with great pleasure that I yield to Congresswoman JACKSON-LEE.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. I thank the distinguished chairwoman, MAXINE WATERS. I would say I am delighted to be part of the Out-of-Iraq Caucus, but that is not the appropriate term. I am delighted, however, to join my colleagues, Chairwoman WATERS and Congresswoman BARBARA LEE and the other members who have participated and submitted their statement.

I wanted to join my colleagues because it has been a very long journey. I remind Congresswoman WATERS in the fall of 2002, we were working hard for people to study the resolution being put before them. We garnered some 133-plus votes to vote in opposition to the then-Iraq resolution.

I want to speak constitutionally and why this special order and the position that Members are taking in opposing any preemptive attack or invasion of Iran and standing solidly against the perceived authority that the President may have.

Frankly, if we look at the 2002 resolution, we will find that it can be assessed that the President's authority

has expired. Saddam Hussein is no longer there. Elements of the resolution required that. The government has changed. There has been a democratic election, and there may be some question as to whether the adherence of the U.N. Security Council resolution is still part of that 2002 war resolution. But I would argue that there have been so many resolutions in the U.N. we could also concede the point that we have protected or adhered to those resolutions.

I truly believe that we are at such a point in history that any actions by the President would warrant extreme actions; or I should not suggest extreme, I should suggest constitutional actions by this Congress. It may warrant raising issues of impeachment. The reason I say that is to use the War Powers Act in a way that ignores the constitutional privilege and right of this Congress to declare war, I believe, is not doing well by the American people.

We already know the results of a war without end, the Iraq war, that is costing $339 million a day, that has already gone past a trillion dollars, that has seen 9,500 of our soldiers injured or maimed, sometimes injured or maimed for life, to see 4,000-plus die. It is a war without end.

Frankly, the question has to become what is the President's goal and intent if he has an idea that Iran is the next target. Has he looked to diplomacy and looked to the question of working with China or Russia to contain Iran? Has he looked at negotiation with the individuals in Iran who really may be interested in some sort of resolution? Is he buying into the constant refrain that Iran is providing the weapons in Iraq? Is he also looking to the perceived friendship between the Iraq government and the Iran government? None of the above.

What I sense in the administration is a percolating attempt to attack Iran, and that percolating attempt based upon the representation of nuclear weapons. I don't want Iran to possess the capacity to engage and to utilize nuclear weapons, nor am I interested in protecting an Iran that has been hostile to the world. I am not interested in coddling terrorists. But we can clearly see that the policies in Iraq have not deterred the terrorists. They have only grown the terrorists. And I would question whether the only way to create peace in the Mid East is to again attack another country in the Mid East.

It is important that we continue to engage for two distinct states, the Palestinian and Israel negotiations. I would have hoped that this administration would have spent their time following through on the road map that the President announced some few years back. I believe that we were distracted in Iraq. We were distracted in Iraq from Afghanistan and from solving the Palestinian-Israeli question.

So I rise today to join my colleagues and say not on my watch, absolutely not. The statistics of the war in Iraq are devastating. Yes, I am prepared today to declare a military success in Iraq. A military success means that our soldiers on one and two and three and four redeployments have done everything the Commander in Chief has asked them to do. Saddam Hussein is gone, there have been democratic elections, and U.N. resolutions adhered to. Bring those soldiers home, declare a military success, and make the statement to the American people that we will never recklessly invade another country.

Iran is somewhat different from Iraq; and, therefore, may have a different story to tell. It may not be the easy route that they might have thought Iraq was. But frankly, my view is that we have crossed the constitutional bounds and that as I yield back to the distinguished chairwoman, I simply believe that we have come to a crisis point that this Congress must accept its duty and say to the President that no war can be declared without a vote of the United States Congress under the Constitution, and I would join with my colleagues, the chairman of the Human Right Subcommittee on International Issues of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Chairman DELAHUNT, to suggest that the War Powers Act should be amended and should now be that it can only be utilized by a President when the Nation is under imminent attack and when there is necessity to go forward to protect our citizens. Other than that, that War Powers Act should be amended, it should be drawn down, and we should stand with the Constitution. No invasion of Iran on my watch, and constitutional implications for the President of the United States if such attack is proposed.

