Mr. Speaker, before we vote on this measure, the

American people need to know that U.S. troops in Iraq have achieved

significant security gains. Violence against U.S. troops and Iraqi

civilians has fallen dramatically, and forces of chaos have had their

safe havens and supply lines systematically eliminated. In fact, it was

recently announced that the curfew in Baghdad may soon be lifted.

Mr. Speaker, we can all agree that the goal is to end the war, but

this must be done in a solicitous and strategic manner. While there is

clearly military momentum in Iraq, the situation remains fragile and

complex, and our work continues to be very dangerous and difficult.

Establishing an arbitrary deadline for withdrawal of our troops would

potentially undermine the stabilization of the country, especially in

light of recent security gains.

However, I would submit that one area of potential agreement in this

body involves a renewed spirit of diplomacy for the region. It is time

for a diplomatic surge. The gains made possible by the steadfast

competence of our troops gives rise to a new diplomatic potential in

the effort to curtail regional destabilizing influences, promote

political and economic progress, as well as provide for the safe and

stable transition of refugees throughout the area.

The recent meeting in Istanbul, Turkey of countries neighboring Iraq,

the upcoming meeting in Annapolis to further the Middle East peace

process, and the United Nation's own recent reengagement in Baghdad are

all positive diplomatic trends that should be aggressively supported

and augmented by our efforts in this House to facilitate the rapid

stabilization of Iraq, potentially empowering an even more rapid

drawdown of our troops and a sustainable peace for the country.