Mr. Speaker, once again, the House Republican leadership

refuses to allow an honest debate over the future of the U.S. military

presence in Iraq. The American people, and in particularly our men and

women in uniform serving honorably in difficult circumstances in Iraq,

deserve more than cheerleading and sloganeering by Congress and the

President. Unfortunately, empty gestures are all this Congress provides

with this resolution.

Like all of my colleagues in Congress, 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. And, the early reporting

on yesterday's election for a new four-year parliament in Iraq has been

positive. There has been progress in Iraq. I congratulate the Iraqis on

the election, and I commend our troops for helping to provide security

for the election.

Unfortunately, I cannot support the resolution on the floor today

because it contains the blatantly false assertion that negotiating a

time line for withdrawal of U.S. forces with the Iraqi government is

somehow inconsistent with achieving victory in Iraq. To the contrary, I

believe that negotiating a timeline for withdrawal of U.S. forces is a

prerequisite for stabilizing Iraq and bringing our troops home with

honor beginning early next year.

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 well undermine support

for insurgents. The majority of insurgent fighters are Iraqi Sunnis who

have stoked the wide variety of grievances of ordinary Iraqis arising

from the U.S. military presence 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 U.S.

military presence itself, by separating nationalist Iraqi insurgents

trying to end the U.S. military presence, both Sunni and Shia, from

foreign elements in Iraq for their own reasons. As, 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.'' A specific withdrawal

plan, with benchmarks for measuring success in stabilizing Iraq, could

turn Iraqis, both Sunni and Shia, against the foreign terrorists

operating in Iraq. This could be a key turning point in stabilizing the

country.

A time line and withdrawal plan negotiated with the Iraqi government

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

rule, and force the Iraqi government to take responsibility for itself

and its citizens. Negotiating a withdrawal timeline and strategy with

the Iraqi government could, more than possibly anything else, improve

the standing of the Iraqi government in the eyes of its own people, a

significant achievement in a region in which the standing of rulers and

governments is generally low.

Similarly, 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. It

would eliminate the conflict they now feel by working with what many of

them see as an occupying force. It would allow them to defend a

sovereign Iraqi government, rather than fight alongside U.S. forces. As

long as the U.S. military remains in Iraq, Iraqi politicians and

security forces will use it as a crutch and will likely fail to take

the necessary steps to settle their differences and establish an

effective, inclusive and independent government.

Negotiating a timeline for withdrawal with the newly elected Iraqi

government 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.

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 financial burden they'll be forced to bear.

Finally, 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 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.''

The House should be debating this important issue and strategies for

moving forward in Iraq instead of politically motivated misleading

resolutions.