



# **IRAQ-AFGHANISTAN-QATAR**

## **Trip Report Congressman Frank Wolf September 2005**

**AVAILABLE ONLINE AT: [HTTP://WWW.HOUSE.GOV/WOLF](http://www.house.gov/wolf)**

## **ON THE COVER**

**(Clockwise from left)**

**Winchester, Virginia, resident Michelle Thrift hands out toys to children at the renovated Al Qudus Pediatric Hospital in Kirkuk. She is a civilian employee with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Transatlantic Program Center in Frederick County. She is on temporary assignment in Iraq.**

**Nearly 5,000 plastic containers are being filled with supplies for the polling stations that will be set up across Afghanistan later this month for the national elections. Among the items in each container: a stamp to certify each ballot and a container of purple ink that voters will dip their fingers in - like used in Iraq - to prevent fraud. Congressman Wolf visited the warehouse where the containers are being prepared during his trip to Afghanistan.**

**The men and women in uniform serving our country in Iraq, Afghanistan and Qatar - and around the world - deserve our deepest admiration. They work under tough conditions and are making great sacrifices. The men and women in this photo are from Virginia and are stationed at the Air Force's Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the largest expeditionary base outside the United States. They are well trained, highly motivated and entirely dedicated to their mission. They work long days, many in extreme heat. The temperature on the flight line at Al-Udeid often reaches 130 degrees.**



**Progress is being made on several fronts in Iraq. Hospitals, like this one in Tikrit, are being built, schools are being refurbished, electricity is being restored and oil pipelines are being repaired.**

I just returned from spending two days in Iraq (August 28 - 29), a day in Qatar (August 30) – home of the Air Force’s Al-Udeid Air Base and the Army’s Camp As-Sahliyah – and two days in Afghanistan (August 31 - September 1). This was my third trip to Iraq and my second to Afghanistan since 9/11.

Before detailing my trip and providing a series of recommendations concerning the ongoing efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, I want to express my sincere thanks to all the members of the U.S. military serving in both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. They are still very much in harm’s way and are doing a tremendous job. Many are serving their second tour in the regions; some even their third. Their morale remains high and their commitment to completing their mission has never wavered.

I talked with dozens of service men and women – active duty, Reserve and Guard, from privates to generals – and cannot say enough about their call to duty and professionalism. They are incredible individuals and deserve the deepest admiration and respect of the American people.

The families of our service men and women also deserve our thanks. They, too, continue to make tremendous sacrifices. It has been particularly hard on Reserve and Guard families who often do not have the same support system readily available as the families of career soldiers who live on or near military bases. I know every family that has a husband or wife, dad or mom, son or daughter, brother or sister, serving in either Iraq or Afghanistan worries every day about the safety of their loved ones. These families have my respect and my support.

My heartfelt sympathy especially goes out to all the families who have lost loved ones or whose family members have been seriously wounded in either Iraq or Afghanistan. We will never forget – and will always be grateful for – their service to the cause of freedom and the war against terrorism. During my trip I was particularly moved by the comments of Army Chaplain J.D. Moore from Gloucester, Virginia. He told me one of his duties is to accompany troops assigned to recover the bodies of soldiers killed in action. He said that the remains of a fallen soldier – called “heroes” in the field by their comrades – are treated with respect and honor. He explained that as the body of the fallen soldier is put onto a helicopter to be flown back to a base camp, the soldiers on the ground salute and then stand at attention until the helicopter takes off. He said he will often look back

and see the soldiers still standing at attention even though the helicopter is more than a mile away. I cannot say enough about the extraordinary men and women serving in uniform today. (On the back of this report is an excerpt from Chaplain's Moore's journal describing a "Hero Mission." You can read other entries by Chaplain Moore online at: <http://www.unionbaptistchurch.net/> Click on: "Chronicles of Pastor JD.")

The civilians serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and the surrounding region – whether with the Department of Defense, the State Department, USAID, FBI, DEA, Department of Energy, Department of Transportation or with one of the many contractors helping support our efforts – also are doing an outstanding job. They, too, are separated from their families and are working long hours in tough conditions. We are grateful, as well, for their efforts.

