Washington, DC—Congressman Steve Israel (D-NY), member of the House Appropriations Committee and the moderate Blue Dog Coalition, released the following statement during debate on the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health, and Iraq Accountability Act:

I rise in support of this resolution. Is this the perfect solution? No. But how can there be a perfect solution to a war so imperfectly devised, so catastrophically planned, so horribly managed by the Bush administration?

This resolution turns in a better direction. It provides health care to our veterans. It provides support to our war fighters. It demands accountability from our President. And it creates the process to redeploy our troops.

I voted for the use of force in Iraq. I believed then, as I believe now, that the Middle East is an exceedingly dangerous region on the brink of an eruption that threatens global security.

But the war in Iraq did not stabilize the Middle East. It has destabilized it. Before the war in Iraq, Iran was concerned about Israel. Today, Israel is concerned about Iran. Before the war in Iraq, there was no such thing as "Al Queda in Iraq." Today, there is.

Before the war in Iraq, our military was capable of swiftly and decisively responding to multiple threats, foreign and domestic. Just yesterday, the New York National Guard reported to my office that it has only 35 percent of the mission critical transportation it needs to respond to a homeland security emergency in my state: whether it's a terrorist attack or a severe hurricane.

This resolution reinvests in the priorities we need. And it says to both the Iraqi government and the Bush Administration: "No more blank checks. No more endless commitments."

Many are troubled with the inclusion of a strategic withdrawal of our troops between December of this year and August of next. And I must be honest. I have struggled with this as well. The

decision should be hard. It should be contentious. It should torment us all. Because no matter what we do, the stakes are high. The consequences are great.

If you lean to the right, an August 2008 redeployment is way too soon. If you lean to the left, an August 2008 redeployment is way too far away.

I reached my own judgment a few months ago. It was not based on polls or politics, not based on the convenience of sound-bytes on either side of the aisle or on righteous absolutism that can only be formulated in a vacuum. I formed it after listening to the Commanding General of CENTCOM testify to the Armed Services Committee that we had until the middle of this year before Baghdad spins out of control. Shortly after that, the Iraq Study Group, after months of non-partisan work and study, reached the judgment that: "By the first quarter of 2008, subject to unexpected developments in the security situation on the ground, all combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq."

This sets natural bookends: the middle of this year and the middle of next year. Those are the benchmarks, Madame Speaker. Those are the nonpartisan, nonpolitical, balanced and reasoned benchmarks. And those benchmarks are contained in this resolution.

Finally, Madame Speaker, let me say this. Today, Republicans and Democrats will disagree. This is fair enough. But it's time to stop thinking about our disagreements and begin working together on our agreements.

Last week, several members of the House Center Aisle Caucus, which I have the privilege of co-chairing, met to discuss how we could cooperate on several Iraq initiatives. This week. I introduced the first of these bipartisan measures with the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. Davis), the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Carney), and the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. Boustany). Our resolution requires the President to submit a Status of Forces Agreement to the Iraqi government, just as we have with other governments where we have a military presence. This will send the message that we are not occupiers of Iraq and that we follow the rule of law.

I mention this now, Madame Speaker, in the hopes that my colleagues who wish to join us in constructive ways forward will join us. I hope the debate will turn from left and right to forward.

That is what our troops want. That is what our constituents want. That is our obligation.

Congressman Israel represents New York's Second Congressional District. Prior to joining the House Appropriations Committee, he served for four years on the Armed Services Committee. He is founder and co-chair of the Democratic Study Group on National Security and is the Chairman of the Democratic Caucus Task Force on Defense and the Military. He is the founder and co-chair of the House Center Aisle Caucus.