withdrawal of American and NATO forces from Afghanistan would put our Nation at greater risk of another 9/11 type attack from al Qaeda.

Unlike the Iraq war, the war in Afghanistan is not a war of our choosing. As President Obama pointed out during his speech at West Point last year, our troops are in the field because on September 11, 2001, al Qaeda launched a direct attack on the United States—killing thousands of innocent Americans. The United States is fully justified in taking action against al Qaeda and the Taliban and we continue to have the strong backing of our NATO allies and the international community.

Unfortunately, under the Bush Administration, many of our troops and resources were diverted away from Afghanistan to Iraq. As a result, al Qaeda and the Taliban began to regain strength and al Qaeda continues to plot against Americans from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. During his campaign for president, Barack Obama made it clear that he would end America's involvement in the war in Iraq and focus U.S. efforts on al Qaeda.

While there is no doubt that al Qaeda operates in parts of Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and other areas, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region remains the operational and ideological center for al Qaeda's global operations. The president is right to conclude that allowing al Qaeda to operate there unchecked poses a serious security risk to the U.S. and American citizens around the world.

The immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan would have two immediate consequences. First, it would immediately strengthen the hand of the most extremist Taliban leaders (those most closely tied to al Qaeda), undercutting any leverage behind ongoing efforts to get some Taliban fighters to lay down their arms and it would also undermine Afghan President Hamid Karzai's new initiative to reach a political accommodation with the members of the Taliban open to national reconciliation. If such a political solution is undermined and the old Taliban regime retakes control of Afghanistan, they will again turn that country into a safe haven for expanded al Qaeda operations. It would also lead to the return of an extreme Taliban regime that encourages horrendous acts like pouring gasoline into the eyes of girls who attempt to go to school. Second, an immediate withdrawal of NATO forces would weaken Pakistan's resolve to confront the Pakistani Taliban, the Afghan Taliban, and al Qaeda. The most promising development over the last year has been the Government of Pakistan's willingness to fight the growing menace of the Pakistani Taliban. In addition, very recently, the Pakistani government has also shown a willingness to confront elements of the Afghan Taliban. The recent capture of Mullah Bandar, the operational chief of the Afghan Taliban, and two Afghan Taliban shadow governors, demonstrates this progress. The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan would sabotage those nascent efforts. Why should the Pakistani forces confront the Afghan Taliban if the U.S. walks away now?

President Obama has developed a carefully considered and comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan that relies not only on the use of troops but also on the use civilian resources.

The strategy has three parts. First, coalition forces will reverse the Taliban's momentum by working to stabilize major population centers and accelerate the expansion of the Afghan national security forces.

Second, the U.S. will work with its partners to create a more effective civilian strategy—with the goal of establishing sustainable economic opportunities for Afghans and strengthening the country's national and local governance structures.

Third, the strategy engages Pakistan as a full partner in these efforts. As a result of better coordination between our two countries, for the first time since the beginning of the war, al Qaeda and the Taliban are being genuinely challenged by the Pakistan military.

The president's strategy contains a timeline which initiates a responsible redeployment of American troops in July 2011. He has established this timeline to send a clear message to the Afghan government that they must take seriously their role in creating a stable Afghanistan and to communicate to the people of Afghanistan that the U.S. has no interest in an open-ended engagement in their country.

The new strategy has already shown promising signs of success. We should not undermine this effort by the immediate and total withdrawal of all U.S./NATO forces.

IRAN EXECUTES OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS

HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, freedom is rarely free. When you don't have it, you're under someone else's yolk, someone else's power. And for you to get it, you have to take that power from the oppressor. And while history has recorded some peaceful transitions, the transfer of power most often comes with the shedding of blood. So freedom has to be desired, yearned for, knowing that the struggle for it could cost you your life but is worth it—if not for you to enjoy, then for your children and grandchildren.

The totalitarian regime in Tehran has tortured, imprisoned, and executed thousands simply because they wanted to be free. On January 28, it continued its brutal oppression with the first known executions of opposition activists since unrest broke out following June's disputed presidential elections. Mohammad Reza Ali Zamani and Arash Rahmanipour were men that courageously made the choice to stand up to their oppressor. Faced with the choice between suffering under the indefinite rule of an oppressive regime and giving their lives so that others might be free, they selflessly chose the latter. We honor their sacrifice by continuing their fight so that all Iranians may one day be free.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ADAM H. PUTNAM

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

Mr. PUTNAM. Madam Speaker, on Tuesday, March 16, 2010, I was not present for 4 recorded votes. Had I been present, I would have voted the following way: roll No. 116—yea, roll No. 117—yea, roll No. 118—yea, roll No. 119—yea.

RECOGNIZING PERSECUTION OF FALUN GONG

SPEECH OF

HON. RUSH D. HOLT

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of House Resolution 605. I am pleased to cosponsor this resolution, which recognizes the continued persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China. The peace-loving people who practice Falun Gong have endured the Chinese Government's coordinated campaign to delegitimize and eradicate their belief system for over a decade. In China, Falun Gong has been officially labeled an 'evil cult,' and its practitioners have suffered censorship, extrajudicial arrests and detentions, involuntary reeducation through labor, torture, and even death for their personal beliefs.

Disappearances of Falun Gong practitioners are not uncommon and are especially difficult for family members who must live in uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones. I recently was informed by one of my constituents about the heartbreaking case of Jiang Feng, who simply vanished after going through airport security at Shanghai's Pudong Airport and before he made it to the gate for his flight to Newark, NJ. Jiang Feng and his wife, Mei Xuan, both are Falun Gong practitioners and were arrested in the 1999 crackdown. Because of repeated imprisonments, the couple has been separated for most of their decade-long marriage. Mei Xuan is a well-known musician in Shen Yun Performing Arts, which rekindles the traditional Chinese arts and portrays current events, including the persecution of Falun Dong practitioners. She was expecting finally to reunite with her husband here in the United States. Now, she awaits word on his whereabouts and his fate, fearing the worst.

Stories like Mei Xuan's are far too common. As Americans and members of the international community, we have a responsibility to speak out against persecution and to stand up for the truths and unalienable rights that we hold dear. Falun Gong practitioners, and all those seeking to exercise the universal right to freely practice the religion of their choice and to express their beliefs openly, deserve profound U.S. leadership on their behalf. I am pleased to vote for this resolution and to give voice to all those who continue to suffer needlessly and cannot speak for themselves.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ADAM H. PUTNAM

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

Mr. PUTNAM. Madam Speaker, on Monday, March 15, 2010, I was not present for 4 recorded votes. Had I been present, I would have voted the following way: roll No. 112—yea; roll No. 113—yea; roll No. 114—yea; roll No. 115—yea.