## IRAQ

I thought it was important for me to return to Iraq to assess the conditions in the country since my last visit in December 2003. On this trip, I returned to Baghdad for a second time and also visited Tikrit – Saddam Hussein's ancestral hometown – and Kirkuk. On my two previous trips, I spent time in Al Nassiriyah, Al Kut (both times), Al Amarah and Basra. I have now spent time in all but the Kurdish areas in northern Iraq. This also was my first trip with the U.S. military. My previous visits were with NGOs (non-governmental organizations).

While I recognize that mistakes have been made in the war effort in Iraq, the purpose of this report is to

look forward, not back. I also recognize there were good and reasonable people on both sides of the decision to send U.S. armed forces to Iraq. But we are there now and cannot abandon the mission to bring peace and stability to Iraq and its people.

Up front, I want to make clear that there are many positive things happening in Iraq. I saw with my own eyes real progress being made on several fronts. Safe drinking water is available in places that have never had it before. Electricity is being restored. Oil pipelines are being repaired. Schools are being renovated. Hospitals and health clinics are being built. Police stations are being constructed. The Iraqi army is being reconstituted and will live and train in modern facilities built by Iraqis under the supervision and guidance of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Perhaps most impressive: Iraq held its first election in more than 30 years and will vote on a constitution later this month. These are all positive steps forward, and are the result of

the efforts of the United States and its coalition partners.

Sadly, much of this "good" news is going unreported because security still remains the number one problem facing Iraq. The country is far from being safe. Everywhere I went I was escorted by a full complement of heavily armed soldiers and security personnel. Even while riding in armored vehicles, I wore body armor and a helmet.

Until we get security under control, our efforts to rebuild Iraq will continue to be a challenge. If embassy officials, USAID staff, NGOs, contractors – and, yes, even the media – cannot move around the country without the fear of being attacked, our efforts to bring peace to Iraq will be hampered. I was told many contractors remain unwilling to bid on work because of the level of violence that still exists, and those who do take on projects spend enormous sums of money on private security. I also was told the World Bank, a criti-



**During my trip, I met with members of the Iraqi leadership, including the president and the speaker of the National Assembly.**



**Iraqis, under the supervision of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, are helping build military bases for the new Iraqi army.**

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cal element to helping rebuild Iraq, has refused to send staff because of security concerns.

To really understand what is happening in Iraq, you have to talk to the service men and women who are serving – or have served – there. They are the fathers, the mothers, the sons, the daughters who have put their lives on the line in the war on terror. They are the neighbor down the street who has been called up for Reserve or Guard duty. They also are the federal employee who has volunteered for a temporary assignment.

In speaking with our service personnel, I was troubled to learn our troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are well aware of the media coverage of anti-war protests in America, especially the vigil of Cindy Sheehan, whose son was killed in action while serving in the war. The televisions in the mess halls, offices and sleeping quarters are all tuned into CNN, CNBC and Fox. I had several soldiers express wonderment on what is taking place back home. At one point, an enlisted soldier pulled

me aside and asked if he could talk to me in private. He said he has been watching the news about the protests and wanted to know if the American people were still behind the soldiers. I reassured him that they were but he just looked at me and asked again, almost as if he didn't believe me. He then said that when some of his fellow soldiers learned about the anti-war vigil their morale plummeted.

I raise this point because I believe it is important for the anti-war protesters to know how their actions potentially could be perceived by our soldiers on the front lines who are doing their jobs. Protest and dissent is the beauty of democracy, but the anti-war demonstrators need to understand that our soldiers know about their actions. They need to realize that those actions can have a negative impact on soldiers' spirits.

I believe President Bush should have met with Mrs. Sheehan last month. I have read news accounts of some of the president's meetings with families of soldiers who have been

killed in action. You can't help but get emotional reading the reports. The president is a compassionate man. He shares in the grief of those families who have lost a loved one. I know the burden on him as commander-in-chief is tremendous. He should include Mrs. Sheehan in his next meeting with families of fallen or wounded soldiers.

I also was struck by the number of soldiers who told me they were bewildered by the news accounts coming out of Iraq. Many said the Iraq being portrayed on the news is not the Iraq they see every day. One young officer said he no longer watches television news. Time and again I had soldiers, civilians and even members of the Iraqi government say they wished the media would report some "good" things happening in Iraq.

