Mr. Speaker, I have come tonight to discuss the challenge

for America in the Iraq war. Some may know that a group of my

colleagues and myself have been discussing this challenge now for

several months on the floor of the House, once a week. We style this

the Iraq Watch. The reason we come to the floor, sometimes as late as

midnight, is that this really is a challenge and it demands that

Congress be involved and not sit on the sidelines of this issue. This

issue is too important, it is too deadly, it is too contentious for

Members of Congress to simply take a pass and have responsibility only

rest in the executive branch, the President's branch of the United

States Government. So we have come once a week to talk about how to

pursue a meaningful, commonsense, successful policy in Iraq. Hopefully

I will be joined by some colleagues a little later in the evening.

I would like to start by just giving a background about why this is

so important and why it is so important for Members of Congress to

address the Iraq issue and not walk away from it. The answer is simply

an example many Members of Congress have had, that I have had, of

visiting a few weeks ago with a family in Bremerton, Washington, who

the father and the husband was serving in Iraq proudly as a sergeant in

the United States Army a few months ago. He was involved in a sweep

mission near the Tigris River. A boat overturned, he went to aid, to

try to save an Iraqi who was serving in forces with the U.S. Army.

Unfortunately, he drowned while doing his duty. Like so many others in

Iraq, a hero.

We now have lost since the war began 725 Americans, since the capture

of Saddam Hussein 264 Americans, since May 31, 2003, and the President

declared that the mission was accomplished, 585 Americans. We have had,

total wounded, 4,151 Americans, many with very, very severe injuries,

many which I have visited in Walter Reed and Bethesda.

Our losses demand that the U.S. Government pursue a policy that is

not based on half truths but all the truth, not on partial planning but

full planning, not on a policy based just on wishes and dreams and

hopes and even faith but based on meaningful plans, strategic decisions

that are based on the hard realities in Iraq.

Unfortunately, the truth is, and it is hard to say, that our policy

in Iraq has not fit the extent of the heroism put

forth by our proud men and women in Iraq who have served with great

valor and distinction in extremely trying circumstances.

Their valor, their professionalism, their integrity has not been

matched by the Federal Government's decision-making. We are going to

discuss tonight in several ways why that professionalism in Iraq has

not been matched by professionalism and wisdom here in Washington, D.C.

I want to talk about several of those mistakes which have cost us

grievously. By the way, I want to say one thing up front: these people

say, well, this is not the 50,000 people we lost in Vietnam. Try

telling that to the family that I visited and the two kids whose dad

will never come home. One American life lost due to incompetence,

neglect, exaggeration, deceit, failure to plan is too many; and that is

what has happened in Iraq.

So, if I may, let me address some of the mistakes that our country

has suffered in Iraq due to failures of this nature.

Number one, this administration sent into combat, into mortal combat,

into the lion's den our soldiers and sailors with inadequate security

protection for themselves. Today as we speak, almost 1 year after the

President of the United States declared that the mission was

accomplished, we still do not have armored Humvees in an adequate

number in Iraq to protect our sons and daughters and husbands and

wives. That is inexcusable.

It is inexcusable, because we obviously were going to be involved in

urban combat going into Iraq. We obviously were going to take RPG,

rocket-propelled grenades, AK-47s, which can penetrate this tiny little

thin skin of sheet metal on a Humvee; and we did not, the people who

were vested in the executive power of the United States Government, did

not do adequate planning to protect our soldiers and sailors from an

obvious threat in the dens and warrens of Baghdad, Fallujah, Basra.

Today they are still not on.

Why did that happen? You know of the travail and travesty, that we

sent our soldiers over there without flak vests either. We are now told

that finally after a year that has been remedied. By why would the

executive branch of this government send our soldiers and Marines into

dangerous urban combat without armor to protect them? Why would they do

that?

Well, it is because of mistake number two. Mistake number two was the

one where the executive over and over and over again told us in the

Congress, told Americans, and apparently believed, for reasons that

stretch my powers of imagination, that we would be met with nothing but

rose petals and champagne and the welcome mat from grateful Iraqis for

occupying their country, and that this country, if you can call it

that, which is a collection of tribes thrown together after the

collapse of the Ottoman Empire, would come together in this joyous

reunion of brotherhood and sisterhood and welcome us with nothing but

open arms, an occupying army from a Western nation, the greatest

Western nation and the greatest democracy that has ever lived, but one

that is totally foreign to Iraq.