I thank the distinguished gentlelady for her leadership in the Out-of-Iraq Caucus.

I join my colleagues here tonight to discuss a very important issue: the possibility that this Administration may be intent on leading us into another war in the Middle East, this time against Iran. I would like to thank my colleague Congresswoman WATERS for organizing this special order on Iran. Even as we remain engaged in a war in Iraq to which there is no military solution, this Administration has begun beating the drum for war with Iran. I strongly urge my congressional colleagues to send a clear message to President Bush that he does not currently have authorization to use military force against Iran.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that using a military strike against Iran would be a colossal error. As a nation, we are still paying an unacceptably high price for this Administration's ill-advised and ill-executed invasion of Iraq in March 2003. In 2002, when I voted against the Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of United States Armed Forces Against Iraq, I did so because I believed that this would be a war without end. I believed this resolution would trap us in a conflict that, like the Vietnam War, would consume American resources and lives without tangible yield. Unfortunately for the people of both this country and Iraq, this has proven true.

As a nation, we have already paid an enormous price for the war in Iraq. We have squandered an exponentially increasing amount of money, and, worst of all, lost an unacceptably large number of American lives. However, the over 4,000 U.S. casualties and the $3,919 per second ($123.6 billion per year) we are spending in Iraq have bought neither peace nor security.

Mr. Speaker, even as our troops are caught in the midst of instability and civil war in Iraq, the President has begun the march to war with Iran. We cannot compound the mistakes of the Iraq war with the even bigger mistake of opening up a second military conflict in the Middle East. And yet, the Administration has begun to set the stage for a U.S. attack on Iranian military or nuclear facilities by issuing strong statements about Iran's intervention in Iraq, and using inflammatory rhetoric against Iran in a similar fashion to the run-up to the Iraq war.

In recent weeks, the Administration has increasingly referred to negative behavior of the Iranian regime. Despite contrary findings by the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), Bush has increasingly stated that Iran is building nuclear weapons. The Administration has also cited Iran as a cause of instability in Iraq, and has argued that Iran is killing U.S. soldiers and supplying weapons, training, and funding.

I certainly believe that the current state of affairs in Iran, and specifically those issues relating to U.S. sanctions on Iran and the security of the region, are extremely important and in desperate need of discussion. As a Member of Congress, I find Iran's support of terrorist organizations, pursuit of nuclear weapons, and dismal human rights record to be extremely worrisome. However, I am also concerned by what appears to be movement by this Administration toward yet another war in the Gulf region, without having first exhausted diplomatic means of addressing any conflicts.

I have long been an advocate of a free, independent, and democratic Iran. I believe in an Iran that holds free elections, follows the rule of law, and is home to a vibrant civil society; an Iran that is a responsible member of the region and the international community, particularly with respect to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. An Iran that, unfortunately, we do not see today.

The only effective way to achieve lasting peace and prosperity in the region, along with bringing about reforms in Iran's polity, is to assist the Iranian people in their quest to achieve political, social, and religious liberty. Every government can be judged with the way in which it treats its ethnic and religious minorities, and the current Iranian government gets a failing grade for its treatment of its many and diverse minorities.

The controversy surrounding Iran's procurement of nuclear energy is cause for great concern; however, the administration's avoidance of any and all diplomatic relations with Iran is cause for greater alarm. Moreover, the current rhetoric from the Bush Administration regarding war with Iran is both counterproductive and highly inflammatory. While full diplomatic, political, and economic relations between the U.S. and Iran cannot be normalized unless and until enforceable safeguards are put in place to prevent the weaponization of Iran's nuclear program, these policy objectives should not constitute pre-conditions for any diplomatic dialogue.

Establishing a diplomatic dialogue with the Government of Iran and deepening relationships with the Iranian people would help foster greater understanding between the people of Iran and the people of the United States and would enhance the stability and the security of the Persian Gulf region. Doing so would reduce the threat of the proliferation or use of nuclear weapons in the region, while advancing other U.S. foreign policy objectives in the region. The significance of establishing and sustaining diplomatic relations with Iran cannot be over-emphasized. Avoidance and military intervention cannot be the means through which we resolve this looming crisis.

