Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from California

(Mr. Schiff) and thank you for your leadership on these very important

national security issues, and as you have suggested, national security

issues should not be devoted to just 1 month. We need to make sure that

we are watching after the national security every day of this year.

I am pleased to join you and Mr. Scott here this evening to discuss

these issues because the President has said he wants a national

conversation on national security issues in Iraq, but in the same

speech, he begins finger pointing; he begins name-calling. Secretary

Rumsfeld and Vice President Cheney are out around the country name-

calling and pointing fingers and trying to malign anybody that

disagrees with them. That is not a national conversation.

Let us have a national conversation. I say, bring it on when it comes

to a national security discussion here in the Nation's Capital and

throughout the country because, unfortunately, if you look at Iraq, if

you look at our national security policy and the implications of that

policy around the world, you can see we have created a mess and that in

so many ways we have made ourselves less safe than we could be if we

had been smart, smart and tough as we went about it.

And it is very difficult to listen to President Bush and Vice

President Cheney talk about how if we only stick with their plan, we

would begin to see a way out of here. After all, we all remember

President Bush when he was on the aircraft carrier USS Lincoln back in

May 2003, with a big banner in front of him declaring ``mission

accomplished.'' May 2003. Well, here we are today in Iraq and we just

had a report come out a few days ago from the Pentagon saying things

are worse than

ever before. Clearly, we are a long way from mission accomplished.

We had Vice President Cheney say more than a year ago that the

insurgency in Iraq was in its final throes, and yet the report that

came out just a few days ago from the Pentagon, a report I must say was

required by Congress, it wasn't volunteered by the administration,

Democrats in Congress pushed for a little small measure of

accountability. Not what we need, but we got this report. And while the

Vice President said the insurgency was in its last throes more than a

year ago, the report says the Sunni-based insurgency remains ``potent

and viable.''

And Secretary Rumsfeld, from day one has looked at Iraq through these

rose-colored glasses. I remember when he sort of referenced an estimate

by people at the Office of Management and Budget regarding the costs of

the war as just a few million dollars. I mean, the figure he gave was

peanuts compared to what we already have spent in Iraq.

So I say to all those people who for all these years have said to us,

trust us, we know what we are doing, just look at your record. Let us

have that debate and let us have a real national conversation on these

issues. Because the mantra ``stay the course'' is not a strategy.

Do we really want to keep doing exactly what we have been doing when

just a few days ago the report that came out of the Pentagon said

things are worse than they have been in Iraq? Is that a strategy for

success? Is that the plan for victory that the President announced last

November at the U.S. Naval Academy in Maryland?

I represent a congressional district in Maryland. The President went

there and unveiled his plan for victory, he called it. Again, we have a

report just a few days ago out of the Pentagon saying things are worse

than ever. So I say we need a national conversation. We need to work

together to find our way forward here.

It doesn't. And what is unfortunate is people on the

one hand are saying let us have this national conversation and then

finger-pointing at people who raise questions about what is happening

in Iraq and elsewhere in our national security policy, when any

sensible person looking at what is going on would have questions. So

let us really get together and have a genuine national conversation

about these very important issues.

Now, you mentioned, and others have mentioned, that we are coming up

very shortly to the tragic fifth anniversary of the September 11

attacks on our country, and I do think it is important to take a moment

to reflect again on where those attacks came from and the reaction of

the international community, which you have outlined a little bit.

Because we all know that those attacks were launched from Afghanistan.

They were launched by al Qaeda. They were launched by Osama bin Laden

as the head of al Qaeda, and they were launched from Afghanistan

because the Taliban government gave al Qaeda sanctuary there in

Afghanistan.

When we were attacked on September 11, this country, and in fact the

international community, responded. You already referred to the action

taken by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. But in fact also the

United Nations unanimously passed a resolution saying they were with

the United States in its fight against terror and they were with us in

going after al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. And in fact, when we went

into Afghanistan, we were united as a country and the world was united

behind us.

You would think, given a lot of the recent talk and rhetoric out of

the administration, until just a few days ago, that Osama bin Laden had

kind of been forgotten. We weren't talking a lot about Osama bin Laden.

But now, just the other day, as we approached September 11 and the

anniversary of that tragic attack, the President again raised the words

of Osama bin Laden and the very real threat that Osama bin Laden and al

Qaeda and their virulent form of extremist Islamic ideology poses.