This was wishful thinking at its highest. It was the arrogance at its

highest of those that did not have a clue what was going on in the

culture and sent our boys and daughters into this combat without this

protection; and, as a result, we have lost now hundreds of our finest

people in this country.

Now, thankfully, finally, the executive has admitted its mistake and

they are trying to remedy this issue, and they have now issued these

contracts trying to put these retrofitted armor plates on our Humvees.

But it is an example of what happens when an executive makes a war-

power decision based on arrogance. People die. And that is what has

happened in Iraq, and it is what happens when you make a decision based

on not understanding the nature of the threat.

So let me go to mistake number three that still exists today. Now,

today we had the pleasure of talking to Dr. Condoleezza Rice, who

finally came and briefed the Democratic Caucus. We think the briefings

should be bipartisan, because this is a bipartisan challenge and there

are no Democrats or Republicans in Iraq. There are only Americans.

I could be mistaken, but I do not recall any. The way

this one happened is she agreed to brief the Republican colleagues, and

only later as an afterthought, at our request, apparently, offered to

brief the Democratic colleagues. We have suggested that we have

bipartisan briefings, because we are in this pickle together, and we

have suggested this.

That is correct. It is a failure, because we need to be a

team in this regard.

And we would hope in the future when we do have these

consultations that we do this in a bipartisan manner, because we have

to all have the information, Democrat and Republican alike, so we can

try to fashion the proper response.

Let me go to the third mistake, if I can, we were talking about. I

must say after briefings today by Dr. Rice and listening to the

administration and listening to the press information, this is an error

that I will next address that still exists in this administration, and

that is the error that they have a strategic initiative that is based

on the wishful hopes that there is just a few finite number of

individuals in Iraq, and that if they are eliminated, this problem is

going to be solved.

This administration still looks at Iraq as sort of this virginal,

potential flower Garden of Eden of democracy that just happens to have

the Corleone family in it, and if they can just get rid of the Corleone

family, everything is going to be hunky-dory.

Listening to Dr. Rice's briefing today, I was astounded to hear that

things were going so swimmingly in Iraq, that if we just eliminate a

few more people in Fallujah and maybe a couple in Basra and three in

Baghdad, things were going to be okay.

That is the most wildly out-of-touch viewpoint about the challenge

that we have in Iraq and dooms our policy in Iraq to failure.

If you think about the administration's theory, their plan, if you

can call it that, their view is, well, when we get Uday, things are

going to be okay. We got Uday, and things were not okay. If we get

Saddam, things are going to be okay. Well, we got Saddam, and we have

lost 264 Americans since then. Now, if we just get a few people in

Fallujah, things are going to be okay.

Well, unfortunately, that is not the situation, because one of the

most prescient things said was stated by Mr.

Paul Bremer when he said on January 1, and, I am sorry my quote does

not have which year, but it holds for any year, he said, ``As long as

we are here, we are the occupying power.'' It is a very ugly word, but

it is true: ``As long as we are here.''

Unfortunately, Mr. Bremer was correct, and that is why this

administration is wrong not to equip our Army in a way that will make

it prepared for that type of conflict as long as we are there and to

develop a strategic effort to recognize that we will be seen as an

occupying power by a significant portion of that population as long as

we are there.

This administration's theory is if we just eliminate a few more

people, we will no longer be seen as an occupying power, but rather as

the liberators that we wish to be. It is a policy based on a falsehood

which is based on mistake number four.

Mistake number four is that there is one principal rule of warfare,

that you should not start a war based on falsehood. Unfortunately, that

is what this executive branch of the United States Government did. If I

can spend just a few minutes, and then I will yield to the gentleman

from Massachusetts (Mr. Delahunt) in that regard. That is a significant

thing to say, but it is, unfortunately, the sad truth.

On March 17, 2003, the President of the United States, George Bush,

said, ``Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no

doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the

most lethal weapons ever devised.''

That statement was false, and that statement formed the entire

foundation of the war that this President initiated, and it was false.

But, unfortunately, it was not the only falsehood that we heard.

On March 16, 2003, the day before, the Vice President of the United

States, Dick Cheney said, ``And we believe he has in fact reconstituted

nuclear weapons.'' That statement was false, and it was an underlying

principle of this executive starting this war.

