Mr. Speaker, 4 years ago, the United States invaded Iraq,

ostensibly to eliminate weapons of mass destruction. When no such

weapons were found, instead of declaring victory and bringing the

troops home, the administration in its arrogance decided to dismantle

the major institutions of Iraqi society and settle into a long-term

occupation in order to remake Iraq in our own image.

The dismantling of Iraqi institutions, the army, the Baath party, et

cetera, led to the breakdown of the delicate balances in Iraqi society

and the emergence of civil war between Sunnis and Shiites. The

continuing occupation led, as occupations do, to the development of a

nationalist insurgency.

Now we have Sunni, Shiites and the insurgents shooting at each other

and all shooting at American troops. This will go on as long as the

occupation continues. The only way out is for Congress to mandate a

timetable for a phased withdrawal of our troops.

Only such a mandate can get the Iraqi Government to step up to the

plate. As Defense Secretary Gates said yesterday, the strong feelings

expressed in the Congress about the timetable probably has had a

positive impact in terms of communicating to the Iraqis that this is

not an open-ended commitment. Only a mandated timetable for withdrawal

will end the endless occupation and end the endless bloodshed of young

Americans.