

Statement on House Resolution to Debate the Global War on Terror -- June 15, 2006

MR. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the resolution and I commend the brave American and coalition soldiers and all other personnel who have risked their lives to fight terror and promote freedom both at home and abroad. These courageous men and women have made tremendous sacrifices to ensure our security, and they deserve our utmost respect and appreciation.

There have been three successful elections held in Iraq since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, and in recent weeks significant progress, both politically and militarily, has been made in the region. As a former member of the House Intelligence Committee, I firmly believe that the elimination of al-Zarqawi will prove to be a key psychological and organizational blow to al Qaeda's terrorist network.

Still, the facts are undeniable - progress in Iraq and Afghanistan has come at a tremendous cost. My small State of Delaware alone has lost fourteen brave soldiers, each of whom honorably served their state and nation. My heart goes out to these noble Delawareans and their families.

And while elections and military victories are crucial, many challenges still lie ahead. We are now facing a critical stage in the war on terrorism, and it is essential that the international community come together to support Iraq's efforts to build a strong, unified government capable of steering the country toward a path of peace and democracy.

Although, several of my colleagues have suggested that the U.S. should set a hard deadline for withdrawal from the region, I believe such a course would be unwise. An immediate withdrawal, or the establishment of a hard deadline to withdraw, would be comparable to an abandonment of the new Iraqi government and would encourage the terrorists and violent factions to bide their time, inviting mayhem and guaranteeing chaos. Such a decision may also embolden our enemies to once again attack our homeland and interests abroad, thus further endangering American citizens. The future of the Middle East, and the security of free nations around the world, depends upon the development of a strong and stable democracy in Iraq.

Therefore, in order to reach an acceptable level of stability in Iraq, it is extremely important that we intensify our efforts to reduce the influence of militias, restore electricity, rebuild schools, and assemble a modern and sustainable economy for the benefit of all Iraq's citizens. A greater emphasis on the development of the Iraqi security forces - with a focus on the selection and education of effective military officers, is absolutely imperative. Over the last few years, we have trained and equipped thousands of Iraqi soldiers and police officers and it is now crucial that we do more to improve this process, so that we may begin supplanting our forces in the region with Iraqi troops at the earliest date possible.

Mr. Speaker, the thousands of Americans who have served in the war on terrorism exemplify the very courage and honor on which our nation was formed. It is essential that we recognize their service by continuing to work with our international partners to promote democracy and protect freedom around the world.