On March 23, a week later, 2003, Kenneth Adelman, the Defense Policy

Board member of the executive branch of the government said, ``I have

no doubt we are going to find big stores of weapons of mass

destruction.'' That statement was false.

Now, this administration I think somewhere in the year 2050 will

still be saying, ``It is out there in the turkey fields somewhere. We

know it is there.''

It is now over a year after we have had control of Iraq and have not

found a single weapon system that this administration started a war

that cost hundreds of Americans' lives over. Not one. Not an ounce. Not

a gear. Not a paper. Nothing. This is while our soldiers and sailors

have paid the ultimate tribute at the behest of the Federal Government.

On March 30, 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said, ``We

know where they are,'' referring to weapons of mass destruction. ``They

are in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad, and east, west, south and

north somewhat.''

That statement was false. Unfortunately, these statements were false

even given the intelligence we had then. We have subsequent to the

initiation of this war had access, and obviously we will not disclose

any secure information tonight, but in the public realm, it is clear

that our intelligence indicated there was lots of doubt, at a minimum,

what the situation was in Iraq.

These airplanes that the President told us had been built by Saddam

to fly over the Atlantic and spray germ warfare over Baltimore and

Washington, D.C., which is a terrifying prospect, and one if it was

true we ought to be concerned about, there was only one problem: the

United States Air Force before the war started, according to published

accounts, stated that that is not the reason these balsa wood, duct

tape affairs were put together.

They were put together, they tried to come up with something they

could take Polaroid pictures of the enemy. They were not meant for

spraying germ warfare, and our own intelligence indicated that. But

that is not what the President told us. It was something else.

Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, the gentleman

has brought up a point with Iran which, unlike Iraq, is developing a

nuclear program and is a potential threat on a nuclear basis. When I

was in Israel a couple of years ago talking to the Israeli defense

force, they were concerned, and rightfully so, I think, about the

nuclear capabilities of Iran, not Iraq. But the pickle we are now in,

we are in a situation now where we have difficulty dealing with Iran

because they have the potential to inflame the Shiite allies they have

in Iraq to get them whipped up, if you will, and foment violence. Now

we are in a more difficult position in Iran.

But I would like to return if I can for just a minute to another

economic issue, since the gentleman brought up economics.

There is a fourth mistake this administration has made which has

severely hampered our effort, and that is this administration has not

leveled with the American people about what the Iraq war costs, and

this costs us a giant deficit because the President will not come forth

and tell the truth about what this is costing the American taxpayer.

How do I know that? It is real simple.

The President of the United States sent us a budget, and in the

budget it is hundreds of pages thick, thousands of numbers, thousands

of numbers, all kinds of numbers. But there is one number that he did

not have the willingness to put in his budget so Americans could see

what it was going to be. That was the cost of the Iraq war.

Can my colleagues believe it? The President of the United States

purports to have us adopt a budget, but he leaves out the cost of the

Iraq war. How could one possibly, with a straight face, leave out

something that this year is going to cost us at least $100 billion and

next year probably half to three-quarters of that at least, if not

more. How with a straight face could he do that, unless he really did

not want the American people to know how costly this endeavor is?

This President needs to shoot straight with the American people and

tell them what it is going to cost, which is hundreds of millions of

dollars coming out of their April 15 taxes. And if it is worth doing,

he needs to say so. But this duplicitous thing of trying to fight a war

on the cheap is wrong.

Winston Churchill said, ``All I have to offer you is blood, sweat,

toil, and tears.'' This President said, don't worry, be happy. That is

not the situation we are in today, and the President needs to belly up

to the bar and show us how he intends to pay for this instead of

ballooning the deficit, which is what he is doing, and putting the cost

of the Iraq war, which is going to go on for years and years on the

backs of our children, with a $500 billion deficit that he thinks

Americans are not smart enough to figure out. Well, I think he is

wrong.

I think they know, especially with the deficit, the cost

of this war; and he is not willing to talk about his tax cuts to pay

for it because he doesn't want anybody to make a sacrifice in this war

except the soldiers, sailors, Marines, and Air Force who put their

lives on the line. They put their lives on the line, George Bush ought

to put his tax cuts on the line. They know what sacrifice is. And, yet,

this President won't shoot straight with the American people to show

how to pay for this war.

