Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of debate on

this House floor recently about the war in Iraq and not so much about

Afghanistan, interestingly, but certainly about Iraq. Some in Congress

are clamoring for us to pull out of Iraq immediately. Some want a

timetable indicating a date certain when we will withdraw. Some say

there is no plan concerning postwar Iraq, no exit strategy. I would

like to address each of these points just briefly.

Number 1, we promised the Iraqi people that we would not pull out

prematurely. Remember that back in the Gulf War in the early 1990s, we

made a similar promise. We did pull out, and thousands of Iraqis died.

We have had a very difficult time regaining their trust since. I think

to this point we may have regained some of that status and some of that

trust.

A date certain on which we will leave Iraq will encourage insurgents

to hang on until that date and then intensify the attacks. I think the

date certain of withdrawal will certainly be looked upon by many

insurgents as a sign that they were winning, a sign of victory. I am

sure they would claim victory at that point.

Also, I think it is important that a withdrawal without victory will

dishonor the memories of those who have died and sacrificed, and I, for

one, would very much hate to go back and face some of those parents and

some of those husbands and wives who have lost soldiers in the war and

try to tell them that basically their son, their daughter, their

husband, or their wife died for no cause at all. That would be very,

very difficult for them to swallow.

Then I think most of us who have been overseas, and a great many

Members of Congress have, have been to Iraq and Afghanistan and Kuwait,

and Landstuhl in Germany to the hospital, and up to Walter Reed, and

one thing that we found almost universally is that our soldiers have

tremendous morale. They have a very strong sense of mission, and they

have a real sense of purpose. Almost to a person the military personnel

that I have talked to would tell you that they absolutely do not want

to leave this thing undone. They want to make sure there is a sense of

accomplishment and a sense of purpose.

Finally, let us address the issue of no plan, that there is no

strategy, no exit plan at all. We might refer to this chart here. One

year ago, there was one Iraqi military battalion that was trained and

equipped. Now there are more than 100 battalions trained and equipped,

and those are reflected over here on this 75,791 total of Ministry of

Defense forces. Also, in addition, there are 90,883 policemen and other

patrol and security guards that have been trained. So it is a total of

170,000 Iraqis who are currently trained and equipped.

I have been to Iraq where I have seen some of this training occur. I

have been to Amman, Jordan, where a lot of the police academies are

held. So at the present time we are aiming for 270,000, and we are most

of the way there. We still have 100,000 to go, and we are training

about 10,000 a month. So that means in about 10 months we will be at

roughly 270,000.

General Petraeus says there is no shortage of volunteers; we have

more people applying for this position than we have slots to fill them

at the present time.

So I think we are in reasonably good shape. The exit strategy is

obviously to draw down our forces as the Iraqis are able to take

control of the situation, and currently, in almost every military

action, Iraqis are out in front. There are many areas of Iraq at the

present time where there are no U.S. forces. Iraqi forces are totally

in control, not a whole lot of those areas, but there are some. So the

Iraqis are assuming more and more responsibility for their own

protection. At the present time, there are 21,000 fewer Americans in

Iraq than there were in January. So there has been some drawdown at the

present time.

One of the wild card situations is the Sunnis. Recently, the Sunnis,

it was reported, reached a resolution with the Shias and the Kurds as

to their role in government. I think if that can be accomplished, then

we are in reasonably good shape for a resolution.

A constitution will be written by August 15. It will be approved by

October 15, and a new government will be elected on December 15.

So there is a strategy. Progress is being made. It is a very

difficult situation. I really, truly believe all Members, both sides of

the aisle, are very much in support of our troops. I think it is

important that we support them with our votes, with money, with

equipment, and also with our words, because our words that are spoken

on this House floor and in the press certainly reverberate around the

world and al Jazeera.

So I know our troops very much are hoping that we will show

unqualified and tremendous resolution in resolving this issue.