I recognize and understand that the media, like everyone else in Iraq, are working under difficult conditions. It is not easy to move around the country and more than 60 reporters have lost their lives. Many have done an outstanding job and I am sure they, too, would like to report "good" news more regularly, but their reports are often overtaken by the events of the day, such as the tragic stampede over a Tigris River bridge in Baghdad on Wednesday, August 31, where more than 900 innocent people were killed fleeing from a mosque that was rumored to be the target of a suicide bomber.

During my visit, I had the opportunity to meet with Lt. Gen. Dave Petraeus, commander, Multinational Security Transition Command in Iraq, and a number of other officers under his command. General Petraeus has

done an outstanding job. Regrettably, his tour in Iraq is winding down. While he was extremely upbeat about the progress being made, he cautioned that there is still a long way to go.

I also attended a lunch meeting with U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and several members of the Iraqi government, including Iraq's president, Jalal Al-Talabani; the speaker of the National Assembly, Hajim Al-Hasani; the president of the Kurdistan Regional government, Nechirvan Idris Barzani, and several members of the country's constitution committee. I am extremely impressed with Ambassador Khalilzad. He has the respect of the Iraqi leadership and is a skillful negotiator. He is playing a major role in Iraq as he did in Afghanistan, where he served as ambassador for the past two years.

Our meeting was only a few hours before the Iraqi government announced it had reached an agreement on the country's constitution. It was interesting to watch all sides involved in the process talk about "compromise." They each acknowledged that no one is entirely satisfied with the constitution but realized each party involved had to give up something in order to move the process forward. Changes are still expected to be made before the October 15 vote. They also were all in agreement that it would be a mistake for the United States to leave before Iraq is safe and that no timetable should be set for U.S. troops to be withdrawn.

I had a separate meeting with Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, Iraq's prime minister, where we discussed the evolution-

ary process of the new constitution. I was struck by his knowledge of the development of our own constitution and the amount of compromise and length of time it took for it to be adopted. He, too, expressed concern about the United States leaving Iraq too soon.

I heard compelling stories of Iraqi men and women meeting with family, friends and neighbors to discuss the October 15 vote on the Iraqi constitution. I was told many are going to great lengths – some even risking their lives – to spread the word and distribute information about the upcoming vote. One story involved a group of individuals who were randomly stopped by local police. While waiting to be allowed to proceed they used the opportunity to talk about the constitution with the police officers.

My trip included a visit to two of the military bases being built for the Iraqi army, a hospital being built in Tikrit and a pediatric hospital in Kirkuk that has been refurbished. I also flew over the Al Fathah Tigris

River bridge/pipeline project, just south of Kirkuk. Coalition forces bombed the bridge during the war to restrict enemy movement and contain the old Iraqi Army. Suspended under the bridge deck were critical oil pipelines that carried oil from the Kirkuk oil fields to the Iraq-Turkey pipeline and then north, south and west to petroleum processing facilities across Iraq.

Repairing this critically important pipeline, considered to be the center of gravity for the Iraqi oil infrastructure, has been a challenge. The geology of the area prevented a new pipeline from being laid under the river and a new strategy has had to be developed. Security also has been a problem. The insurgents are fully cognizant of the importance of this pipeline and regularly attempt to disrupt progress on the project. I was told there is small arms fire almost daily at the site. A Washington Post article on Sunday, September 4, reported that "armed men" set fire to oil leaking from the pipeline the day before and the pipeline eventually caught fire. The Reuters news service



**The men and women serving in Iraq deserve the admiration of the American people. They are all incredible individuals.**

reported that a bomb, rather than arson, caused the pipeline fire and the blaze shut down exports to the Turkish city of Cohen on the Mediterranean.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is playing a key role in many of the construction and rehabilitation projects in Iraq. Nearly a dozen civilians from the Corps' Transatlantic Programs Center from my congressional district in Winchester are presently serving in the Gulf region. All volunteered for the temporary assignment. Winchester resident Michelle Thrift, whom I had met earlier this year during a visit to the Winchester office, traveled with our group as we toured Tikrit and Kirkuk. She and her colleagues are making a difference.