Mr. Speaker, Middle East experts have repeatedly stated that a U.S. attack on Iran would have disastrous consequences. Among possible outcomes, many experts agree, would be an Iranian counter-attack on U.S. and Israeli interests in the region or throughout the world. Such an attack could also lead to a greater Middle East War, and would undoubtedly bring with it a greater loss of life and financial burden.

Mr. Speaker, now is the time that we need to be looking to ending one Middle East conflict, not to beginning another. We need to work to rebuild our standing in the international community, not to raise further enmity in the Middle East and beyond by attacking another nation. I strongly urge my colleagues to speak out against any potential military strike in Iran.

Ms. WATERS. I thank the gentlelady from Texas, and I am very, very appreciative of the fact that the gentlelady is one of the Members of Congress that we can always count on to confront the challenges that we are confronted with, particularly as it relates to this war, and at this time I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE).

Ms. LEE. I, too, want to commend the gentlelady from Texas for raising some of the constitutional issues that we have to grapple with each and every day.

I would like to talk briefly about the issue of the preemptive strike which is central to this administration's foreign and military policy.

In essence what the Bush administration has decided is that it is all right, and actually it is their standard, to be able to use force not necessarily in the face of an imminent threat, but it is all right and it is a policy of this administration to be able to use force to prevent a future perceived threat. All of this is couched in this global war on terror where oftentimes they believe they do have a blank check to use force wherever they want to go in the world.

When you look at what they are trying to do now in Iraq with regard to the security agreements, they are trying to negotiate a permanent military presence in Iraq without even coming back to Congress to try to get the authority to do that. I think minimally, and we have several bills that have been introduced into this body, that basically just say before the administration decides to use force or take military actions or strike Iran, minimally they must come to Congress to seek authorization.

Well, for the life of me, this is the People's House. I cannot figure out why we cannot have a resolution as basic as that come to this body so we can pass that. I think that should be a minimum standard to protect the American people from first of all what could be total chaos. Secondly, when you just look at the expenditure of resources and what a possible preemptive strike could cost as it relates to Iran in terms of treasury, blood, our young men and women and also our financial resources. We may just be a few voices in the wilderness crying out tonight, but we are crying out very loudly and asking the American people to look at these signs because as Congresswoman WATERS said, we are sounding the alarm so we can stop what appears to be on the horizon.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. If the gentlelady would yield, I just came back from Iraq, and you are so right. After going and I think getting a very wide view of the status of affairs there, clearly as we have understood or understand, the government is leaning on the captains of our military. Ranks at the captain level are like the government. There is no seeming intent or plan that would cease the Maliki government from leaning on the United States military, using it as a crutch. So there is no evidence that suggests that they don't intend to have permanent military bases. In fact, every indication from the presentations of the military and others is that they would have it. I believe they are in violation of maybe not the rules of this House, but certainly the respect of the three branches of government.

Finally, I would say that I have legislation that declares a military success, that lists the criteria under which our soldiers went in, and moves it to a diplomatic surge. We should not fool ourselves. The intent is a permanent base that allows them to do the preemptive strike that you are speaking of against any country in the Mideast, and in particular Iran. I believe we have to stop it now, and we have to stop it forever, and we have to lean on the Constitution because we have seen over the last couple of years the Constitution ignored, and that simply cannot stand in this place called America.

□ 2230

Ms. WATERS. Thank you very much to both SHEILA JACKSON-LEE and BARBARA LEE for, again, their constant and consistent struggle working in this House against the war.

Mr. Speaker, and Members, press reports have given us some indications of the thrust of current White House directed planning. The strike would be against Iranian terrorist facilities, the Revolutionary Guard units and/or nuclear production facilities, a limited air strike operation with the objective of changing Iranian behavior. Those who argue for the strike are saying there will be very few U.S. casualties and very few Iranian civilian casualties. Nevertheless, we all know that U.S. strikes against Iran would be disastrous.

Middle East experts generally agree that Iran would respond to a U.S. strike by attacking U.S. and Israeli interests throughout the region and possibly globally. These strikes would lead to a greater Middle East war, including greater loss of life, financial burden, over stretch of our military and worse.

