Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all of our colleagues from California, from both sides of the aisle, it is a great privilege and honor for me to congratulate and to welcome our new colleague, Mr. JOHN CAMPBELL.

EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE

(Mr. CAMPBELL of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. CAMPBELL of California. Mr. Speaker, thank you all. Thank you, Congressman DREIER.

I wish, Mr. Speaker, to thank my family first for their support and their coming here today. I wish to thank the people of Orange County for the confidence that they have placed in me to have this very honored position. And I look so forward to working with all of you on the many issues that we have coming ahead of us.

I feel so the history as I stand here, what this building, what this room means and what it has held and what it has done. I only hope that I can do honor to those who have served before us here, and that I will help with all of you to do justice to those whose futures we serve.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

The SPEAKER. Under clause 5(d) of rule XX, the Chair announces to the House that in light of the administration of the oath to the gentleman from California, Mr. JOHN CAMPBELL, the whole number of the House is 434.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MCCAUL of Texas). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

THE BLAME GAME

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim my 5 minutes at this time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. PAUL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, our country faces major problems. No longer can they remain hidden from the American people. Most Americans are aware the Federal budget is in dismal shape. Whether it is Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, or even the private pension system, most Americans realize we are in debt over our heads.

The welfare state is unmanageable and severely overextended. In spite of hopes that supposed reforms would restore sound financing and provide for all the needs of the people, it is becoming more apparent every day that the entire system of entitlements is in a precarious state and may well collapse. It does not take a genius to realize that increasing the national debt by over $600 billion per year is not sustainable. Raising taxes to make up the shortfall is unacceptable, while continuing to print the money needed will only accelerate the erosion of the value of the dollar.

Our foreign policy is no less of a threat to us. Our worldwide military presence and our obsession with remaking the entire Middle East frightens a lot of people both here and abroad. Our role as world policeman and nation-builder places undue burdens on the American taxpayer. Our enormous overseas military expenditures, literally hundreds of billions of dollars, are a huge drain on the American economy.

All wars invite abuses of civil liberties at home, and the vague declaration of war against terrorism is worse than most in this regard. As our liberties here at home are diminished by the PATRIOT Act and the national ID card legislation, we succumb to the temptation of all empires to neglect habeas corpus, employ torture tactics and use secret imprisonments. These domestic and foreign policy trends reflect a morally bankrupt philosophy, devoid of any concern for liberty and the rule of law.

The American people are becoming more aware of the serious crisis this country faces. Their deep concern is reflected in the current mood in Congress. The recent debate over Iraq shows the parties are now looking for someone to blame for the mess we are in. It is a high stakes political game. The fact that a majority of both parties and their leadership endorsed the war and accept the same approach toward Iran and Syria does nothing to tone down the accusatory nature of the current blame game.

The argument in Washington is over tactics, quality of intelligence, war management and diplomacy, except for a few who admit their tragic mistakes were made and now sincerely want to establish a new course for Iraq. Thank goodness for those who are willing to reassess and admit to these mistakes. Those of us who have opposed the war all along welcome them to the cause of peace.

If we hope to pursue a more sensible foreign policy, it is imperative that Congress face up to its explicit constitutional responsibility to declare war. It is easy to condemn the management of a war one endorsed, while deferring the final decision about whether to deploy the troops to the President. When Congress accepts and assumes its awesome responsibility to declare war as directed by the Constitution, fewer wars will be fought.

Sadly, the acrimonious blame game is motivated by the leadership of both parties for the purpose of gaining, or retaining, political power. It does not approach a true debate over the wisdom or lack thereof of foreign military interventionism and preemptive war.

Polls indicate ordinary Americans are becoming uneasy with our prolonged war in Iraq, which has no end in sight. The fact that no one can define victory precisely, and most Americans see us staying in Iraq for years to come, contributes to the erosion of support for this war. Currently, 63 percent of Americans disapprove of the handling of the war, and 52 percent say it is time to come home. Forty-two percent say we need a foreign policy of minding our own business. This is very encouraging.

The percentages are even higher for the Iraqis. Eighty-two percent want us to leave, while 67 percent claim they are less secure with our troops there. Ironically, our involvement has produced an unusual agreement among the Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis, the three factions at odds with each other. At the recent 22-Member Arab League meeting in Cairo, the three groups agreed on one issue: they all want foreign troops to leave. And at the end of the meeting an explicit communique was released: ''We demand the withdrawal of foreign forces in accordance with a timetable and the establishment of a national and immediate program for rebuilding the armed forces that will allow them to guard Iraq's borders and get control of national security.''