Would the gentleman yield? He said something that really

triggered a thought, and it is disappointing. He said, ``The

administration needs to be more forthright to tell us its plan.'' Well,

I have some really bad news for the American people tonight: there was

not a plan for the security of Iraq the week before the invasion, there

was not a plan for the security of Iraq the week after the invasion,

there was not a plan for the security of Iraq when the President

declared the mission accomplished in May, 2003, and there is not a plan

for the security of Iraq tonight that has a good chance of success.

Now, why do I say that? And this is very, very frustrating to me.

Because 7 days before the invasion of Iraq, we, on a bipartisan basis

in several meetings, begged the administration to show us the plan for

the security of Iraq after the Iraqi Army folded, which we knew was

going to happen at some point. And the administration officials

essentially said a week before the invasion, we are giving serious

thought to that.

Well, I just do not think that is good enough. And that is one of the

reasons Iraq exploded into looting because the President did not listen

to General Shinseki when he told him, and this is the fifth mistake,

that we need hundreds of thousands of boots on the ground to prevent

Iraq from going up in flames after the Iraqi Army collapses.

And our soldiers today, tonight in Fallujah are paying the price for

that mistake, that we did not have enough boots on the ground the day

after the Iraqi Army collapsed. And we continue to suffer as a result

of that.

Now, why did that happen? Again, the deadliest kind of plans in

warfare are those based on wishful thinking. And this plan, if you

could call it that, from day one has been based on fallacious, false,

wishful thinking. It is wishful thinking about the amount of troops we

are going to have to have, it was wishful thinking about what type of

armor we are going to have to have, it was wishful thinking about how

much it was going to cost, it was wishful thinking about whether we

would find the weapons of mass destruction, it was wishful thinking

that once we got rid of Saddam Hussein there would no longer be an ally

of al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda is in Iraq. They are in there now, al Qaeda is in Iraq big

time now. They may not have been there before the war; but, by gum, we

made it a great place for them to do business today, and they are

there.

I do not think the Iraqi new ``sovereign,'' whatever they

are, should feel badly because our Secretary of State did not find out

about the war until the ambassador of Saudi Arabia did first.

Prince Bandar, who learned about it before our Secretary

of State. So the fact that we told the Saudis, the President of the

United States shared with the Saudi Government, a foreign government,

our war plan, that the war was going to start before he told the

Secretary of State, the Iraqis should not feel too bad if we do not

clue them to who the next government will be that we choose.

Let us be honest about this. This is what we are asking and

suggesting to the President in a very, very difficult situation. And I

do not envy that position of dealing with Iraq as President of the

United States. But the first order of business ought to be truth. And

this operation from day one has been built on the shifting sands of

deception, exaggeration, failure, and simply not shooting straight.

Now he needs to be straight with the world and the Iraqis. What

happens on June 30 is not going to be a sovereign government. And the

reason it is not going to be a sovereign government is because the only

force capable of doing anything in Iraq is the United States military.

And he is fooling himself if he thinks that is going to fool the

American people or the Iraqi people or the world. And we need to be

straight about this that this is a multi-year situation the mess we are

about.

I am sure the country will appreciate that.

First off, I want to make sure people understand what we have been

talking about tonight has been very well documented. The Web site that

is indicated before the podium here indicates where you can check out,

anybody that is listening this evening can check out the factual

statements that we have talked about. You will find 247 misstatements

of fact by this administration about Iraq that are documented in this

government Web site by the House Committee on Government Reform due to

the good efforts of the gentleman from California (Mr. Waxman). Anyone

can check that out.

In conclusion, let me wrap up. What we were saying tonight is a

theme. We believe this is an extremely challenging situation for

America in Iraq. We believe our soldiers and sailors, Air Force

personnel, men and women, are doing an exemplary job in Iraq under

extremely trying circumstances; and anyone who has talked to them will

agree with that. But we believe it is high time for the administration,

for the President of the United States, for the Vice President of the

United States, for the Secretary of Defense to stop basing an Iraq

policy on wishful thinking and exaggeration.

They need to adopt the policy to the number of troops based on

realism rather than rose-tinted glasses. They need to adopt a policy on

how much it will cost based on hard-headed fiscal reality, rather than

hiding the ball from the American people. They need to adopt a policy

on the armor that recognizes how severe this problem is with security

in Iraq, and starting to tell the truth to the American people is a

good way to start to figure out a way out of Iraq.