Mr. Speaker, I will vote today for a resolution

that would finally draw the war in Iraq to a close, and that would for

the first time put conditions of self-determination on the Iraqi

government that has benefited from our country's generosity. While I

was not yet in Congress at the time of the original authorization

debate in 2002, I have concluded that the authorization decision was

wrong and that too many American lives have been sacrificed for the

dubious cause of advancing the interests of one side of an Iraqi civil

war over the other.

It is also my belief that Congress has the unmistakable authority to

put time limits on the commitment of American forces and to attach

strings to the manner in which military funds are spent: Congress has

used this power before in Lebanon, Vietnam, and Somalia, and most

recently, during the second term of the Clinton Administration, when

Republican congressional majorities imposed restrictions on the use of

ground forces and on the duration of the force commitment made during

the Balkan conflict.

Some of my colleagues who share my opposition to the war have

suggested that this resolution has the defect of not going far enough

in that it does not require an immediate withdrawal of American forces.

I disagree: for the sake of regional stability, any withdrawal should

be more orderly and more measured than the haphazard way American

forces were deployed in the first place.

Other anti-war critics argue that a Democratic Congress has a moral

imperative to take a bolder course, such as repeal of the 2002

authorization or a pledge to impound funding for additional

deployments. While I agree that the test of Democratic legislation

cannot be whether it would attract a Presidential veto (if that is the

standard, Democrats would be immobilized this next 2 years), it is

reasonable for the Democratic leadership to pursue a bill that can win

overwhelming Democratic support, including those members from more

conservative districts whose opposition to the war comes at some

political cost.

Finally, I respect the concern of some Alabamians that any withdrawal

from Iraq is a loss of prestige that will embolden our enemies. While

this is not a trivial argument, the reality is that radical Islamic

fundamentalism has exploded into a civil war in Iraq and that Al Queda

will be a generation-long threat. These conflicts will rage on

regardless of whether we are in combat in Iraq because they are rooted

not in an assessment of our strength but in a permanent disdain for our

values.

We need to engage Islamic terrorism on a different ground, such as

Afghanistan, where Al Queda is resurgent, and we should use the

leverage from a withdrawal from Iraq to cement international resistance

to the Iranian nuclear program. Lines should be drawn in the sand

around Israel's security, and the steady work of cultivating Arab

moderates and isolating Arab radicals should continue. But it is time

to end our active engagement in the disaster that is Iraq.