Since the administration is so enamored of democracy, why not have a national referendum in Iraq to see if the people want us to leave?

After we left Lebanon in the 1980s, the Arab League was instrumental in brokering an end to that country's 15-year civil war. Its chances of helping to stop the fighting in Iraq are far better than depending on the U.N. NATO, or the United States. This is a regional dispute that we stirred up but cannot settle. The Arab League needs to assume a lot more responsibility for the mess that our invasion has caused. We need to get out of the way and let them solve their own problems.

Remember, once we left Lebanon suicide terrorism stopped and peace finally came. The same could happen in Iraq.

Everyone is talking about the downside of us leaving, and the civil war that might erupt. Possibly so, but no one knows with certainty what will happen. There was no downside when we left Vietnam. But one thing for sure, after a painful decade of killing in the 1960s, the killing stopped and no more Americans died once we left. We now trade with Vietnam and enjoy friendly relations with them. This was achieved through peaceful means, not military force. The real question is how many more Americans must be sacrificed for a policy that is not working? Are we going to fight until we go broke and the American people are impoverished? Common sense tells us it's time to reassess the politics of military intervention and not just look for someone to blame for falling once again into the trap of a military quagmire.

The blame game is a political event, designed to avoid the serious philosophic debate

over our foreign policy of interventionism. The mistakes made by both parties in dragging us into an unwise war are obvious, but the effort to blame one group over the other confuses the real issue. Obviously Congress failed to meet its constitutional obligation regarding war. Debate over prewar intelligence elicits charges of errors, lies, and complicity. It is now argued that those who are critical of the outcome in Iraq are just as much at fault, since they too accepted flawed intelligence when deciding to support the war. This charge is leveled at previous administrations, foreign governments, Members of Congress, and the United Nations—all who made the same mistake of blindly accepting the prewar intelligence. Complicity, errors of judgment, and malice are hardly an excuse for such a serious commitment as a pre-emptive war against a non-existent enemy.

Both sides accepted the evidence supposedly justifying the war, evidence that was not credible. No weapons of mass destruction were found. Iraq had no military capabilities. Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein were not allies (remember, we were allies of both Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden), and Saddam Hussein posed no threat whatsoever to the United States or his neighbors.

We hear constantly that we must continue the fight in Iraq, and possibly in Iran and Syria, because, ''It's better to fight the terrorists over there than here.'' Merely repeating this justification, if it is based on a major analytical error, cannot make it so. All evidence shows that our presence in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and other Muslim countries benefits Al Qaeda in its recruiting efforts, especially in its search for suicide terrorists. This one fact prompts a rare agreement among all religious and secular Muslim factions; namely, that the U.S. should leave all Arab lands. Denying this will not keep terrorists from attacking us, it will do the opposite.

The fighting and terrorist attacks are happening overseas because of a publicly stated Al Qaeda policy that they will go for soft targets—our allies whose citizens object to the war like Spain and Italy. They will attack Americans who are more exposed in Iraq. It is a serious error to conclude that ''fighting them over there'' keeps them from fighting us ''over here,'' or that we're winning the war against terrorism. As long as our occupation continues, and American forces continue killing Muslims, the incentive to attack us will grow. It shouldn't be hard to understand that the responsibility for violence in Iraq—even violence between Iraqis—is blamed on our occupation. It is more accurate to say, ''the longer we fight them over there the longer we will be threatened over here.''

The final rhetorical refuge for those who defend the war, not yet refuted, is the dismissive statement that ''the world is better off without Saddam Hussein.'' It implies no one can question anything we have done because of this fact. Instead of an automatic concession it should be legitimate, though politically incorrect, to challenge this disarming assumption. No one has to like or defend Saddam Hussein to point out we won't know whether the world is better off until someone has taken Saddam Hussein's place.

This argument was never used to justify removing murderous dictators with much more notoriety than Saddam Hussein, such as our ally Stalin; Pol Pot, whom we helped get into power; or Mao Tse Tung. Certainly the Soviets, with their bloody history and thousands of nuclear weapons aimed at us, were many times over a greater threat to us than Saddam Hussein ever was. If containment worked with the Soviets and the Chinese, why is it assumed without question that deposing Saddam Hussein is obviously and without question a better approach for us than containment?

