Mr. Speaker, I will shortly be joined by my colleagues,

who, on a weekly basis, have come to the floor of the House to discuss

events occurring in the Middle East, specifically in Iraq and in

Afghanistan. We have called ourselves the Iraq Watch, in an effort to

have a conversation to illuminate and educate not just ourselves, but

those who are interested, as I think most people are, in these

particular matters.

It is clearly no secret, and it is a most disturbing situation, that

we have a deteriorating situation in Iraq. One only has to remember the

initial estimates of the cost that were put forth by the White House. I

think the range that was suggested by the Deputy Secretary of Defense,

Mr. Wolfowitz, was from $30 billion to $60 billion.

When the then-Chief Economic Adviser to President Bush, Larry

Lindsay, indicated that in his judgment the range could be from $100

billion to $200 billion, he was eased out because there was a sense

that that was not a realistic number. Now, of course, we are currently

at the figure of $150 billion, and that does not include future

estimates, which again according to recent reports just simply is for

the military presence of American troops in support for other military

personnel there. That is an additional 50 or $75 billion. And of course

that does not include the cost of reconstruction, both for Iraq

and for Afghanistan. But, obviously, most importantly is the loss of

life, particularly American personnel, both military and civilian. The

number now is well in excess of 700. That of course does not account

for the men and women in our military who have been wounded.

Many Members of this body have been to Walter Reed Hospital and to

Bethesda Naval Hospital and met with the men and women there who have

suffered wounds, egregious wounds, that will clearly impact their

future and will alter irrevocably the quality of life that they will

enjoy for the rest of their lives.

I know that I have attended in my district the funerals of two young

men, Sergeant Caldwell and Corporal Jeff Burgess, who gave their lives

in Iraq. Furthermore, there was a universal echo of support and

sympathy for the United States in the aftermath of our national tragedy

on September 11. I think we all remember the headline in the French

newspaper, Le Monde, that screamed, very poignantly and eloquently the

day after 9-11, that ``Today We Are All Americans.''

It is clear that there was not just sympathy, but a commitment by

countries all over the world to assist our efforts to end once and for

all the scourge of global terrorism. Unfortunately, much of that

international support has eroded. And now the motives of the United

States are being called into question, and not just in the Mideast but

all over the world.

There was a recent poll that was done by one of the premier polling

groups in this country, the Zogby polling group, and it was conducted

among the elite in Latin America, the economic elite which

traditionally had been supportive of American policy. There was no

attempt to interview or survey those that had traditionally been

hostile to American interests or who have disagreed with our policies.

What I find remarkable was that of the six countries that were

surveyed, and they range from Argentina to Brazil to Venezuela to a

Central American country, that the negative opinion of the United

States Government, the negative opinion of the United States Government

exceeded 87 percent. That is particularly disturbing, because I think

we can all agree, Mr. Speaker, that we need the international community

and its support if we are going to end terrorism. If we are going to

protect our homeland, cooperation is absolutely essential. It is

absolutely critical. But now American motives are suspect.

There was a recent poll that was done, it was done by the Pew

Foundation and the numbers are startling. Majorities in seven nations

believe that our intervention in Iraq was motivated by a desire to

control Mideast oil. Clearly, there are few Americans that accept that

premise. But when one reads the list of nations that believe that our

intervention was based simply on the desire to control oil, we must

acknowledge that we have a problem that has to be addressed. Let me

just recite some of those numbers: 51 percent of the people in Russia

believe that that was our primary motive; 58 percent of the people in

France; 60 percent of the people in Germany; 54 percent of the people

in Pakistan. In Turkey the number is 64 percent. In Jordan it was 71

percent. And yet we speak of a certain moral authority. But it has

become clear that the world does not see us in that lens. They believe

our motives are much more crass. And when these numbers are combined

with comments and observations and revelations by senior administration

officials, they are reinforced.

For those of you that have not had the opportunity to read ``The

Price of Loyalty,'' which is a book regarding the tenure of the former

Secretary of Treasury, Paul O'Neill, let me commend that book to you;

and I would specifically direct your attention to page 96 of that book.

Because Secretary O'Neill, a traditional Republican widely regarded in

business circles, someone who served his country in the Reagan

administration and in Bush One, reveals an anecdote that I find

disturbing. Let me read for a moment. O'Neill had seen ``brewing a

battle since the National Security Council meeting on January 30.''

Let me interrupt the excerpt that I will quote to inform my

colleagues and the viewing audience that this was 1 week after the

inauguration after George W. Bush. One week. The anecdote itself that

he reveals occurs February 27, less than maybe 5 weeks, after the

President was inaugurated. O'Neill: ``It was Powell and his moderates

at the State Department versus hardliners like Rumsfeld, Cheney, and

Wolfowitz who were already planning the next war in Iraq in the shape

of a post-Saddam country.''

