Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of this

resolution, and yield myself such time as I may consume.

This resolution expresses the sense of Congress that the United

States should establish a consulate in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. As

the United States military presence in Iraq winds down and our

diplomatic presence increases, a consulate in northern Iraq will prove

indispensable to America. Fifteen countries, including Iran, Turkey,

and a leading number of European countries, have already opened

consulates in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan regional government.

It would benefit U.S. national security to follow suit. American

economic interests would also be served by opening a consulate in

northern Iraq. Indeed, Iraqi Kurdistan offers numerous business

opportunities across a number of important sectors, including energy

development and infrastructure. The lack of a consulate in northern

Iraq is preventing U.S. firms from taking full advantage of these new

economic opportunities in a rapidly developing region. Instead,

contracts are going to Iranian, European, Turkish, and Asian

corporations.

Finally, the absence of a U.S. consulate in northern Iraq makes it

extremely difficult for the residents of that region--Kurds, Arabs, and

others--to gain access to U.S. consular services. Iraqis from the north

must drive more than 200 miles to reach the American Embassy in

Baghdad. And

some of the territory they are forced to cover is treacherous. This is

no way to encourage Iraqi communication with American diplomats or to

handle passport issues.

Madam Speaker, this year, the State Department modified its travel

warning for Iraq, reflecting the relative safety and security in the

Kurdistan region. And we must not forget that the Kurdish people of

Iraq have been partners with the United States for many years. I

believe that the establishment of the United States consulate in the

Kurdistan region of Iraq will demonstrate our strong commitment to

maintaining and building upon a success and stability that has already

been achieved in that part of Iraq, thanks in large part to the proud,

brave, and courageous warriors from our armed services. I also believe

that we should open consulates in the majority Shia south and the

majority Sunni Arab center of the country to expand America's

diplomatic reach and presence throughout Iraq.

Madam Speaker, the future of United States-Iraqi relations will be

based on diplomacy and security. Expanding our consular access in

northern Iraq will contribute both to our national security goals and

to the stabilization and success of the Iraqi nation. I encourage all

of my colleagues to support H. Res. 873.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.