Mr. President, we are today at war--in Iraq, Afghanistan,

and so many other places in the world, with an enemy who knows no

borders. The recent bombings in Amman, Jordan during a wedding

celebration are a strong reminder that terrorists know no limits to

their ambitions and the means by which they would achieve those

ambitions, however violent and horrific.

Our dedicated American service men and women have answered a noble

calling to defeat terrorism, taking the fight to the terrorists abroad,

so that we do not have to fight them here at home. The central

battleground in the war on terror is Iraq. It has been just 3 years

since Iraq was liberated from the brutal regime of an evil dictator,

and in that time, we have made tremendous progress. A constitutional

democracy is taking hold, and the Middle East is moving towards greater

stability. It is integral to the continued progress in this region and

to the overall war on terror that we not allow the cowardly acts of

insurgents to derail our efforts. America must stand firm with the

Iraqis and see that this danger is defeated and freedom prevails.

Last January, the world watched as Iraqis voted for a new government.

Rejecting intimidation and embracing the foundations of freedom, 8.5

million Iraqis went to the polls to vote in a free national election.

Just last month, Iraqis returned to the polls once again for a

referendum on a new constitution. This time, we saw significantly fewer

insurgent attacks, with nearly 9.8 million Iraqis voting, and 79

percent supporting the approval of the new constitution. Iraqis have

shown great courage by participating in the democratic process. They

have walked for miles to the polls, stood in line for hours, and

literally put their lives on the line to cast a vote for peace. Eighty-

three-year-old Qadir Abdullah, seen here, made his way to the polls--on

crutches. He said,

After decades of tragedy, there is a new

optimism, as shown by the willingness of Iraqis to step forward and

vote for a brighter future. And the success of the referendum indeed is

a powerful milestone on Iraq's road to democracy.

In another sign of progress toward democracy, the Sunnis, who in

large measure refused to even participate in the January elections,

turned out in great numbers to vote in the constitutional referendum,

exercising their right to engage in the democratic process. And in

recent weeks, three major Sunni political groups have united to

participate in the December 15 elections, in which Iraqis will elect a

new national assembly to pass legislation and implement the

constitution.

And Iraq has seen tremendous progress toward freedom in the new

public services, infrastructure, free press, economic activity, and

legal institutions that are critical to the longterm success of this

democracy.

Over 3,400 public schools have been built; Hundreds of water and

sewage projects, 149 new health facilities, and over 250 fire and

police stations have been completed.

Before the war, Iraq's media was tightly controlled by Saddam

Hussein's

propaganda machine. The country had no commercial TV or radio stations,

and no independent newspapers or magazines. Today, Iraq has a thriving,

competitive, free press, with 44 commercial TV stations, 72 commercial

radio stations, and more than 100 independent newspapers and magazines.

Iraqis can now make up their own minds, based on varying viewpoints in

a marketplace of ideas, about the future of their new democracy.

And another foundation of freedom is taking hold--Iraq is

experiencing the beginnings of a competitive financial market, with a

modernized Iraqi stock exchange.

And Iraqis are for the first time experiencing the rule of law at

work in their legal system, with an independent judiciary free to judge

cases on their merits, not under the orders of Saddam Hussein and his

henchmen.

Ever more, Iraqis are seeing the insurgents for the thugs, thieves,

and indiscriminate killers that they are. In just the past nine months,

there has been an astonishing 500 percent increase in the number of

tips regarding insurgents that Iraqi civilians are providing to

security forces.

Iraq is the central battleground in the war on terror. And yet

despite the evident progress, some want to cut and run. They claim that

our troops have simply done all that they can do, and that the United

States should set arbitrary timelines for withdrawing our forces. Mr.

President, I strongly disagree and believe that setting such a timeline

would only embolden the terrorists and send the message that the United

States has lost its resolve in the war on terror. This is the wrong

message. Any timeline for withdrawal must be driven by success--not

artificially tied to a calendar.

This is not the first time in our history when cynics and skeptics

have balked in the face of landmark challenges. A few years may have

passed since I had the pleasure of serving President Ronald Reagan in

his Cabinet, but I can still remember the naysayers attacking him for

his fixed resolve in fighting the cold war. They questioned President

Reagan's reasoning, they questioned his strategy, and they questioned

America's chances of coming away victorious in a battle to free Russia

and other countries from the grasp of communism. President Reagan

rejected communism, he rejected the iron curtain, and he refused to

concede that freedom would not prevail. While the Soviet Union was

extending its influence and doctrine throughout the world, President

Reagan, in the face of severe criticism, pursued a different vision. He

knew that the enemy must be defeated, not tolerated. We now know he was

right in his actions to bring an end to communism--millions were freed

and that global threat no longer exists.

Today, naysayers are at it again. Their droning doubt is all too

familiar. Much of this defeatist criticism is being leveled by the very

same people who, having access to the same intelligence as the

president, agreed that Iraq posed a real and immediate threat. And

these very same people supported going into Iraq to fight the war on

terror. Now they want to throw up their hands and walk away before the

job is done.

No one ever said this would be easy, and mistakes have certainly been

made. This is a war--and it is painful and horrific. Every life lost is

one tragic loss too many. But we must ensure that their sacrifice was

not in vain.

We must honor our fallen heroes, heroes like Major Jeffrey

Toczylowski, by completing the job they set out to do. Major

Toczylowski, seen here, was a Special Forces detachment commander

assigned to the 10th Special Forces Group. Two weeks ago in Anbar

province, he made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. In his last

email home to his family and friends, he wrote how they should respond

if he were to lose his life in battle: And I quote:

What a powerful testament to the commitment of our service members

fighting the war on terror.

Just yesterday, we debated an amendment to the Defense authorization

bill that would have forced the administration to set an arbitrary date

for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. I am pleased the Senate rejected

this proposal. The Frist-Warner amendment we accepted--79-19--sent a

message--a forward-looking message--that we expect the Iraqis to

continue their progress--and the Congress, in its oversight, will

continue to receive reports on the progress being made. The timeline we

should focus on is December l5 the election of a parliamentary

government. The establishment of a constitutional democracy, coupled

with the continued training of Iraqi security forces--now exceeding

210,000 personnel--will in time allow the Iraqis to defend themselves,

and the United States to bring our troop levels down.

Around the country, Iraqi forces are now overseeing 72 percent of

security checkpoints and leading 43 percent of all combat patrols. Two

Iraqi brigades have been assigned their own battle space in Baghdad in

an area once a haven for insurgents.

Freedom and democracy in Iraq are the terrorists' worst nightmare.

They know what is at stake and try desperately to derail our success.

In a letter intercepted last month from Bin Laden's deputy Zawahiri to

al-Qaida's leader in Iraq--the terror network's plan was exposed: to

expel the Americans from Iraq, establish radical Islamist authority in

the country, and extend the terrorists' jihad into neighboring

countries and around the world. They seek to destroy our very way of

life. We cannot cut and run--we know all too well what is at stake in

this global war against terror. To our men and women in uniform who are

protecting our freedom and our security, I say thank you and God bless

you. You make us so very proud.