Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from

Hawaii, and most of all I want to thank the esteemed Members who have

participated week in and week out in the Iraqi Watch. I think you do a

service to the country.

As the gentleman from Massachusetts was saying, our troops have

performed extraordinary under unbelievable circumstances. I, like many

of you, have traveled to the Middle East three times, twice to Baghdad

in the last 9 months. I can recall vividly when Tommy Franks was before

our committee and I asked him about the policies of preemption and

unilateralism and how he felt about that. The general paused and looked

at me and said, ``Well, Congressman, that is above my pay grade.'' He

says, ``But we have long learned in my service to the country that we

are able to distinguish between those who wave the flag in Washington

and those who have to salute it and follow orders.''

As the Iraqi Watch has done throughout this, commending our troops

for their valiant effort, but as our leader Nancy Pelosi says, our

troops in many respects need policies that are worthy of our sacrifice.

It is clear to me that the Pentagon, the civilian Pentagon's

ideological reach has exceeded our military grasp and has, as has been

pointed out here this evening, has placed our men and women in harm's

way.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Murtha), a valued colleague of

ours, in describing the ongoing turf battle between the Department of

Defense and the Department of State, concludes that there were plans

that were separately conceived, poorly coordinated, based on false

assumptions, poor intelligence and outright lies from Ahmed Chalabi,

that have placed our men and women in the situation that we find

ourselves today.

Because of your nightly efforts, and I assure you, people in my State

of Connecticut and throughout my district, the First Congressional

District in Hartford, have heard. I have conducted several forums back

in my district, and I find them incredibly informative in the sense

that people want to come out and speak out about this issue, because,

as the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Delahunt) has pointed out,

this is not a partisan issue. This is about the soul of the country and

who we are and what direction we plan to go. And it is important, as

the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. Abercrombie) said earlier this evening,

that we have this open dialogue and debate, a real dialogue with the

American people, about our future, about our brave men and women, and

how we intend to proceed now that we find ourselves in this quagmire

called Iraq, moving forward.

Yes, it can be acknowledged that it was a good thing to be rid of

Saddam Hussein.

But in traveling to the Middle East and talking to Ambassador Jordan

in Saudi Arabia a year before the outbreak of the war, he warned

prophetically that if we unilaterally and preemptively strike Saddam

Hussein, that what we will do is unwittingly, unwittingly accomplish

what Osama bin Laden failed to do and create a united Islamic jihad

against the United States. We find that our brave men and women now who

are over in Iraq are faced with people pouring over the borders

answering the call to jihad.

The United States has to proceed in a manner, as the gentleman from

Pennsylvania (Mr. Hoeffel) pointed out, that allows us to stand up, in

as timely a fashion as we possibly can, the Iraqi Army, civil defense,

and police. But as the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. Delahunt) also

points out, if the Iraqi people do not embrace democracy as much as we

want them to, it is up to them ultimately to embrace this democracy.

And if our presence there only inhibits that, then there has to be an

ongoing examination and dialogue of an appropriate exit strategy for us

that is strategic in its thinking.

Tactically, the United States and our men and women who wear the

uniform have performed brilliantly, but we have not strategically had a

plan that will allow this government to stand up the way all of us want

to see it happen.

There is an important article that was

written in Harper's Magazine by David Armstrong back just before the

outbreak of the war. The title of the article was ``Dick Cheney's Song

for America.'' In there he goes back and talks about the concept for

this plan being hatched by the then-Secretary of Defense and the two

Under Secretaries which at the time were Paul Wolfowitz and Richard

Perle. The goal was to be the lone force in the Middle East. The plan

that was put forward was a bold one: To go forward and overtake

Baghdad.

It was rejected at the time. It was rejected by Colin Powell. It was

rejected by Bush the elder. It was rejected by the most outspoken

people against this war back in 2002 in this invasion and that was Jim

Baker, Brent Scowcroft and Eagleburger.

So as the gentleman said at the beginning, this is not a partisan

effort. This is an understanding of the wrong turn the Nation has taken

with respect to foreign policy. Again, I commend the members of the

Iraq Watch for their vigilance.