We're sounding the alarm this evening and we are sending a message to the President of the United States of America and to the Vice President, particularly now to the Vice President, who, when he was reminded by an ABC News reporter that the recent polls show that two-thirds of Americans say the fight in Iraq is not worth it, his response, ''and so?''

Well, Mr. Vice President, our ''and so'' to you tonight is, and so the American people do not want us to continue this war in Iraq and to air strike in Iran. We're sounding the alarm. And I will yield time to the gentleman who just left the Speaker's seat to complete this colloquy that we've had here this evening.

Mr. ELLISON. Madam Speaker, I just want to again thank Representatives WATERS and LEE and SHEILA JACKSON LEE.

I just want to make a few quick points. We're under no illusions. I think that by this special order, I don't think anyone intends to excuse bellicose, inflammatory remarks that have been made by the President of Iran. There's no excusing that. But you don't deal with bellicose remarks with a war. You deal with bellicose remarks by issuing a statement condemning those statements, but not with a war. And I don't think any bellicose statements or inflammatory remarks by the President of Iran could ever justify an attack which will result in the massive loss of life.

I also want to say that a strike against Iran, no one can predict what the consequences of that will be. Will it excite the Shiia community in Pakistan, of which 30 percent of the people are Shiia there? What will it do to Afghanistan?

Again, Iran is providing electricity in Afghanistan in an effective way, much, much more than other countries have done. Again, Kabul and Kandajar are not electrified 100 percent of the time.

What will happen in Lebanon? Will that inflame another war such as the one in the summer of 2006? That could inflame the region, and no one knows whether bombs will start falling from other parts of the region.

This war against Iran, a strike against Iran has no clear outcome. It is a very bad idea. And I think that what we must do is pursue diplomatic negotiations, and remember that negotiation is not a reward, it's not a gift, it's not a present; it's a tool for the security of the world.

Ms. WATERS. Madam Speaker, and Members, I am pleased that we have

taken time from our schedules to come to the floor tonight to sound the alarm. The saber rattling is going on by this administration. The remarks that we're hearing day in and day out are more accusatory toward Iran. We are made to believe that we are somehow being placed at a great threat by Iran.

And so we know where this is going. We know what this means, and we're saying, we must not rule out diplomacy. We must believe that we can settle differences by way of diplomacy.

We know that we've still got work to do on Iraq. We've still got to make many Members of this House feel comfortable with the idea that they can confront their President, that they can still be very, very patriotic as they stand up against war and bringing our soldiers home. We know that the work has to be done, but we've got to add to that work the fact that we can stop an airstrike on Iran and we can stop the notion that somehow we must send more soldiers in.

AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE WAR IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ELLISON). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. GILCHREST) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. GILCHREST. I thank the Speaker for the time. And Mr. Speaker, what I would like to talk about today, and it's actually a pretty good follow-up to the previous special order by Ms. WATERS, who is a classmate of mine, going back to, I was going to say 1891, but going back to 1991, MAXINE and I came in as freshman and we've been here now for the past 17 years. And the previous discussion about the Iraq war, the relationship with Iran, I think, leads fairly well into the special order that I am prepared to give tonight.

Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do is to give a presentation on the war in Iraq, the Middle East, an American perspective on the Cold War that engulfed the world for many decades, an American perspective on the Cold War and how it impacted the Middle East, the present crisis in the Middle East and Iraq, from an American perspective, and an American perspective on the way forward.

When I say an American perspective, tonight, Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to relate an idea that the United States, for the past 50 years, has seen itself not as a lone super power in the world, but as a Nation, as Walt Whitman described, the race of races, the United States, the melting pot.

The United States has engaged itself in the fiber of the international community, and has not seen itself as a lone ranger in the international arena of conflict, of economy, of culture, of exchanges. The United States has seen itself as an integrated part of the international community in much of its history. And so, tonight, when I talk about the U.S. view of the war in Iraq, it is to illustrate the complexity of that conflict, the complexity of the intrigue and violence that we are now seeing, the complexity of the way forward, but, in fact, there is a way forward.