But I think we should ask the question, given the fact that the

President has now reminded us again of where those attacks came from,

what are we doing in Afghanistan and how much progress have we really

made? If you look at the situation now and you look at the southern

part of Afghanistan, we have seen, by all accounts, including from the

testimony of the Defense Intelligence Agency, the head of that is

General Maples, that you have seen a resurgence in Taliban activities

in southern Afghanistan. That is the hotbed of the resistance in

Afghanistan. Yet, while we are seeing that resistance grow, we have

actually seen a reduction in U.S. military forces in that area. That is

not the way you address a real threat.

Secondly, this administration disbanded the one unit, the one unit

within the Central Intelligence Agency that was specifically dedicated

to targeting al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. They got rid of it.

We have also seen reports today that opium production in Afghanistan

is now at a record high, the highest levels ever recorded in terms of

opium production. And those are funds that are able to be used by al

Qaeda to help arm themselves and help promote their ideology and help

promote their efforts against the United States and others.

At the same time, we learned today that Pakistan, Pakistan, has now

entered into a deal with the pro-Taliban militia in the Waziristan

portion of Pakistan, that rugged mountain area along the Pakistan-

Afghan border, where the Taliban have been assembling and using as a

launching pad for their attacks into Afghanistan. We have heard that

Pakistan apparently is no longer going to sort of prosecute the war

against al Qaeda.

So if you look at the state of play today, and you ask yourself what

have we done to eliminate the threat that attacked us on September 11,

I would say the answer is pretty clear. We have a long way to go before

we can hang up a banner of mission accomplished. And we need to

redouble our efforts in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, what has happened is we have, as a result of the war

in Iraq, diverted our resources and gotten ourselves bogged down in a

very messy situation with a huge amount of sectarian violence, a

budding civil war, civil war, whatever you want to call it. We heard

from the Pentagon it is the worst situation they have seen. We have

gotten bogged down there and we haven't finished the job against al

Qaeda.

Yet, at the same time, we have actually fueled the forces that

support the extremists. We have added to their allies. We have provided

a great recruiting tool for them. And the biggest beneficiary of all

has been Iran. The biggest beneficiary of all has been Iran, which is

right there next to Iraq. They fought a long war with Iraq. During most

of the 1980s Iraq and Iran were engaged in a very bitter war. But now,

with Iraq in chaos, Iran is extremely well positioned and is taking

advantage of the situation. They are emboldened and they are trying to

expand their influence in the region through Hezbollah and through

other proxies.

So I think as we have this national conversation, it is very

important that the American people, not just looking at some of this

rhetoric out there, but they really try to figure out what is going on.

Because one of the biggest consequences of the administration's

mistakes, and many of them are coming home to roost now, is that they

refuse to listen. They refuse to listen to many generals regarding the

best way to prosecute the war in Iraq. They refuse to listen to the

experts at the Central Intelligence Agency about the possible

consequences within Iraq of taking the lid off Pandora's box and

unleashing the forces between the Sunnis, the Shiias, and the Kurds.

They have all the answers, the administration. We have got all the

answers. Who are you to question us? And you know what this Republican

Congress said? You are right, you have got all the answers, so we are

not going to ask you the tough questions. This was a blank-check

Congress. No tough questions. No accountability. And the result has

been very clear: when you ignore failure, or when you reward failure,

you are going to get more failure.

So what we are saying is, let us have a real national conversation.

Let us have a Congress that will begin to ask the hard questions.

Let's hold people accountable when they make mistakes.

The finger pointing, you have got to scratch your head, as you

pointed out. We have President Bush in the White House. We have

Republicans controlling the Senate and the House. They really have no

one to look around right now to blame. Yet they still are out there in

the field trying to tell the American people that somehow it is the

other guy's fault that we are in this mess now.

It is time to hold them accountable.

We know what the consequence of that is. We know what

the consequence is. When you don't hold people accountable for failure,

you shouldn't be surprised when you get more of the same. But more of

the same is not a good strategy in Iraq. More of the same is not a good

strategy in terms of our national security. These are tough, difficult

issues. Nobody has all the answers.

So, it is very important that the Bush administration and the

Republican leadership stop pretending that they have all the answers,

because their view of the world has gotten us to where we are now, and

we can be doing a lot better.

I want to thank you and Mr. Scott for your very sensible leadership

on these national security questions.