I thank the distinguished gentlewoman and my good friend

from Florida for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, we are come to this floor today, it seems to me, in an

important moment in the life of two nations. We are come to this floor

at a time when our colleagues in the other body are debating a Defense

authorization bill and will be considering amendments about a new

course in Iraq.

So I do not question the decision of the majority in this chamber to

consider these same issues, particularly in light of the release of the

initial benchmark assessment report by our military and diplomatic

leadership in Iraq. It is a report, I must confess, Mr. Speaker, that

is to me frustrating, as it is, I think, to Members on both sides of

this aisle. Of 18 benchmarks included in the interim report to

Congress, progress on eight of the benchmarks has been characterized as

satisfactory, but progress on another eight are unsatisfactory, with it

being too early to tell on another two.

Two months from now, the Crocker-Petraeus report that Congress has

been promised will provide, we believe, a broader assessment. But,

frankly, I am struggling, as a strong supporter of our effort in Iraq,

with the failure of this Iraqi Government to step forward with progress

toward enacting legislation on de-Ba'athification reform, hydrocarbon

resources reform, and the scheduling of and planning of provincial

elections.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be transparent about that frustration as much

as I was when I met with Iraqi cabinet officials just a short 2 months

ago. The Iraqi Government must do more. If there is any unintended

benefit of this debate today, my hope is that some of this debate with

that message would echo to those people.

But that being said, I will oppose this measure, Mr. Speaker, because

I truly believe that defeat and an American failure in Iraq is not an

option that we can consider.

With great respect to my colleagues who would endorse this proposal

for a precipitous American withdrawal from Iraq by April 1 of next

year, I truly believe that, before we make any decision adjusting our

strategy on the ground, we ought to wait to hear from those Americans

on the ground in Iraq who have been charged with implementing the

strategy the President put into effect in January.

I want to reiterate, and I think I speak for many Republicans, Mr.

Speaker, as the President said in January, our commitment to this Iraqi

Government is not open-ended. But my commitment to an American and

Iraqi success is deep and heartfelt. Whether this Iraqi Government can

rise to that challenge or not, as the gentleman from Indiana in the

other body said, we must find a way to forge agreement to achieve

success in Iraq.

The good news of the assessment that has come before the Congress is

that we have been achieving some progress as a result of the

President's surge strategy on the ground. Between May and June, 26

high-level al Qaeda leaders have been killed or captured.

I know there are some, even the gentleman who just spoke, who

questioned whether we are fighting al Qaeda in Iraq. Our soldiers don't

question that. Eleven of those al Qaeda leaders killed or captured were

emirs, local al Qaeda leaders; seven were facilitators who smuggled

foreign weapons; and five were cell leaders who commanded terrorist

units.

U.S. operations in the last 2 months, according to the reports

released this week, have also uncovered an al Qaeda media network in a

nondescript facility outside Samarra. U.S. forces also, I am happy to

report, received 23,000 tips during this period of time, which is four

to five times the number of tips we were receiving last year.

But, again, that goes against the backdrop of disappointing news.

While the American soldier performs with courage and effectiveness, the

Iraqi government still fails to demonstrate the urgency.

So as I struggle, I would just ask my colleagues on the other side of

the aisle who share my concerns about the lack of progress in Iraq, as

to this solution you bring to the floor, how will your plan for a

unilateral withdrawal keep American soldiers safe?

We have 160,000 soldiers there now. The majority of this Congress

would call for them to exit Iraq by April 1. Well, in effect it would

take 3,000 large convoys, according to some press reports, to evacuate

the country down the one road out through Basra and into Kuwait.

Also I would ask, how would this plan for unilateral withdrawal

decrease the number of terrorist safe havens in that country? And since

al Qaeda is clearly in Iraq, how would the plan for unilateral

withdrawal succeed in fighting al Qaeda in Iraq?

Lastly, I say as the ranking member of the Middle East Subcommittee,

how will a withdrawal, a precipitous, reckless, irresponsible

withdrawal, make the Middle East safer and more stable?

I fear if we lose Iraq, we will lose Israel. We must come together as

a Nation to find a way forward to succeed in Iraq.