Mr. Speaker, today's debate should not be about the

character of the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Murtha, whose service

to his country is above reproach. It should also no be about a

resolution introduced by one member ascribing it to the position of

another. It should be about the profoundness of the dilemma we face in

our Iraqi policy.

All wars evoke analogies to prior conflicts. Vietnam is on everyone's

mind. My sense is that references to our Southeast Asian experience are

somewhat oblique, but important to ponder. Of particular relevance is

the advice of a former Vermont Senator, George Aiken, who suggested we

just declare victory and get out of Vietnam. Aiken's advice was rooted

in frustration, but wise as it was, represented more spin than reality.

Given the strategies in play, victory wasn't close at hand.

For many Americans, including me, the war in Iraq has been difficult

to justify. But all Americans, except perhaps a few who may be

partisanly vindictive, should want as positive a result as possible,

given the circumstances we now face. The decision to go to war may have

been misguided and strategies involved in conducting it mistake-ridden;

nonetheless there should be clarity of purpose in ending the conflict,

with the goal neither to cut and run, nor simply to cut losses. At this

junction of involvement we should define cogently our purposes and by

so doing create a basis both for a viable future for Iraq and for a

U.S. disengagement that respects the sacrifices of those who have

served so valiantly in our armed forces and those of our coalition

allies.

The key at this point is to recognize the WMD threat proved not to be

a compelling rationalization for the war and emphasize instead the

moral and philosophical case for overturning a repressive and cruel

regime and replacing it with a constitutional democracy. This latter

emphasis need not suggest or imply that all repressive regimes are fair

game for intervention, nor that regime change is the principal American

way, nor that other rationales for intervention don't exist. But it is

the case for intervention that shows the most concern for the Iraqi

people as they look both to their past and to the new challenges of Al

Qaeda.

Accordingly, in today's circumstances, my advice, as one who voted

against authorizing military intervention in Iraq, is for the

Administration to emphasize its commitment to democracy, not as a

rationale for continuing the war, but as the reason for disengagement.

Let me amplify.

All Americans, however wary they may be of the political judgments

that have to date been made, should concur that the world is better off

without Saddam Hussein and that it is positive that a dictatorial

regime is being replaced with a democratically elected government. The

cost of the undertaking may have been too high and the results counter-

productive in many ways, but before the international situation worsens

further, the administration would be wise, perhaps noting with pride

the elections to be held under a constitution this December, announce

that a new sovereign circumstance allows for comprehensive troop

drawdowns next year. The more definitions and forthright the plan the

better, but announcing a precise time table is less important than

making firm commitment to leave, with articulation of a clear rationale

for so doing. If we don't get out of Iraq at a time of our own choosing

and on our own terms, we will eventually be asked to leave, possibly

ignominiously, by the Iraqi government, or be seen as forced to leave

because of terrorist acts, which can be expected to continue as long as

we maintain a military presence in the heart of the Muslim world. The

key is that we must control and be seen as controlling our own fate.

All Americans should be respectful of the sacrifices of our men and

women in uniform. They have been placed in an untenable situation. If

they had not been so heroic and in many cases so helpful in rebuilding

neighborhoods and schools, the U.S. would face a far more difficult

dilemma today.

But we have no choice except to assess whether Osama Bin Laden and

his movement have not been given added momentum by our intervention in

Iraq, and whether the ideologically advocated policy of establishing

long-term bases or one of returning our troops home is likely to be the

more effective strategy in prevailing in the world-wide war on terror.

Here, it should not be hard to understand that prolonged occupation

of a country which encompasses an area of land where one of the world's

oldest civilizations prospered is humiliating to a proud people and

those elsewhere who share its great religion. It should also not be

hard to understand that the neo-con strategy of establishing a long-

term military presence in Iraq with semi-permanent bases raises the

risk of retaliatory terrorist attacks at home and abroad.

Indeed, according to the University of Chicago scholar, Robert Pape,

in his definitive book on suicide bombers, Dying to Win, the principal

reason anarchists choose to wrap themselves in explosives and kill

innocent civilians is to register martyred objection to the occupation

of countries or territories by the armed forces of Western or other

Democratic governments. Suicide bombing, by implication, will exist as

long as occupations continue.

In this regard, a note about Al Qaeda is in order. Just as neither

Iraq with its secular leanings nor any Iraqis were responsible for 9/

11, so Saddam Hussein apparently considered Osama Bin Laden as much a

rival as a soul brother. It is Western military intervention that has

precipitated Al Qaeda's rapid growth in Iraq and elsewhere, creating a

``cause celebre'' for its singularly malevolent actions. If American

withdrawal policy comes to turn on the question of anarchy--i.e.,

troops can't be drawn down as long as suicide bombers continue to wreak

havoc--we place ourselves in a catch 22 and, in effect, hand over

decision-making discretion to those who wantonly kill. We allow the

radical few to use our presence as the reason for their actions and at

the same time cause our involvement to be held hostage to their

villainy. The irony is that as conflicted as the Iraqi police and army

appear to be, we are fact reaching a stage where the anarchists may be

more credibly dealth with by Iraqis themselves, particularly if the

principal rationale for violence--i.e., the American presence--

disappears.

Hence, the case for a change in strategy is compelling, not as the

resolution under consideration tonight envisions, but in an orderly

manner, protecting our troops, our values and the gains we have helped

make for the Iraqi people.

Sometimes it is as difficult to know when to end as it is when to

start a war. In this context I am hard pressed to believe anything

except that a mistake of historical proportions will occur if the

administration fails to recognize the opportunity presented by next

month's elections to effectively bring our involvement in this war to a

close. It may be true as the Secretary of State told the Senate several

weeks ago, that democratic elections alone don't create a viable

government. But the assertion of the Secretary, however, valid, should

not be used as a rationale for an unending American occupation.

It is possible, of course that civil strife will ensue when we

withdraw, but this is just as likely to be the case in 2026 as 2006. In

any regard, civil union is for the Iraqi people to manage. It's not for

American troops to sustain. The authorization this Congress gave to the

Executive to use force contemplated the clear prospect of military

intervention in Iraq. It did not, however, contemplate prolonged

occupation. If this is not understood by the Executive branch, the

current overwhelming Iraqi polling sentiment favoring American troop

withdrawal will be more than matched by shared American sentiment. And

in a democracy no one can be a leader without followers.

The issue is no longer, as is so frequently asserted, the need ``to

stay the course;'' it is to avoid ``overstaying'' our presence.