Over three years ago, when I spoke out against war in Iraq, I said that we needed to face more pressing issues and those that posed more serious threats, like Iran.

In the three years since, the threat from Iran has only grown more difficult and our capacity to meet that threat has diminished. Iran has elevated an apocalyptic president who exploits Iranian nationalist grievances to consolidate power and has openly expressed his desire to wipe Israel off the map. Our troops are bogged down in Iraq, placing them at the risk should Iran launch a wave of terrorism. We have done nothing to break our global dependency on oil, the control of which gives Iran its greatest ability to blackmail other countries.

I thank the sponsors of this bill for bringing a critical issue before us, however I must rise in opposition. Nothing in this legislation points us in the direction of a solution, such as exploiting the differences within the Iranian regime to achieve a Libya-like grand bargain where Iran gives up its nuclear program and support for terror in exchange for the benefits of membership in the international community. Instead, this bill limits the administration's flexibility to pursue diplomacy without providing them any tools not already at their disposal. We need allies to address the Iranian threat. We need China's, Russia's, and Europe's cooperation, since we have no more unilateral sanctions to place on Iran. Our global standing is at a low point, yet, by sanctioning foreign countries and companies that have economic relations with Iran, this bill sanctions the very countries we need for a strong diplomatic effort.

This bill gives as much weight to overthrowing the Iranian government as it does to non-proliferation. I am hardly a fan of the Iranian regime, but preventing them from developing nuclear weapons capability must be our first priority. By not prioritizing behavior change over regime change, we pull the rug out from under anyone in the Iranian leadership who values survival over the nuclear program and eliminate any incentive for a diplomatic solution.

I feel a sense of déjà vu this morning, as I think back to the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998. Neither bill authorizes the use of force, but the Iraq Liberation Act certainly helped get the ball rolling that led to the tragedy of the Iraq War. Knowing what we know today, I believe that a number of my colleagues would have voted differently 8 years ago. I certainly would have.

Freedom, when it comes to the Middle East, has too often meant picking a friendly horse and backing it. We overthrew the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran in 1953 and earned

the enmity of the Iranian people by supporting the Shah. Today, we see the repercussions of picking the wrong people to support in Iraq – first Saddam Hussein and later Ahmed Chalabi - and yet that is exactly what this bill would have us do in Iran. Choosing who to back could even undermine the entire Iranian opposition, by discrediting them as American agents.

I am very worried about where this all ends. We've heard reports from the Pentagon of plans for a nuclear strike on Iran, the repercussions of which should make all of us recoil in horror. We've read of an Iranian offer to negotiate all of our differences, which elements of the administration rejected, so as not to loose their chance to remake Iran by force. I don't pretend to imagine the horrific things that an uncontained Iran would do with nuclear weapons. That's why a smart, strong and constructive diplomatic strategy is so critical and, since this bill doesn't provide it, why I must vote no.