Patience is the key to our success in Iraq. We have to manage our expectations when it comes to rebuilding the country. Almost an entire generation of Iraqis know nothing but the brutal, murderous regime of Saddam Hussein. While Saddam, his two sons and other loyal supporters lived lavishly in Baghdad, the rest of Iraq lived in extreme poverty. In parts of the country where Saddam felt threatened, he did everything possible to make life even more difficult, particularly after the uprisings following the first Gulf War. It was their punishment for opposing his iron-fisted rule.

Saddam spent millions of dollars on ornate palaces and tributes to himself and only invested the bare minimum in keeping the country's infrastructure in place. Consequently, the task of repairing oil pipelines, electric generation plants, roads and the country's rail system is going to

be much greater than ever believed.

One interesting comment I heard is that the rebuilding of Iraq cannot be on America's timetable. It will have to be on Iraq's timetable. Life – and timetables – in Iraq are not the same as in the United States. This is a key point, and one the Bush administration must explain better.

It also is important to remember that in its early years, America had its share of growing pains. While we declared our independence in 1776, it was 11 years before our forefathers began to draft a constitution that wasn't ratified until 1789. Few remember that our constitution was debated in complete secrecy. Delegates knew that they would generate heated differences and did not want to advertise their own dissension the workings of the House of Commons. Democracy and an elected government are truly foreign concepts to the Iraqi people.

The Bush administration also needs to do a better job of explaining what the consequences of "failing" in Iraq would mean to the average person in Chantilly, Virginia; Topeka, Kansas, or Portland, Oregon.

I repeatedly asked people I met during the trip – from generals, to State Department officials, to members of the Iraqi government – what they thought "failure" would mean. The responses were chilling.

I heard references to Somalia – think of the movie "Black Hawk Down" – and the former Yugoslavia with all its ethnic cleansing. The images that flashed in my mind when I

heard these countries were disturbing. I was in Somalia during the crisis in 1993. I traveled to Sarajevo and the Yugoslavia region several times in the early to mid-1990's where so many were killed. In fact, many of the people I met with in Vukovar, Croatia, in 1991 were killed several months later and buried in mass graves.

Many speculated that civil war would break out in Iraq and even more foreign fighters from across the region would pour into the country in hopes of influencing the outcome. I was told almost all of the insurgents now carrying out the suicide attacks are foreigners, most coming across the Syrian border from places like Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan and Afghanistan. I also was told militias are already fighting each other on a regular basis in some parts of the country.

If our mission fails and civil war comes, the country would almost certainly divide into three parts: the Kurds in the north, the Sunnis in central Iraq, and the Shias in the south. It is believed the Kurds would most likely be able to keep from being drawn into the fighting and could govern themselves. In the central region of the Sunni Triangle, warring factions would fight for control and most agree that there would be sheer chaos. Iran's presence is already being felt in the south as it tries to influence the upcoming elections and if civil war erupts, elements in Iran could be expected to even further infiltrate the south.

With civil war, almost everyone I asked said that Iraq would become a haven from which terrorists groups



**U.S. Ambassador Khalilzad is playing a major role in Iraq as he did in Afghanistan, where he served as ambassador for two years.**

could launch attacks against the United States and other countries. No one has to be reminded of what happened on 9/11. Thirty people from the Virginia's 10th congressional district were among the thousands who died that day.

Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups would like nothing more than to have a new "base" from which to operate, much like Afghanistan in the 1990s after the Soviets were defeated. There is no denying that the terrorists have designs on the United States and, as one U.S. officer told me, "we must win the war so we don't fight the next war in America."

Terrorists are doing everything in their power to prevent the United States and its coalition partners from being successful in Iraq. They believe time is on their side and that they can "wait out" the United States. They will do anything – including blowing themselves up in busy marketplaces – to disrupt our

progress and turn the Iraqi people against America. They believe that the war being fought in Iraq is not a "military" war but rather a "political" war and American public opinion will dictate when the United States leaves, not military success.

There is a general belief among terrorism experts that the top priority of terrorists is to seek chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons. The video of two commercial airliners being flown into the World Trade Center is ingrained in every American's mind. I shudder to think what terrorists would do if they obtained a biological or chemical weapon.

