Mr. Speaker, I rise today to reiterate that now is not the

time to bring our troops home from Iraq. Our soldiers have done a

valiant effort in fighting terrorism and bringing a semblance of law

and order to the chaos in the region and it would be shortsighted to

lay out a specific timetable to bring U.S. troops home prematurely

before their mission is accomplished. Over the last 12 months, enormous

progress has been made in training Iraqi security forces and already we

are seeing the fruits of our labors. Iraqi forces took the lead in

election security and maintaining order during the December elections.

In Southern Iraq control of the countryside is already in the process

of being transferred from Japanese and Australian peacekeepers to Iraqi

security forces. Slowly but surely this approach of having Iraqi forces

take the lead in patrolling the streets of their cities while the U.S.

military moves their troops to the perimeter is taking hold. As Iraqi

forces continue to stand up, American forces will stand down. Congress

needs to ensure that by our actions we don't send a message to our

Iraqi allies that the United States is lessening its resolve and going

back on our commitment to achieve our strategy for victory in Iraq and

defeat the terrorist insurgents who are threatening this victory. While

the United States will continue to face setbacks as we move forward

with our mission to transfer authority over to the Iraqi people, we

have to be firm in maintaining our resolve and finish what we started

by achieving a lasting peace in Iraq.

Everyone agrees that our ultimate goal is to establish a free, open

and democratic Iraqi government and bring our men and women in uniform

home as soon as possible. Nevertheless, we have a responsibility to our

troops to ensure that terrorism does not prevail in the Middle East.

Any Congressional agreement of an arbitrary time table to bring our

troops home before we have accomplished our mission is unacceptable and

could potentially increase the risk to our soldiers. I have confidence

in our military leadership and in our troops that we will ultimately

prevail in our war on terror. I look forward to the day when we can

transfer U.S. authority over to Iraq's elected leaders and to a

completed transition of power and governance of Iraq.