Mr. Speaker, I have been in Congress for nearly 20

years. And in all that tie, I don't think I have ever been more ashamed

of the House of Representatives than I am today.

Deciding issues of war and peace should be one of the most solemn

obligations we confront in Congress. Instead, what is going on today is

pure political gamesmanship. Such gamesmanship demeans the sacrifice of

our men and women in uniform, demeans our country's tradition of

democratic debate, and is a total abdication of our responsibilities as

Members of Congress. Rather than holding vigorous oversight hearings

and having a full, open and honest discussion about the future of U.S.

involvement in Iraq, the Republican leadership has rushed a resolution

to the floor today that deliberately mischaracterizes the views of many

Democrats, including the honorable Representative Jack Murtha, a

decorated marine who served in both Korea and Vietnam, who have called

for a safe and orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops over the next six

months to a year.

Instead of debating the merits of the ongoing occupation of Iraq and

the White House's lack of an exit strategy, the White House and the

Republican leadership in Congress have viciously attacked the integrity

of both Republican and Democratic critics of the administration's Iraq

war policies. Senator Hagel, a Republican from Nebraska, was so

outraged by such character assassination that he said recently, ``The

Bush administration must understand that each American has a right to

question our policies in Iraq and should not be demonized for

disagreeing with them. Suggesting that to challenge or criticize policy

is undermining and hurting our troops is not democracy nor what this

country has stood for, for over 200 years . . . Vietnam was a national

tragedy partly because Members of Congress failed their country,

remained silent and lacked the courage to challenge the Administrations

in power until it was too late . . . To question your government is not

unpatriotic--to not question your government is unpatriotic.''

It is particularly galling when individuals like Dick Cheney, who has

never served a day in the military, let alone been shot at by enemy

soldiers on behalf of our country, questions the integrity of genuine

heroes like Representative Murtha.

Let me be clear, I have not supported an immediate withdrawal from

Iraq. But, I do believe that in the wake of the December parliamentary

elections in Iraq that the U.S. should negotiate a timeline with the

new Iraqi government for the withdrawal of U.S. troops next year.

I was heartened when millions of Iraqis, even at risk of life and

limb, voted in late January to establish an interim government and

constitutional assembly and again in October in support of a new

Constitution. I wrote to President Bush just after the January

election, suggesting that the U.S. negotiate a timeline for a phased

withdrawal of U.S. troops with the newly elected government. I felt it

would be an ideal time to signal to the Iraqi people in a concrete way

that the U.S. has no long-term designs on their country. While the

President ignored my advice earlier this year, I renew my call and ask

that following the December elections in Iraq, the U.S. negotiate a

timeline to withdraw from Iraq next year.

While some have argued that announcing a timeline for withdrawal

would undermine our troops and allow the insurgents to wait us out, I

disagree.

Negotiating a timeline for withdrawal with the Iraqi government

elected next month would show that democracy ended the U.S. occupation

of Iraq, not terrorist or insurgent violence, and would allow our

troops to come home with honor.

Announcing the termination of the open-ended U.S. military commitment

in Iraq and

providing a concrete plan, including a timeline negotiated with the

Iraqi government, for withdrawal could also undermine support for

insurgents who have stoked the wide variety of grievances of ordinary

Iraqis arising from the occupation to generate popular support for

their cause. Most importantly, establishing a withdrawal plan and

timeline would remove one of the chief causes of instability in Iraq,

the occupation itself, by separating nationalist Iraqi insurgents

trying to end the occupation, both Sunni and Shia, from foreign

elements in Iraq for their own reasons. To the extent that a specific

withdrawal plan, with benchmarks for measuring success in stabilizing

Iraq, would turn Iraqis, both Sunni and Shia, against the foreign

terrorists operating in Iraq, it could be a key turning point in

stabilizing the country. Remember, the insurgency is made up of two

primary camps--nationalist Sunnis and foreign terrorists. These two

camps have different motivations and different goals.

A timeline and withdrawal plan negotiated with the Iraqi government

would also boost the Iraqi government's legitimacy and claim to self-

rule and would force the Iraqi government to take responsibility for

itself and its citizens.

Just as importantly, a specific plan and timeline for withdrawal

would provide much needed relief to over-burdened military personnel

and their families and provide some certainty to U.S. taxpayers

regarding the ultimate financial burden they'll be forced to bear.

A plan for withdrawal could also help the United States in our

broader fight against Islamic extremists with global ambitions, most

notably al-Qaeda, by taking away a recruiting tool and training ground.

Porter Goss, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, testified

to Congress earlier this year that, ``Islamic extremists are exploiting

the Iraqi conflict to recruit new anti-U.S. jihadists. These jihadists

who survive will leave Iraq experienced and focused on acts of urban

terrorism.'' He went on to say, ``The Iraq conflict, while not a cause

of extremism, has become a cause for extremists.'' And, the Commander

of U.S. forces in Iraq, General George Casey, testified to Congress

earlier this year that ``the perception of occupation in Iraq is a

major driving force behind the insurgency. ``

Finally, establishing a firm timeline for withdrawal could accelerate

the development of Iraqi security forces and deepen their commitment to

defending their own country and their own government by eliminating the

conflicted feelings they now feel by working with an occupying force.

It would allow them to be defending a sovereign Iraqi government,

rather than fighting on the side of an occupation force.

The House should be debating this important issue and strategies for

moving forward in Iraq instead of politically motivated straw man

resolutions.