Many I spoke with also said failure in Iraq could destabilize the entire Gulf region and possibly lead to the downfall of the governments of Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Failure also could have serious impact on the world's economy,

especially the increasing demand for energy. Japan, I was told, imports more than 75 percent of its oil from the region, Western Europe 30 percent and the United States 22 percent. The United States is now seeing record gasoline prices and supply disruptions in the wake of Hurricane Katrina as consumers fear gas shortages. Failure in Iraq would directly impact the cost of oil and have far-ranging negative consequences on the U.S. and world economies.

Others said they believe the United States has a moral obligation to the people of Iraq to successfully complete what it started. They asked how the American public would feel if civil war were to break out and thousands upon thousands of innocent Iraqis were slaughtered in the subsequent fighting?

Finally, many believe the United States' credibility is at stake. In The Washington Post's Outlook Section on September 4, Victor Davis Hanson, a military historian at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and the author of the forthcoming book, "A War Like No Other," wrote:

*If we fled precipitously, moderates in the Middle East could never again believe American assurances of support for reform and would have to retreat into the shadows – or find themselves at the mercy of fascist killers. Jihadists would swell their ranks as they hyped their defeat of the American infidels. Our forward strategy of hitting terrorists hard abroad would be discredited and replaced by a return to the pre-9/11 tactics of a few cruise missiles and writs. And loyal al-*

lies in Eastern Europe, the United Kingdom, Australia and Japan, along with new friends in India and the former Soviet republics, would find themselves leaderless in the global struggle against Islamic radicalism.

Failure cannot be an option in Iraq nor can the creation of an arbitrary deadline for pulling out U.S. troops. The ramifications for our country and other countries in the West would be huge. Our withdrawal must be event driven and not artificially tied to a calendar. We must set conditions for victory, not dates for withdrawal.

The Bush Administration must do a better job articulating just what is at stake and the potentially catastrophic consequences. Time is not on the side of the administration. There is a sense that public support is waning in both the United States and in Great Britain. No one believes we will lose the war on the ground in Iraq; it's here at home that there is a concern. One general officer said point blank that the "center of gravity" for our success in Iraq is the American public.

The administration also needs to do a better job of letting the American people know how they can participate in the war effort. During World War II, the American people were asked to buy war bonds. They were asked to plant "Victory Gardens." They were asked to collect cans for scrap metal. They were asked to do tangible, real things to help in the war effort. For the 21st century, there must be more all Americans can do to participate. I know the American people are anx-



### **Iraqis play an important role in the making of a new Iraq. Failure cannot be an option.**

ious to support our troops and many are doing just that. But I am confident more can be done.

For example, when I was in Qatar, we visited the facility where soldiers can come for four days of R&R from the front lines. It is a great place for soldiers to relax, call or e-mail home, watch television and even go sightseeing in Doha. I was told, however, that many of the soldiers come there either in uniform or without the proper clothes to leave the base since Qatar, like many of the countries in the region, adheres to strict, conservative dress codes, particularly for women.

I learned there is a collection of clothing available for the service men and women to borrow, but in all honesty, the facility doesn't have enough. As Americans look for ways to support our troops, perhaps civic organizations could organize clothes drives or purchase suitable clothing to ship to the Qatar base via FedEx

or DHL or any carrier servicing the region. Something as simple as this would allow the American public to get more involved, and surely would be welcomed by the men and women who are coming back from the front for a few days of rest and relaxation.

While there has been real progress in Iraq, there is still a long way to go. To ensure progress continues as quickly as possible, I strongly urge the Bush Administration to select a group of capable and distinguished individuals – some with a military background and others with extensive foreign policy experience – to go to the Iraq and other parts of the Gulf region to comprehensively review our efforts. All of the individuals selected would be known for their honesty, integrity and competence.

The group would essentially provide "fresh eyes on the target." The target, of course, being how we bring about success in Iraq. Upon their return, the group would report to the president, Congress and the American public.

My motive behind the appointment of this group is not to find fault with the U.S. effort there now. Such an independent, comprehensive review could help to assure Americans – no matter what their position is on the war – that every effort possible is being made to protect our troops and realize our goal of a secure and peaceful Iraq. I see no downside in such a review. In our daily lives, we regularly seek second opinions.

I recognize that the Bush administration has sent other teams of individuals to Iraq to assess the

ongoing situation. But what I call a “fresh eyes” review would be different in that rather than just reporting back to the president, the secretary of Defense or the secretary of State, this group also would report to the American public. Frankly, I believe the administration has an obligation to the American people to provide this information.