Now, let us remember, this is before our national tragedy on 9-11,

and this is not coming from outside. This is not an opinion being

offered by a Member of the House. This is being offered by the former

Secretary who was present at this particular meeting of the National

Security Council on February 27, 2001.

``Documents were being prepared by the Defense Intelligence Agency,''

Rumsfeld's intelligence arm, ``mapping Iraq's oil fields and

exploration areas, and listing companies that might be interested in

leveraging the precious asset.'' Obviously he means oil. ``One document

headed 'Foreign Suitors For Iraqi Oil Field Contracts' lists companies

from 30 countries, their specialties, bidding histories and in some

cases their particular areas of interests. An attached document maps

Iraq with markings for supergiant oil fields, other oil fields

earmarked for production-sharing while demarking the largely

undeveloped southwest of the country into nine blocks to be designated

for future exploration.''

I guess this is a question that I would have for the President, for

the Vice President, and for the Secretary of Defense: Why on February

27, months before the attack on the homeland, why was a map being

presented at a National Security Council meeting divvying up the oil

reserves of Iraq?

That, I daresay and will submit, is a question, Mr. Speaker, that

should be answered by the Secretary, by the National Security Adviser,

by the Vice President, and by the President. That is a question that

cannot linger, that cannot go unanswered, particularly when a majority

of people in countries that are our traditional allies have concluded

that our main interest in Iraq is not to bring democracy, is not to

save lives, but is to secure oil for our energy needs.

And, again, let me remind my friends who are here, I have been joined

by my colleagues, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Hoeffel), the

gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie), and the ranking member on the

Committee on the Judiciary, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. Conyers),

let me remind ourselves that we are losing international support. And I

am convinced that many of the questions that the rest of the world has

is based on reports such as this and have a potential to undermine not

just our credibility and our moral authority, but to undermine our

national security if we are going to do something in terms of

international terrorism.

Because if the world concludes, and if we do not respond that this is

our motivation, they will turn their backs on us. When this is all

combined with obviously many other issues that are out there, I dare

say we have a serious problem.

Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time for a moment, because I

know we are joined by our friend, the gentleman from Washington (Mr.

Inslee), and again, I think we are coming back to an issue that has to

be discussed here, and that is an issue of competence.

There is nobody in this chamber that is not committed to making every

effort, every responsible effort to end the threat of terrorism, not

just against the United States but all over the globe. What I think the

world has concluded, as most Americans have concluded, is that the

information that

was provided to this administration indicating that there was weapons

of mass destruction in Iraq and that there were linkages between Saddam

Hussein and al Qaeda were absolutely false, absolutely false.

What we have learned is that much of this information was provided by

an exiled group called the Iraqi National Congress, headed by this

particular gentleman here with the sunglasses on whose name is Ahmed

Chalabi, who for years was working to return to Iraq.

Mr. Chalabi is an interesting and controversial figure, of course,

because during his exile he lived for a time in Jordan, and while he

was there, he was charged with and accused and convicted of the crime

of embezzlement in the amount of some $30 million. He was sentenced to

a term of 22 years in prison. Somehow during his exile he became

friendly with or developed relationships with Richard Pearl, who

formerly served on the Defense Advisory Board, with the Vice President

Mr. Cheney, and with others in the so-called neo-conservative movement.

And they believed what he had to say. And it has been proven to be

false.

And I thought what was particularly interesting was that this past

weekend our Secretary of State, Colin Powell, made a statement, I think

it was on ``Meet the Press,'' that he now believes, and I am reading

again from the New York Times dated today, that ``he now believes that

the Central Intelligence Agency was deliberately misled about evidence

that Saddam Hussein was developing unconventional weapons.''

Now, stop for a moment to think of this, that the Secretary of State,

who made the presentation before the world at the United Nations, who

built the case for this White House and for this President, now

indicates that he was or the CIA was misled. The report goes on, ``He

hinted at widespread reports,'' this is Secretary Powell, ``of

fabrications by an engineer who provided much of the critical

information about the so-called bioweapons labs. Intelligence officials

have since found that the engineer was linked to the Iraqi National

Congress, an exiled group that was pressing President Bush to unseat

Mr. Hussein.'' This is a quote by the Secretary of State. ``It turned

out that the sourcing was inaccurate and wrong and, in some cases,

deliberately misleading,'' Mr. Powell said in an interview broadcast

from Jordan, ``and for that I am disappointed and I regret it.''

Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not think we have the answers.

