Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may

consume.

This resolution before us clearly and explicitly states that this

body is committed to achieving victory in Iraq. The United States

should not go back on its commitments to confront tyranny and to ``make

the world safe for democracy.'' Failure is not a part of the American

nature nor of our moral fiber. It is certainly not a concept that is

acceptable to our men and women in the Armed Forces.

When we talk about progress in Iraq and concrete benchmarks for

measuring success, we need only look back at yesterday's landmark

nationwide elections in Iraq. Iraq's Independent Electoral Commission

reported that at least 97.5 percent of planned voting centers were

opened, monitored by up

to 120,000 observers, including 800 accredited by international

observer groups.

The U.N. envoy to Iraq said that the initial signs are very positive,

adding that ``anecdotal evidence shows that there has been good

turnout, that it was inclusive, and that security was well

maintained.''

Are we not in agreement that yesterday's vivid example of democracy

taking root in Iraq was a profound victory for the Iraqi people, for

our sons and daughters who continue to place themselves in harm's way,

and a resounding defeat to the brutal Islamic jihadists? Are we not in

agreement that this election empowers the people of the region who have

toiled under brutal dictatorships for far too long and that the success

of democracy yesterday in Iraq aided our efforts in the global war

against terror? Are we not in agreement that these elections could not

have been possible without the presence of our men and women in the

Armed Forces?

If we are in agreement that these most recent Iraqi elections were a

success and were met with very little violence and widespread

participation due to the presence of U.S. forces in support of Iraqi

security, then we should be in agreement with the totality of the text

of the resolution before us. We should not leave the Iraqi people at

this most critical juncture. We should not leave before they are fully

capable of protecting their own nation, their people, and their

incipient democracy from those who seek to destroy what they have been

creating because they wish to turn Iraq into a safe haven for Islamic

militants and extremist elements like Iran and Syria.

This is not in our nature, Mr. Speaker. This is not what our troops

want, and it is not what the Iraqi people want.

References have been made to calls for U.S. withdrawal, but let us

review some of those. Iraqi officials have not made such requests to

the U.S. Government. The Arab League, for example, their statement says

that it was the result of undue political pressure by rogue regimes,

particularly Syria and Iran, whose foreign minister was involved in the

drafting of the final communiqué.

We are fully aware that these pariah states have a vested interest in

seeing Iraq fail and assisting the foreign fighters who are launching

attacks against Iraqis and our U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq. We

have achieved significant progress thus far in Iraq. The political and

the psychological transformation that has taken place in Iraq will have

long-term positive impact on our efforts to curtail the spread of

Islamic extremists and jihadist activities.

Saddam Hussein would not be on trial today for his crimes against

humanity, and most of the villainous heirs to his legacy would not be

neutralized were it not for the critical role played by our U.S. Armed

Forces personnel. Without the presence of our forces, the people of

Iraq would not have had the opportunity to participate in the January

30, 2005, nationwide elections. They would not have returned to the

polls on October 15, again to approve their Constitution and would not

have been celebrating their new found democratic freedoms by

participating in yesterday's yet another historic election.

Our mission, however, Mr. Speaker, remains only partially

accomplished. Iraqi security forces are taking up more of the military

burden, and the new coalition for strategy for ``clear, hold, and

build'' is denying the insurgents many of their former sanctuaries.

The Iraqi Army and the police forces are growing larger, better

trained, more effective. These forces are also becoming increasingly

professional. Today, Iraqi security forces are now strong enough to

garrison and control cleared areas, as recently illustrated by the

resoundingly successful joint U.S. and Iraqi offensive in Tel Afar.

The Iraqi security forces are improving, but they cannot yet stand on

their own. To abandon them now would be to leave them at the mercy of

the brutal Islamic jihadists and would destroy the progress that we

have achieved thus far.

Again, this is not in our nature. As clause 5 of this resolution

states: Our presence in Iraq ``will be required only until Iraqi forces

can stand up so our forces can stand down and no longer than is

required for that purpose.''

Are we not in agreement on this critical point? Is it the contention

of those who oppose this resolution that we abandon the Iraqi people

after they have displayed immeasurable courage in the face of attacks

from Islamic jihadists and their state sponsors? We should not base our

strategy on artificial timelines. The criteria governing our eventual

withdrawal from Iraq must be performance based, not chronologically

based. Victory defined is: ``Final and complete defeat of an enemy in a

military encounter. Success in a struggle against . . . an opponent, or

an obstacle.''

Who is the enemy, the common enemy of Iraq and coalition forces, the

enemy of the American and Iraqi people, of those who want freedom and

democracy to flourish in Iraq? They are the Islamic jihadists and the

militants who are seeking to destroy what we have helped the Iraqi

people accomplish.

And what is our strategy for victory? One developed by our military

and policy planners in coordination with our coalition partners and our

Iraqi partners. Our military and policy planners track numerous

indicators to map our progress and adjust our tactics as necessary to

meet our strategic goals.

I would further add, Mr. Speaker, that despite some of the references

made to the alleged lack of a clear path to victory, the President has,

in fact, articulated our approach in the recent National Strategy for

Victory in Iraq. Many of these reports with metrics on our efforts, our

strategies, our goals, our accomplishments are readily available not

just to us in this Chamber but to the American people. We are not just

winning in Iraq, but we stand on the precipice of something far more

profound: a decisive shift away from the world of brutal dictatorships

which ruin their own societies through a combination of state-sponsored

murder and incitement, and toward the emergence of a modern, democratic

Middle East that takes its rightful place among free nations.

However, if we leave prematurely, Mr. Speaker, before the Iraqi

people are able to stand on their own, we risk endangering all that we

have worked so hard for and that some of our brave men and women in our

Armed Forces have also sacrificed for. Let us not diminish their

sacrifice by leaving their mission incomplete. Let us stand behind them

as they seek to bring home a definite victory for us in this war on

terror.

In closing, I would ask that we all recall the words of former

President Ronald Reagan, who said: ``It is up to us . . . to work

together for progress and humanity so that our grandchildren, when they

look back at us, can truly say that we not only preserved the flame of

freedom but cast its warmth and light further than those who came

before us.''

We have prevailed in the struggle against tyranny and fascism after

40 years in a global conflict. We prevailed in the battle of ideas

against communism. We will again prevail in defeating Islamic fascism

if we fulfill our mission in Iraq and do not heed the nay-saying of

defeatists. With freedom on our side, we cannot fail, Mr. Speaker.

I am proud of the service of my stepson, Doug Lehtinen, and his

fiancee, Lindsay Nelson, who are marine officers serving in Iraq flying

F-18s. They will tell us that setting an artificial deadline for

withdrawal would put them in harm's way. They are fully trained

military officers who understand that war is difficult; but they

believe in their mission, a mission for victory in Iraq, a mission

without a surrender statement.

As Joseph Lieberman, the Senator, said just a few days ago a

withdrawal, a withdrawal on an artificial timeline would discourage our

troops because it seems to be heading for the door. It will encourage

the terrorists. It will confuse the Iraqi people.

I agree with Senator Lieberman, and I hope my colleagues do as well

today.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.