Mr. Speaker, today, without a doubt, we should

congratulate the Iraqi people for what appears to be a successful,

high-turnout election.

For the third time this year, courageous Iraqi citizens have

enthusiastically exercised their democratic rights.

But successful elections do not, and cannot, obscure the devastating

national tragedy that is the Iraq war.

It doesn't change the fact that over 2,100 Americans have died for

weapons of mass destruction that never existed.

It doesn't change the fact that this war has turned Iraq into a

hotbed of terrorist activity.

It doesn't change the fact that our troops are sitting ducks for the

insurgents, who have been emboldened--not deterred--by our military

presence in Iraq.

Here's the bottom line: a successful Iraqi election should, at the

very least, reinforce the imperative of bringing our troops home. If

Iraq is truly able to self-govern, then we have no business occupying

their country and meddling in their affairs.

I've argued all year long that it's time to restore Iraqi sovereignty

and give Iraq back to the Iraqi people. If the election is a watershed

moment as the White House claims . . . then what is the continued

justification for having our troops over there in harm's way?

Now is the time to enlist the support of the international community

to establish an interim security force for Iraq. But that's just the

start.

As I've written to the President in a letter signed by 61 other

members of the House, the United States must also launch a ``diplomatic

offensive,'' recasting our role in Iraq as reconstruction partner

rather than military occupier.

We must also lead the way in establishing an international peace

commission to oversee the post-war reconciliation and coordinate peace

talks between Iraq's various factions.

The majority of the American people aren't behind it. Our global

allies aren't behind it. The Iraqi people aren't behind it. Even Iraqi

leaders--Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish alike, who agree on practically

nothing--have united around a call for the United States military to

leave.

With the Iraqi people having voted once again, let's offer the

ultimate vote of confidence in their democracy. Let's reward the self-

sufficiency they've demonstrated--by giving them their country back and

bringing American soldiers home.