As I stated at the beginning of this report, I wanted to return to Iraq to assess the present conditions. Like many Americans I was growing more and more concerned about the daily media reports coming out of Iraq, particularly the steady stream of stories of soldiers losing their lives. I voted to send American men and women to war and I strongly believe I have an obligation to see firsthand how things are going so I can fully explain the situation to a mother in Warrenton or a father in Berryville.

Before this most recent trip, I heard a constant drum beat of negative reports. But I have seen with my own eyes the progress we are making. There is a huge difference between December 2003 and today. Yes, security is still a big problem, and yes, we still have a long way to go. But complete and total success is not going to come overnight. This is going to be a long and difficult struggle. In fact, many predict the insurgents will increase their level of attacks in the coming weeks in hope of disrupting next month’s referendum on Iraq’s draft constitution.

The Bush Administration needs to face the reality that a growing number of Americans are becoming skeptical. While they clearly support our troops, they are tiring of all the

negative stories coming out of the country and do not have the benefit of seeing the entire picture.

The administration has nothing to fear by putting together the “fresh eyes” group I propose. Progress is being made. The American people need to know that. Mistakes have been made, too, and I believe the American public is an understanding public and are willing to forgive as mistakes are acknowledged. Most of all, Americans just want an honest assessment.

As chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee with oversight of the State Department and the Justice Department, in addition to being the author of the legislation creating the National Commission on Terrorism, later known as the Bremer Commission, I am keenly aware of what is at stake if we fail to achieve our goal in Iraq. This group could help ensure that we are successful. It would examine each and every operation – from how we are dealing with the insurgency to the status of the thousands of reconstruction projects being undertaken in Iraq to what we are doing to improve America’s image through public diplomacy in the region – and perhaps offer different perspectives in addressing what is a very complex issue. The group would travel to all parts of Iraq – the Shia south, the central Sunni Triangle and the north where the Kurds reside. They would meet with general officers, junior officers, NCOs and privates in Iraq and at our ancillary facilities in the region. They would meet embassy officials and other federal government employees working in Baghdad. They would meet with civilian contractors

and NGOs operating in the country. Meetings with Iraqi leaders would be scheduled as well as meetings with ordinary Iraqis in the country’s towns and villages.

In an effort to better educate the American public about our ongoing efforts in Iraq – and the Gulf region – perhaps a select group of media should accompany this group during its visit, not as a tool for U.S. “propaganda” but to ensure transparency. This would give the media the opportunity to travel to all parts of the country and report on both the “good and the bad.” The “pool” would include both broadcast and print media.

This “fresh eyes” review would assess answers to questions such as the following:

- How accurate a picture do we have of the insurgency? What is the realistic strength of the insurgency? Is the insurgency growing or diminishing in capability?
- What can we do to get better tactical intelligence on the enemy and what will it take to get actionable intelligence?
- How reliable and effective is the growing Iraqi security establishment? What is its ethnic makeup?
- What is the power and effectiveness of local militias in the country and how much of a problem do they pose in the longer term for an Iraqi government?
- What role is Iran playing in the evolving political and security situation in Iraq? What role is Syria playing?
- What will it take in terms of resources, organization and time to effectively control the Iraqi bor-

ders?

- Is there an anti-sabotage strategy to protect the energy infrastructure? If so, why isn't it working? Are there alternatives?
- What is the status of the efforts to organize the Iraqi ministries and get them up and running? Is progress being made? If not, what more needs to be done?
- What criteria should guide the pace of withdrawal of American and coalition forces?

We owe it to the thousands of men and women who are in harm's way to test the process and ask questions. We also owe it to the American public. I urge the administration to act quickly to put together this team to offer "fresh eyes on the target."

## **QATAR**

Both the Air Force and the Army have large command, operation, staging and warehousing facilities in Qatar. The Air Force operates out of Al-Udeid Air Base, the largest expeditionary base outside the United States; the Army at Camp As-Sahliyah. I was extremely impressed with both facilities. The airmen and soldiers stationed here are well trained, highly motivated and entirely dedicated to their mission. They work long days, many in extreme heat. The temperature on the flight line at Al-Udeid often reaches 130 degrees and can get even hotter because of all the pavement. Keeping the airmen who maintain and load the planes hydrated is a top priority.

