Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Washington for

his usual insightful review of the salient points.

I think we should welcome back the original founder of Iraq Watch. He

has been unable to attend the last several conversations because of

other business, but he is certainly welcome here tonight, and that is

the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Hoeffel).

The events of the past several weeks have obviously been very

disturbing in terms of what has occurred in the prison facility, Abu

Ghraib. And I think every American feels a sense of profound, profound

shame, and there has been much talk and much criticism.

I found a story that was reported today in the Washington Times and

the headline reads ``Outrage Erodes Morale of Troops.'' And there were

comments by some of our colleagues from the other side of the aisle.

One was made by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DeLay), the House

majority leader, which I will not even address because the gentleman

from Texas (Mr. DeLay) has a proclivity to make statements that some

describe as over the top. But the gentleman from California (Mr.

Hunter), the Chairman of the House Committee on Armed Services, whom I

think we all respect, the report stated that he blamed Democrats who

have been harshly critical of the war effort for eroding troop morale.

The quote is, ``I'm concerned that a number of Members of Congress have

lost their sense of balance. They think their role here is to bash the

American military. It is demoralizing for the troops.''

Clearly, it has never been the intention of any individual who serves

in this House, be he or she Republican or Democrat, to erode morale or

to bash the military. I do not think anyone in any way wishes to

denigrate the commitment and the contribution and the manner with which

our military overall has conducted itself. But at the same time I think

that the chairman has it wrong. It is not Democrats. There are a number

of Republicans, and he should be aware of that, that have criticized

the so-called post-major combat phase of this adventure for some time

now. One only has to watch and observe the Monday morning TV programs.

But the reality is that morale has been low among our military for

some time, not because of criticism of the civilian leadership of the

Pentagon, the Department of Defense, Mr. Rumsfeld, Mr. Wolfowitz, Mr.

Feith, and including the Vice President of the United States, who is

described in a recent book as suffering from war fever in terms of his

obsession about invading Iraq. I think it is rather interesting that

this poster I have here which is back in November 2003, a Newsweek

cover that states ``How Dick Cheney Sold the War.'' It is clearly true,

given what we know now, that he had great influence in terms of

advancing the military invasion of Iraq by the American military.

But now to go back to the morale issue, there was an interesting

story, and maybe the chairman of the Committee on Armed Services is

unaware of this, but it was reported last Sunday in the Washington

Post, and the title is ``Dissension Grows in Senior Ranks on War

Strategy.

``Deep divisions are emerging at the top of the U.S. military over

the course of the occupation of Iraq, with some senior officers

beginning to say that the United States faces the prospect of casualty

for years, without achieving its goal of establishing a free and

democratic Iraq.''

These are not Members of the Democratic Party in Congress. These are

not Members of the Republican Party in Congress. This is senior

military personnel.

``Army Major General Charles Swannack, Jr., the commander of the 82nd

Airborne Division, who spent much of the year in western Iraq, said

that he believes that at the tactical level at which fighting occurs,

the U.S. military is still winning, but when asked whether he believes

the United States is losing he said, `I think strategically, we are.'

``Army Colonel Paul Hughes, who last year was the first director of

strategic planning for the U.S. occupation authority in Baghdad, said

he agrees with that view and noted that a pattern of winning battles

while losing a war characterized the U.S. failure in Vietnam.''

These are senior members of the military establishment in this

country.

This is not about partisanship. This is criticism coming from the

military itself regarding the lack or the incompetence, if you will, of

the civilian leadership that currently resides in the Department of

Defense.

Colonel Hughes went on to note that he lost a brother in Vietnam. ``I

promised myself when I came on active duty that I would do everything

in my power to prevent that sort of strategic loss from happening

again. Here I am, 30 years later, thinking we will win every fight and

lose the war because we don't understand the war we are in.''

They are worried. This is the senior American military speaking. They

are worried by evidence that the United States is losing ground with

the Iraqi public.

Some officers say the place to begin restructuring U.S. policy is by

ousting Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, whom they see as responsible

for a series of strategic and tactical blunders over the past year.

Several of those interviewed said a profound anger is building within

the Army at Rumsfeld and those around him. A senior general at the

Pentagon said he believes the United States is already on the road to

defeat. His quote is, ``It is doubtful we can go on much longer like

this. The American people may not stand for it, and they should not.''

This is a senior general at the Pentagon.

