Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to the resolution.

Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear on the points we can agree.

Every Member of this House was horrified by the terrorist attacks of

September 11, 2001.

Every Member of this House believes we must do what is necessary to

defend our country and our people from future attacks and to eliminate

the threat of terrorism.

And every Member of this House supports our troops and their

families, and we commend them for their honorable service under very

difficult and stressful circumstances.

But today, Mr. Speaker, this House debates the ongoing war in Iraq,

not the struggle against terrorism.

I voted no when the House considered the Congressional Resolution

authorizing the President to Invade Iraq.

At that time, I had several crucial questions that needed clear

answers:

1. What is the nature and the urgency of the Iraqi threat to the

United States?

2. What is the mission of our troops?

3. How much international support will we have?

4. Will this military operation in Iraq increase terrorism or

decrease terrorism?

5. What is the exit strategy to withdraw our troops from Iraq?

Despite my questions on the rationale for the war, I have

consistently supported the funding for our troops.

They deserve our full support, and they deserve to have everything

necessary for their mission.

And as the father of two sons who have served in the military, I

would want no less.

Mr. Speaker, we now know that Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of

mass destruction.

President Bush has publicly acknowledged that there was no link or

connection between Saddam Hussein and the terrorist attacks on 9/11.

The mission of our troops seems to change and expand daily.

As for international support, the American taxpayer has foot the vast

majority of the costs to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars.

And American fighting men and women, and their families, have borne

the vast majority of the deaths and injuries to coalition troops, over

2,500 killed and 18,000 wounded.

Moreover, many of the original members of our coalition have

withdrawn or are withdrawing their troops from Iraq, leaving the U.S.

to shoulder the burden almost alone.

Are we safer today than we were before the invasion of Iraq?

According to U.S. State Department data, there were 175 international

terrorist attacks in 2003, and that was a 20-year high.

In 2004, the number jumped three-fold to 650 attacks.

In 2005, 11,111 terror attacks were reported by the state department.

Finally, the Bush Administration does not now nor ever has had a

viable exit strategy for our troops in Iraq.

Saying, ``we will stand down as the Iraqis stand up'' puts the fate

and future of American troops completely at the mercy of the competence

of the Iraqi government and its security forces.

I agree with the resolution before us, we should not set an

``arbitrary'' date for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

But we should set intelligent, well-thought out benchmarks that make

the most sense for American national interests.

Setting reasonable benchmarks for the departure of our troops would

send several important messages.

To the Iraqi national government--get your house in order now!

To the Iraqi Sunnis opposing our occupation now is the time to cut

your best deal with the Shiite and Kurdish factions while the U.S. is

still able to act as an honest broker.

To our American military leaders--here is a date to which you can

plan, knowing when the rebuilding of our military capabilities can

begin.

To the American people we have done what we could.

From this point on, it is now up to the Iraqi people to find their

way, with the support of the international community.

And finally, to the terrorists the Iraqi people will deal with you

now if you remain in Iraq.

For all the other terrorists outside of Iraq, the United States can

now shift the full force of its military, diplomatic, law enforcement,

and economic resources to the single task of hunting you down and

bringing you to justice.