I received high-level briefings at both facilities, including one from the Army's U.S. Central Command. I also toured the Air Force's Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC), where all aircraft opera-



**In a meeting with President Karzai, I voiced concern about ongoing production of opium and its derivative heroin in Afghanistan.**

tions in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa are monitored. It is a truly amazing facility. Massive floor-to-ceiling monitors track flights much like an FAA operations center tracks commercial flights. The facility hums with activity 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In addition, I visited a facility where thousands upon thousands of documents uncovered or captured in Iraq are translated and reviewed as part of the war on terror. I was told more than 50,000 boxes of documents have been collected in Iraq alone. Items captured include computers, hard drives, videos, maps, film and blueprints. The work being done at this facility is critically important. A number of DOD civilians have volunteered for temporary duty at this facility, including several from Virginia.

As I mentioned earlier, I also toured the facility where soldiers serving on the front lines can come

spend four days of R&R. The facility has televisions, computers with access to the Internet and American-style restaurants. It also has a stage where USO shows featuring Hollywood entertainers and popular musicians can perform. Sightseeing tours of Qatar also are scheduled out of the facility. Providing our soldiers with a place to decompress and escape from the stress of the front lines is vital.

## **AFGHANISTAN**

Significant strides have been made in Afghanistan since my first visit in January 2002, when I led the first congressional delegation into the country following 9/11. Kabul is full of life. The streets are crowded with shoppers and young children. Schools are open – for both boys and girls. Hospitals are being improved. Health clinics, I was told, are opening in villages that never had any form of health care before. New roads are being built. The country elected its first president, and on



**On my trip, I met civilian and military personnel from across Virginia. They - and their families - are all making great sacrifices.**

September 18 will elect a national assembly. I also saw kites flying in the sky – a longstanding Afghan tradition which was forbidden by the Taliban.

While in Afghanistan I met with Ambassador Ronald Neumann and members of the embassy staff; Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry, commander, Combined Forces - Afghanistan; representatives from the Department of Justice, including the FBI, and some of the NGOs operating in the country. I also met with Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Nearly all the individuals with whom I met seemed pleased with the progress made to date, but stressed that like Iraq, there is still a long way to go. Many described the situation as “fragile.” Security still remains an issue, from both internal and external threats – internally from some of the militias that continue to exist; externally from Al Qaeda. One long-time American friend I saw during my visit, though, told me he feels perfectly safe in Kabul and regularly takes taxis around town.

Aside from security, there are two other threats to the future of Afghanistan: corruption and drug trafficking. The government must get a better handle on both. Almost half of the nation’s GDP comes from the sale of illicit drugs. I was told nearly 90 percent of the world’s supply of opium and its derivative heroin comes from Afghanistan. I am concerned that some of the profits from the drug trade could be helping support the terrorist network around the globe.

I also visited the National Democratic Institute’s (NDI) Election Training and Information Center in Kabul. I was extremely impressed with the work of NDI. It has done an outstanding job teaching candidates about the electoral process and is now training nearly 200,000 polling officials whose goal will be to ensure that the upcoming elections are honest and fair. The center is training both men and women since each will vote at separate polling places. More than 3,000 candidates are running for 249 seats in the national assembly; women must hold 68 seats. Each

candidate was permitted to select 20 polling officials to be trained as observers.

I wish C-SPAN could have been with me when I visited NDI to capture the excitement in the air. The Afghans are enthusiastic about the upcoming elections. Candidates are going to people’s homes to solicit votes and holding “campaign” barbecues. Campaign posters are plastered on sign posts, walls and storefronts all over Kabul. Candidates are even being given three minutes of free airtime on television and two minutes of free airtime on the radio.

My only concern is that their expectations may be too high. Because there are so many candidates running in Kabul alone and the ballot there will be seven pages, the election is expected to be complicated and confusing. Since so few people in Afghanistan can read or write, each ballot will not only list candidates by name, but will include the candidate’s photo and an identifying symbol, such as a dove or a camel.