I hope that the Republican chair of the Committee on Armed Services

has an opportunity to read this particular report that was in the

Washington Post last Sunday. He should not blame Democrats or any

elected official for ever eroding the morale of the troops. We stand by

the troops, but we do not stand by a policy that no one can understand.

As to who is to blame, this general pointed directly at Rumsfeld and

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. ``I do not believe,'' and this

is his quote, ``we had a clearly defined war strategy and end-state and

exit strategy before we commenced our invasion.''

If the gentleman will yield further, the much-heralded

efforts to train Iraqis as far as police and a new Iraqi Army, you only

have to go back two or three weeks to remember that headline that

screamed out the new Iraq battalion would not accompany the U.S.

Marines into combat in the City of Fallujah. So while the Secretary of

Defense speaks about the training of some 70,000 personnel for security

service, the truth is those that are adequately trained amount to only

several thousand.

What we have here, what we have here is a failure of leadership, is a

demonstration of incompetence unequaled in terms of my public life, and

I have held elected office for some 30 years.

If you could bear with me for just one more moment, again, I want to

come back to the military's perspective of the civilian leadership and

what they are saying.

There was an editorial that appeared in the Army Times, the Marine

Times, the Air Force Times and the Navy Times, and it was regarding the

situation in the Iraqi prison. It is entitled ``A Failure of Leadership

At the Highest Levels.''

I would remind those that are viewing our conversation this evening,

this is not a partisan publication. This is a publication that covers

the military that in many respects represents the majority view of the

military in this country.

``Around the halls of the Pentagon, a term of caustic derision has

emerged for the enlisted soldiers at the height of the furor over the

prison scandal, `the six morons who lost the war.' Indeed, the damage

done to the U.S. military and the Nation as a whole by the horrifying

photographs of U.S. soldiers abusing Iraqi detainees at the notorious

prison is incalculable.

``But the folks in the Pentagon are talking about the wrong morons.

There is no excuse for the behavior displayed by soldiers in the now

infamous pictures, and an even more damning reported by Major General

Anthony Taguba. Every soldier should be ashamed. But while

responsibility begins with the six soldiers facing criminal charges, it

extends all the way up the chain of command to the highest reaches of

the military hierarchy and its civilian leadership.

``The entire affair is a failure of leadership, from start to finish.

From the moment they are captured, prisoners are hooded, shackled and

isolated. The message to the troops, anything goes. In addition to the

scores of prisoners who were humiliated and demeaned, at least 14 have

died in custody in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Army has ruled at least

two of these are homicides. This is not the way a free people keeps its

captives or wins the hearts and minds of a suspicious world.

General Richard Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, also shares in

the shame. Myers asked ``60 Minutes'' to hold off reporting news of the

scandal because it could put U.S. troops at risk. But when the report

was aired a week later, Myers still had not read Taguba's report which

was completed in March. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had also

failed to read the report until the scandal broke in the media; but by

then, of course, it was too late. The Army Times, the Marine Times, the

Navy Times, and the Air Force Times are correct: it is a failure of

leadership at the highest level.

That is just an unbelievable statement.

And that is leadership.

What the gentleman is basically saying is that loyalty

is prized above competence.

Mr. Speaker, it is really time to be honest with the

American people. As David Kay said, who was sent and appointed by this

administration to conduct a search for the weapons of mass destruction,

came back, said there are none, and implored the President, it is time

to come clean with the American people. Otherwise, he had grave

concerns about our credibility all over the world.

It is like this administration is incapable, incapable of dealing

with the truth. I do not think they intend to lie; I just do not think

they can grasp reality. It is like again going back to the morale

issue. In ``Stars and Stripes,'' a magazine that is funded by the

Pentagon, reported better than a year ago on the issue of morale of

U.S. troops in Iraq: high-ranking visitors to the country, including

Department of Defense and congressional officials, have said it is

outstanding, but the ``Stars and Stripes'' itself, the magazine did a

survey and concluded that some troops on the ground would beg to differ

about what they call low morale on their part and on the part of their

units.

So as a result, the Pentagon went and conducted a survey of troops,

and it was reported again about a month ago in The Washington Post

before the scandal broke out, and it concluded that a slim majority of

Army soldiers in Iraq, 52 percent reported that their morale was low,

and three-fourths of them said that they felt poorly led by their

officers, according to a survey taken at the end of the summer and

released yesterday by the Army.