

WASHINGTON REPORT

SPECIAL EDITION

I am privileged to share my experiences with the people who have entrusted me with representing them in our nation's capitol.

Devin



SEPTEMBER 2007

On September 11, 2007, Rep. Devin Nunes traveled to Iraq for his third visit to the country. Congressional Delegation Boehner, named for Republican Leader John Boehner who served as delegation Chairman, traveled to Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

DEVIN NUNES, UNITED STATES CONGRESSMAN

21ST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

This article contains a summary of my views following a recent trip to Iraq. I appreciate your interest in this important issue and hope you will take the time to independently examine our current situation in the Middle East.

A perilous road to victory

Before I begin, it is important to understand the context of our current military presence in Iraq. In 2002, the United States Congress authorized military action following more than ten years of defiance by Saddam Hussein; both with respect to the terms of the Gulf War Cease Fire and numerous United Nations (U.N.) Security Council Resolutions. During this period, intelligence agencies in Britain, Germany, France, and many other nations were issuing stark warnings concerning Iraq's ongoing efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction. Intelligence reports also detailed Iraq's proven support for terrorism as well as large stockpiles of missing weapons of mass destruction, which were known to be in the possession of Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War.

Noting these facts, Congress authorized the president to use our Armed Forces to defend the national security of the United States against the ongoing threat associated with Iraq and to enforce Iraqi compliance with U.N. Security Council Resolutions. This military authorization, Public Law 107-243, passed with an overwhelming bipartisan vote.

The defeat of Iraq's military was swift and reminiscent of the first Gulf War. In early 2003, coalition forces rolled into Baghdad amid celebrations by the Iraqi people. Hussein had ruled with an iron fist, committed atrocities against the Iraqi people, and attempted genocide against the Kurds. His departure from power was celebrated by the vast majority of Iraqis. These celebrations, however, were short-lived. The reality of



Iraqis, with the help of American soldiers, topple a statue of Saddam Hussein, March 2003.

historic ethnic strife and brutality in Iraq soon emerged. Since that time, coalition forces have navigated a perilous path towards Iraqi democratic self-rule and defense.

Freedom in Iraq came at great cost

The United States liberated Iraq at great cost, both in terms of the lives of our soldiers as well as ongoing financial investments. We understandably have high expectations of the new Iraqi government. The U.S. Congress has high expectations, and the American people have high expectations. We want Iraq to stand up for herself and to commit to the political reforms necessary to end ethnic violence. Most of all, we all want our soldiers to come home and the long deployments to end.

After several years of turmoil and many setbacks, some Americans legitimately question whether reconciliation in Iraq is possible. I have a healthy dose of skepticism myself and have shared my concerns about slow progress with Iraqi leaders during my visits to the country. However, I do not accept that anyone can objectively question the national security consequences of failure in Iraq. This is particularly true for Members of Congress. There is no excuse for any elected leader in our government to advocate defeatist policies or to suggest we have lost the conflict.

Other than the simple fact that we have not "lost" in Iraq, there is the compelling reality that defeatism undermines our mission. It demoralizes our soldiers, who are committed to victory, and it sends the wrong signal to both our allies and enemies in the region. The long-term security threat associated with terrorism is very real and no amount of political pandering can change the stark reality that Iraq is a central front in the global war on terror.

Fallujah in April 2007

By way of brief background, in April of this year I participated in my second trip to Iraq. I wanted to see first hand whether or not progress was being made and whether or not the Iraqi government was capable of making the difficult decisions necessary to facilitate national unity. As you may recall, at the conclusion of the trip I noted that progress was indeed being made, and did so with some surprise (see the *Washington Report: Special Edition, May 2007*). In our nation's capitol, as in communities across the United States, we are constantly hearing bad news from Iraq, and good news seems to get lost in the debate.

However, there I was in Fallujah. I was walking around with military officials in the open. This region had been a hotbed of terrorist activity and was described as "lost" in intelligence and Defense Department reporting not more than a year ago.



Congressman Nunes in Fallujah, April 29, 2007.

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It was arguably the most dangerous place in Iraq. Al Qaeda controlled Fallujah and any Iraqi caught talking to or cooperating with the coalition would turn up dead shortly thereafter. Nevertheless, I was there in Fallujah, and it was clear that al Qaeda had been driven out.

My third trip

On this, my third trip to Iraq, I had the opportunity to travel with Republican Leader John Boehner of Ohio, as well as the ranking representatives who serve on the Homeland Security and Intelligence committees. The delegation's mission was an assessment of intelligence activities in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan related to the global war on terror. The trip was also well-timed for an evaluation of the Petraeus / Crocker report and gave us an up-close perspective on what has been described by our military leaders as significant progress in Iraq.



Iraq Schedule Highlights

- Lt. General Raymond Odierno discussed security improvements
- Major General Kevin Bergner, Major General Michael Barbero and a number of State Department Officials discussed political reconciliation and infrastructure developments
- Brigadier General Ed Cardon and Iraqi military leaders hosted a visit to a U.S. - Iraqi joint security station outside the green zone
- Meetings with soldiers from California

New tactics; positive results

Fallujah represented an early example of how a surge in troops could result in the stability necessary to achieve com-

munity support. A comprehensive re-evaluation of our strategy, both by the Pentagon and an independent panel (The Iraq Study Group), resulted in a number of changes in our war policy. The adoption of a larger military surge in the country was among the changes that surfaced as a result of growing criticism about increasing violence in Iraq.