In addition to visiting NDI, I toured the site where the media will broadcast the election results and the warehouse where the election day materials are being assembled. Among the items included in each plastic container for the polling places is a stamp that will be used to certify each ballot and a container of the now famous purple ink in which voters will dip their fingers to show they have voted.

The progress in Afghanistan is truly remarkable. Five years ago women were being executed in soccer stadiums. Today, almost all walk the



**Kabul is full of life. Its streets are crowded with cars and shoppers. Campaign signs are posted on shop fronts, kiosks and even hang from trees in anticipation of the upcoming election.**

streets of Kabul without a burka, the head-to-toe sky-blue garment Afghan women were required to wear in public by the Taliban. Like Iraq, however, patience is key to its success. Afghanistan was a failed state. It has known nothing but war for 25 of the last 30 years. It is slowly but surely making the transition to a democracy, but its future is very much tied to the commitment of the United States – and its coalition partners – to seeing it through to the end. We walked away once from Afghanistan. We cannot make the same mistake twice.

## END NOTES

I want to thank all those who

helped make my trip possible, particularly the U.S. Army, who served as my host, and my Army escort, Lt. Col. Donna Shahbaz. I also want to thank the U.S. Air Force for providing transportation in and out of both Iraq and Afghanistan and the embassy staff in Iraq, Afghanistan and Qatar for all their support. My appreciation also goes to the military staff who provided assistance on the ground as well as to all the individuals who helped provide security.

I also want to thank several members of my staff for their help in putting together this report. Dan Scandling, my chief of staff, accompanied me on the trip, helped write this

report and served as photographer; Janet Shaffron, my legislative director, edited the report, and Kristin Erb, my scheduler, played a critical role in planning the trip. Colin Samples did the layout and design.

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# “HERO MISSION”

Excerpted with permission from  
Army Chaplain J.D. Moore’s “Chronicles of Pastor J.D.”

(Online at: <http://www.unionbaptistchurch.net/>)

January 27, 2005

“I was abruptly caught off guard today by one of the Administrative Privates from flight operations. He told me that the flight operation Battle Captain was looking for me. When I arrived to see the Battle Captain, he told me that I was given a Hero Mission for a young soldier who had died in battle only hours before. I had about twenty minutes to ready myself and to go by Black-hawk with Specialist Toussaint to recover the soldier’s body from his unit and to escort the Hero to another base where he would be sent home to his family. I found Specialist Toussaint, gathered my gear, and made my way to the flight line to board the aircraft. When I arrived, everyone was as somber as I. I prayed over the aircraft, received our mission briefing, and then we departed. Once arriving to the location of the unit, I found the fallen soldier’s unit neatly and sharply in formation next to the landing zone. Their clothes were muddy and their faces were downcast. Immediately you could sense their pain.

“Toussaint and I immediately departed the aircraft and hastily made our way to the Chaplain of the unit who was standing with his soldiers like a good shepherd. In the Chaplain’s arms was his large red Bible embraced against his chest. The soldiers carefully opened the back of the vehicle and solemnly and with honor removed their fallen friend from the vehicle. The black body bag hung in the hands of his friends. Toussaint and I stood next to the vehicle and rendered a slow salute. We slowly and reverently followed the soldiers and their fallen comrade to the aircraft. Once arriving to the helicopter with the blades still churning and whirling, we all carefully placed the Hero in the aircraft. The crew chiefs of the aircraft gently situated the new crew member, our Hero. We stopped and prayed. As I turned to my rear, I looked back to see the rest of the America’s Sons. Their Chaplain, Chaplain Fisher, came to me, embraced me tightly, and with a shattered voice said, “Thank you for being here and escorting our friend part way home. Thank your unit for us for their help.” I could only return his embrace, pat his shoulder, and look into his face. I then boarded the aircraft, and we began our ascent. As the aircraft blades aggressively moved the air and we began to rise off the ground, I looked to my right out of the window to see the unit being swayed by the turbulence but still saluting their fallen hero. As long as I could see Hero’s unit standing at attention in the blowing turbulence saluting their combat buddy, one of the soldiers, they remained standing, steadfast, saluting and honoring our hero.

“I certainly will never forget this Hero Mission. I was very quiet all the way back to Speicher and could only think about the pain a family back home was getting ready to experience. I prayed for the family.”

Love,

Pastor J. D.