Mr. Speaker, beginning in January 2005, speaking from

this very spot just about every single night that I could on the House

floor, I've declared again and again my conviction that we must bring

our troops home from Iraq. I was actually the first Member of Congress

to bring legislation to the House floor to end the war in Iraq, and now

at long last it is finally happening. Eighty-eight months after

President Bush declared President Obama has

kept his promise to redeploy our fighting forces out of Iraq.

To be sure, however, there is still a long way to go before we can

declare that this war is over. There are still Americans in harm's way

in Iraq--50,000 servicemen and -women as well as countless contractors,

but they are remaining behind to train Iraqi Security Forces, and it is

expected they will leave by the end of next year.

Every single American, Mr. Speaker, has sacrificed for this policy of

invading a sovereign nation without provocation and under false

pretenses. The Iraq war has drained the American people of nearly

three-quarters of $1 trillion. This is money, much of it borrowed from

foreign creditors, which we are essentially taking from our children

and grandchildren.

And then there are the things you can't quantify--the moral authority

we have squandered; the national credibility we have lost; the trust of

our global neighbors that we won't soon recover. Of course no sacrifice

was greater than the one borne by our men and women in uniform and

their families; 4,400 Americans died unnecessarily, upwards of 30,000

are wounded, and tens of thousands more are suffering from post-

traumatic stress. The men and women deployed to Iraq, Mr. Speaker, have

served with courage, they have served with honor, and we owe them our

never-ending gratitude, and we owe them our concern and our support.

Now that the occupation is drawing to a close in Iraq, however, the

Iraqi people have a chance to build the brighter future that they

deserve. To help them in that endeavor, even as we phase out the

military campaign, we must step up our commitment on other fronts.

We must embrace the smart security platform I have spoken of so often

in these chambers. That means a civilian surge of aid workers,

diplomats and other experts who can help the Iraqi people rebuild their

country, strengthen democratic institutions, and empower their citizens

with education and economic opportunity.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let me say this: We are still a Nation at war.

The conflict in Afghanistan, often forgotten when Iraq was at its

worst, lingers on hopelessly and disastrously. There are some who

believe more time is needed in Afghanistan to turn the corner. But if

we've learned one lesson from Iraq, it's that prolonging the war only

emboldens the very forces we're trying to defeat.

Just as President Obama kept his word to end combat operations by a

date certain in Iraq, he must do the same in Afghanistan. I strongly

urge the President to stick to his own deadline of next July, and I,

for one, will

not rest until all of our troops are out of danger and brought safely

home.