So I want to give a brief history covering about the last 60 years. And what I would like to share with the American people, Mr. Speaker, among many, many periodicals, many books, many resources, I'd like to share ideas tonight from seven books.

The first one is Violent Politics by William Polk, who served in the Kennedy and Johnson Administration. Violent politics is not what we see here on the House floor. Violent politics is when diplomacy fails and war begins, war usually that engulfs communities or regions, not in what we saw in World War II, but in insurgencies, where there are no munitions factories to bomb, there are no supply lines to bomb, there are no massive armies to bomb or thousands of tanks to take out, but violent politics as it envelops regions in insurgencies.

And is there an effective counter insurgency to that particular break down in diplomacy?

We're seeing an insurgency in the Middle East, in the Middle East, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and certainly in other places. In Violent Politics, William Polk gives an idea of how an insurgency actually works, and how you can deal with an insurgency like we're experiencing now in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The other book is Fiasco by Thomas Ricks. How did we get involved in Iraq? What were the mistakes, the very clear, obvious mistakes over the planning in the first few years?

The next one is by Steven Kinzer, All the Shah's Men; America's relationship with a large country that is seeking to have influence for self-defense purposes, mainly, the country of Iran.

The next one is Trita Parsi who wrote Treacherous Alliance. What is the arrangement or what has been the arrangement or the alliance and sometimes the verbal conflict between Israel and Iran?

The next is Tony Zinni, who was Commander of CENTCOM for a number of years, spent much of his military Marine career in the Middle East. He wrote a book about the Battle for Peace. Tony Zinni, like President Eisenhower, knows you need a strong military, strong intelligence, and consensus in dialogue and diplomacy. That plays a vital role in actions that the United States is involved in.

An interesting book called Human Options by Norman Cousins. What kind of decisions do we make? Why do we make them? And do we know all the options that are before us?

The last book is a little bit older. It's about the Vietnam war, called Why Vietnam? How did we get involved in that conflict? It's written by a man called Archimedes Patty, who was among the first Americans to meet Ho Chi Minh in 1945; sent there by this government as the head of the OSS or the Office of Strategic Services, which was the forerunner of the CIA, to find out how we can find people in Indochina, to see, to gather intelligence about the Japanese troop movements in that region of the world since we couldn't get any intelligence from the French or the Chinese or anybody else.

And Archimedes Patty discovered this man, the head of the Viet Minh, known as Ho Chi Minh that was willing to help and in fact did help the United States gather intelligence on Japanese troop movements in Indochina; helped many, many, many Americans, downed pilots and so on, and allied himself with the United States in 1945, hoping to get help from the United States, not from Russia, not from China, to gain his independence from French colonial rule. A fabulous book that shows the intricacies of how diplomacy works sometimes, and how the bureaucracy doesn't always work too well when communicating those kinds of pieces of information.

Seven books, Violent Politics, Fiasco, All the Shah's Men, Treacherous Alliance, Battle for Peace, Human Options, Why Vietnam. Sounds like a tall order.

But, Mr. Speaker, I can imagine the American public, who have some dissatisfaction, some apprehension, some anger, some wanting a ray of hope about the conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, I can see the American public, over the next many months, turning the television off every single night for 1 or 2 hours, every night, and dedicating themselves to help the solution, the American solution, the American solution of how to solve this difficult problem in the Middle East, by becoming informed, by finding out information, by becoming more knowledgeable about these issues, not waiting for the government that people sometimes assume is competent, but being a part of the process.

Now, I mentioned the book Human Options by Norman Cousins. And I want to give you two quotes out of that book to frame this discussion tonight. The first one is, ''Knowledge is the solvent for danger.'' You want to solve a problem? You need a couple of things. You need initiative, of course. You're going to turn the TV off and read these books. You need initiative. And then as you read this material, some of it is pretty intricate, exquisite detail, complicated. But you need some ingenuity and intellect to figure it out. And you have that.

But what this assignment will give to you is knowledge. It'll give you information. It'll give you a depth of information so that, you, as an individual, can become more competent to share this with your fellow Americans and maybe even write your congressman.

The other one in Human Options, the quote, is ''History is a vast early warning system.'' We know more about