Mr. Speaker, I hadn't realized the juxtaposition that

the speakers would have this evening. But my remarks, I think, dovetail

somewhat with the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Woolsey) in regard

to addressing the issue of withdrawing from Iraq and exit strategy and

so on. We hear a lot of debate about that.

And I am not here to debate the merits of the war in the Middle East.

I am not here to talk about the intelligence leading up to the war, but

I would like to address the current reality of the situation, we are

there. We made sacrifices. We have lost roughly 1,700 soldiers. We have

spent billions of dollars.

And yet as I traveled to the Middle East, I have been to Iraq three

times, I have been to Afghanistan once, Kuwait once, I have been amazed

at our soldiers' morale. And they often tell me this, they say there

are two wars that we are fighting over here, there is the war that we

see on CNN, the bombings, the beheadings, and then there is the war

that we are actually experiencing.

And I wondered if you please go home and tell the American people

what we are seeing and what we feel about the situation. So as far as

Afghanistan is concerned, I met with a Colonel this morning who just

returned from Afghanistan. We realize we have disrupted the terrorist

training camps, their funding for terrorists have been disrupted, the

Taliban has been removed, they have a representative government,

constitution, and a great leader in Karzai. So we have made

considerable progress.

It is not perfect, but things have certainly gone well there. As far

as Iraq is concerned, Saddam Hussein has been deposed. And I am the

cochair of the Iraqi Womens Caucus. So I meet with Iraqi women in Iraq

and also here. And the one thing that they continually tell me is this:

They say, you know, Iraq is still a dangerous place. There is a lot of

bad things. But for the first time in 30 years, we now have hope. We

now see a future. And hope is a very powerful thing.

As far as education is concerned, the school attendance has increased

by 80 percent, most of those are young women for the first time going

to school. Health care, 97 percent of the young people have been

vaccinated for the first time. We all know about the elections and how

that empowered the Iraqi people. And one thing that we do not hear much

about is economic activity, Iraqi income has doubled in the last year.

So a great deal has been accomplished. So as far as the strategy is

concerned, or is there an exit strategy, what are we talking about

here?

It is very clear. If you talk to General Casey, you talk to General

Petraeus, they say here is the objective. We are going to train 270,000

Iraqis. And they will give you charts that show you explicitly that

they have trained more than 150,000, and they are armed and they are

proficient at this point. So we are training about 10,000 a month. So

the math indicates that about 1 year from now we will be at 270,000.

The other thing that has to happen, in addition to the 270,000

trained, is we have to make sure that Iraq can control its own destiny,

we have to have a stable government, and we have seen some improvement

in that direction as well.

We have seen the Iraqis now out in front in most military actions.

There are portions of the country where Iraqis are solely in control

militarily. So we see signs that are good. The big question, the wild

card at this point is Sunni involvement in the government. And Al

Jafari will tell you, General Casey will tell you, we do not know how

that is going to go, so we cannot give a precise timetable.

Declaring that we would pull out at a date certain, I think, would be

counterproductive. It would be a like giving a playbook to an opponent,

as a coach, something you would not do. You would not give insurgents a

date certain, where they can wait and say, well, this is the time when

a certain amount of troops will be gone and we can go therefore begin

to attack, and certainly encourage terrorists.

A young captain in Kuwait told me this. He said, if we pull out

prematurely, three things will happen. Number 1, the 1,700 soldiers

that we have had killed there will have died in vain, and we will have

to tell their families that. Number 2, tens of thousands of Iraqis will

be killed in the ensuing conflict, and we promised them, we gave them

our word that this would not happen, that we would not pull out

prematurely.

And, thirdly, we would have encouraged terrorists around the world.

And so it seems to me that the course that we are pursuing, while not

perfect, makes some sense, and we definitely do have an exit strategy.