The ''we're all better off without Saddam Hussein'' cliche doesn't address the question of whether the 2,100 troops killed or the 20,000 wounded and sick troops are better off. We refuse to acknowledge the hatred generated by the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqi citizens who are written off as collateral damage. Are the Middle East and Israel better off with the turmoil our occupation has generated? Hardly! Honesty would have us conclude that conditions in the Middle East are worse since the war started: The killing never stops, and the cost is more than we can bear—both in lives and limbs lost and dollars spent.

In spite of the potential problems that may or may not come with our withdrawal, the greater mistake was going in the first place. We need to think more about how to avoid these military encounters, rather than dwelling on the complications that result when we meddle in the affairs of others with no moral or legal authority to do so. We need less blame game and more reflection about the root cause of our aggressive foreign policy.

By limiting the debate to technical points over intelligence, strategy, the number of troops, and how to get out of the mess, we ignore our continued policy of sanctions, threats, and intimidation of Iraq's neighbors, Iran and Syria. Even as Congress pretends to argue about how or when we might come home, leaders from both parties continue to support the policy of spreading the war by precipitating a crisis with these two countries.

The likelihood of agreeing about who deliberately or innocently misled Congress, the media, and the American people is virtually nil. Maybe historians at a later date will sort out the whole mess. The debate over tactics and diplomacy will go on, but that only serves to distract from the important issue of policy. Few today in Congress are interested in changing from our current accepted policy of intervention to one of strategic independence: No nation building, no policing the world, no dangerous alliances.

But the results of our latest military incursion into a foreign country should not be ignored. Those who dwell on pragmatic matters should pay close attention to the results so far.

Since March 2003 we have seen:

Death and destruction; 2,100 Americans killed and nearly 20,000 sick or wounded, plus tens of thousands of Iraqis caught in the crossfire;

A Shiite theocracy has been planted;

A civil war has erupted;

Iran's arch nemesis, Saddam Hussein, has been removed;

Osama bin Laden's arch nemesis, Saddam Hussein, has been removed;

Al Qaeda now operates freely in Iraq, enjoying a fertile training field not previously available to them;

Suicide terrorism, spurred on by our occupation, has significantly increased;

Our military industrial complex thrives in Iraq without competitive bids;

True national defense and the voluntary army have been undermined;

Personal liberty at home is under attack; assaults on free speech and privacy, national ID cards, the Patriot Act,

National Security letters, and challenges to habeas corpus all have been promoted;

Values have changed, with more Americans supporting torture and secret prisons;

Domestic strife, as recently reflected in arguments over the war on the House floor, is on the upswing;

Pre-emptive war has been codified and accepted as legitimate and necessary, a bleak policy for our future;

The Middle East is far more unstable, and oil supplies are less secure, not more;

Historic relics of civilization protected for thousands of years have been lost in a flash while oil wells were secured;

U.S. credibility in the world has been severely damaged; and

The national debt has increased enormously, and our dependence on China has increased significantly as our Federal Government borrows more and more money.

How many more years will it take for civilized people to realize that war has no economic or political value for the people who fight and pay for it? Wars are always started by governments, and individual soldiers on each side are conditioned to take up arms and travel great distances to shoot and kill individuals that never meant them harm. Both sides drive their people into an hysterical frenzy to overcome their natural instinct to live and let live. False patriotism is used to embarrass the good-hearted into succumbing to the wishes of the financial and other special interests who agitate for war.

War reflects the weakness of a civilization that refuses to offer peace as an alternative.

This does not mean we should isolate ourselves from the world. On the contrary, we need more rather than less interaction with our world neighbors. We should encourage travel, foreign commerce, friendship, and exchange of ideas—this would far surpass our misplaced effort to make the world like us through armed force. And this can be achieved without increasing the power of the state or accepting the notion that some world government is needed to enforce the rules of exchange. Governments should just get out of the way and let individuals make their own decisions about how they want to relate to the world.

Defending the country against aggression is a very limited and proper function of government. Our military involvement in the world over the past 60 years has not met this test, and we're paying the price for it.

A policy that endorses peace over war, trade over sanctions, courtesy over arrogance, and liberty over coercion is in the tradition of the American Constitution and American idealism. It deserves consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)