But, again, let me go back to this issue of

competence, because the President of the United States described the

Secretary of Defense as a superb leader. I reject that description. I

reject that description out of hand. One only has to see example after

example, such as the relationship, and not just a single incident, with

Mr. Chalabi. Clearly, the Kingdom of Jordan, which has been a steadfast

ally of the United States, was insulted by the appointment of this

individual, who is a convicted felon, to the Iraqi Governing Council.

King Abdulla of Jordan was here. I and several other members of the

Committee on International Relations, I believe I was joined by my

colleague here tonight, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Hoeffel),

at a luncheon when I posed the question to the King, and congratulated

him, by the way, for moving towards the democratization, if you will,

of Jordan, whether he was ever consulted by Secretary Rumsfeld or by

the President about the appointment of Mr. Chalabi. And he said, no, he

was not even consulted. Yet here is an individual who established a

bank, one of the largest banks in Jordan, then embezzled, according to

the conviction, millions of dollars, causing the bank to collapse; and

he then escaped from Jordan.

When asked just recently about Ahmed Chalabi potentially becoming the

prime minister in the interim government, what King Abdulla said was,

``He was not the ideal choice.'' I daresay that was extremely

diplomatic.

But at the same time let me go and quote another individual who has

earned the respect of Members of this body and the American people,

David Kay. Remember David Kay? He was assigned the task by this

President, by this Secretary of Defense to go find the weapons of mass

destruction; and he came back and said there are no weapons of mass

destruction, Mr. President, and testified before the United States

Senate that we were all wrong. We were all wrong.

But, of course, this White House, Mr. Bush and Mr. Cheney and Mr.

Rumsfeld cannot acknowledge that they were wrong. They were wrong about

the weapons of mass destruction. They were wrong about the links

between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. And now we find ourselves in a

quagmire.

But this is what Mr. Kay had to say, who, by the way, was one of the

most hawkish members of the United Nations monitors that went out and

that was part of that inspection team, and who actually supported the

war. But here is what he had to say. He now believes the Western

countries' intelligence agencies got it wrong for two reasons. He is

referring to the weapons of mass destruction. First, they were

manipulated by Ahmed Chalabi and other dissidents whose central

interest was ousting Saddam.

Just mentioning the name of the Iraqi National Congress leader makes

Kay laugh. There is a guy who is so transparent. Chalabi asked me once,

and again this is Mr. Kay speaking, why are you so concerned about the

weapons of mass destruction? No one cares about weapons of mass

destruction. And when asked by Tom Brokaw was he embarrassed, no, his

response was, we are heroes in error.

Well that error has cost the American taxpayers hundreds of billions

of dollars, the lives of American young men and women, and the loss of

American moral authority and prestige in the war. Mr. Chalabi, that is

disgraceful. That is disgraceful.

Mr. Speaker, it can be summed up in one word,

incompetence, and a lack of leadership and an inability to wage a war

against terrorism that will succeed.

Mr. Speaker, what is interesting is that David Kay,

highly respected, the man that was charged by this President, it did

not take him too long to conclude that Mr. Chalabi was transparent, a

manipulator, a con man, if you will.

In addition to all that the gentleman has said, do my colleagues

remember when the President of the United States delivered the State of

the Union address this year, in January of 2004, who was sitting up

right there in the gallery in the Bush family box? Does the gentleman

remember?

It boggles the mind, it is such rank incompetence, it

is such an inability to see reality, to be fooled. It is not

incompetence, it is gross negligence. In some other forum it might

almost be funny, but here it is so tragic because it is not just about

this President and this Vice President, but it is about war and peace

and the American people and how we are viewed in the world, and it is

the blood of our children, and it is mortgaging our future.

We should walk away from Mr. Chalabi now and begin to restore the

confidence of the world in our ability to match reality and our dreams

and aspirations.

Let me reclaim my time for a moment. I think it is

important for Americans to understand that during the course of this

week, we will be debating a bill that is described as the defense

reauthorization bill. It is our purpose collectively as members of this

informal group that came to being as a result of the gentleman from

Pennsylvania's brainstorm almost a year ago now, this informal group is

going to make every single effort to eliminate the funding and the

authority for the funding for the Iraqi National Congress that is

receiving some $4 million a year, as the gentleman indicates. For what,

we do not know. For bad information, for self-aggrandizement, for

certainly not the best interests of the United States.

We again, as the gentleman suggests, recommend that anyone who is

interested in this issue, that shares our concern and our belief that

this is very much a linchpin to beginning to restore our international

respect and support, to contact their Senators and their

Representatives to assist in this effort, to read about, not just

listen to our comments, but to become engaged, educate themselves as to

the role of this individual in the course of the past several years and

the consequences to the United States simply because there were people

in this administration, so-called neoconservatives that were looking

for a reason to go to war in Iraq long before our national tragedy of

September 11.