Earlier this year, the president ordered, and the military executed a large-scale military surge in Iraq, thanks in part to the lessons learned in Fallujah. Traveling to Iraq for a third time, I was optimistic that the surge could work on the larger scale envisioned by our military leaders.

With the additional soldiers, the coalition was able to clear and hold neighborhoods. This was a departure from previous military tactics, which involved sweeping an area but not necessarily holding ground. Our continued presence, along with additional Iraqi units, prevented the terrorists from circling back and reestablishing a foothold. It also gave local residents confidence that they would be safe if they worked with the new Iraqi government and fought terrorists.

It is noteworthy to point out that the day prior to our departure for Iraq, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker had submitted their report to Congress (testimony is available on my website). This report detailed security progress in Iraq but also expressed frustration concerning political benchmarks.



Security has improved but challenges are significant

There is no question that security has improved in parts of Iraq. Indeed, during my April visit to the country, the

Embassy Compound in Baghdad was shelled while I was participating in a meeting with military commanders. We were told these attacks were common. The green zone had become highly unsafe.

However, during my third visit the green zone was relatively quiet. The security conditions in the city were remarkably improved. We also traveled to the front lines and visited Cahill in the Babil Province, South of Baghdad.



Congressman Nunes meeting with Brigadier General Cardon and other military officials in Cahill.

Cahill is undergoing a slow transformation and is extremely dangerous today. Many of the insurgents and terrorist who were driven out of Baghdad fled to the Babil Province. However, local leaders are cooperating with coalition forces to improve security. One of the most promising aspects of the work being done in this region is growing cooperation among Sunni and Shia. If Iraqi efforts to unify Cahill and other Babil communities are successful, it will be an important step in national reconciliation.

Our visit to Babil Province gave us the opportunity to interact with soldiers stationed at a joint U.S. - Iraqi Combat Post. The soldiers at this post were dedicated and upbeat. They were also highly frustrated with the defeatist propaganda coming from elected leaders in the United States. These soldiers have seen the face of the enemy. They understand the consequences of allowing al Qaeda and other extremist groups to gain control of Iraq and they are not ready to surrender.

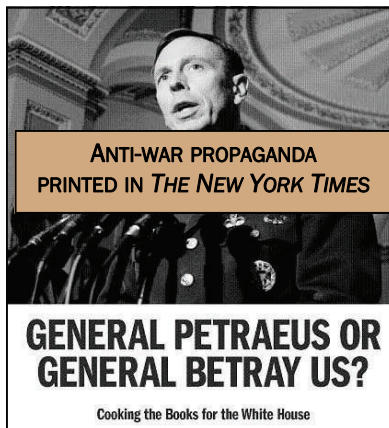
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Anti war propaganda hurts

On more than one occasion, MoveOn.org's advertisement in *The New York Times* was mentioned. General Petraeus is well respected, and highly regarded by soldiers serving in Iraq. They expressed outrage over MoveOn.org's personal attack against the General.



Many Americans have grown war weary. Thousands have experienced personal losses as a result of the conflict. However, we must be careful not to undermine our mission or the morale of our soldiers. MoveOn.org was out of line when they attacked General Petraeus. Although it took too long, Congress did the right thing when we passed resolutions condemning the organization's attack on the General.

One thing is certain

The question of whether Iraq will become a stable democracy may still be subject to debate, but I can share with you one important fact: the war is coming to an end for a lot of al Qaeda terrorists. Our soldiers are fighting and defeating terrorists and insurgents every day of the week. American and coalition allies are eliminating threats in Iraq, Afghanistan and other parts of the world. As a result, we are safer here at home.



Iraqi commitment

The Iraqis are standing up and assuming more security responsibility. This was apparent from my visit. However, there are a lot of challenges remaining. Ethnic tensions are high and military, and police loyalty to the government remains in question.



Tribal leaders are highly influential in Iraqi society, and it has become apparent that a ground-up reconciliation effort may be necessary to move the national government forward. The slow progress of reform in the Iraqi Parliament is largely the result of uncertainty among Iraqi leaders, and fear for the future. Cahill may hold a glimmer of hope for this process, and there are notable examples of cooperation among ethnic groups towards the common goal of security and economic prosperity in other areas of Iraq today.

Security and reconciliation

Large-scale violence in Iraq is a significant barrier to political progress. Another barrier is the perception that the United States might give up and leave the nation in chaos.

Our national frustration with the Iraqi government is legitimate. However, we cannot underestimate or oversimplify the challenges confronting Iraq. The country has the potential of being a regional economic power-house. It has oil, rich soil and plenty of water.

Unfortunately, the nation also has the potential of becoming a focal point of human tragedy and regional instability; a proving-ground for terrorists seeking to destroy our way of life. My visits to Iraq have solidified my belief that the global war on terror will be a long-term, perhaps generational, battle. Our enemy wishes to impose its radical religious views on the world, not just the Middle East. We see this threat in every corner of the world.

How do you succeed with a national

unity government in Iraq when the viability of that government remains in question due to ongoing violence? Furthermore, how do you convince tribal leaders and Iraqi citizens to "buy-in" to the unity government and cooperate with reconciliation and security when they are not certain the government will exist long-term? These questions lead us to one answer: security.

The tone of the Iraq debate has not improved

Congress has spent the past four months debating Iraq policy. Those interested in retreating from the conflict remain committed to their cause. No amount of success stories will change their views; just as no amount of evidence concerning the dangers associated with defeat have been able to do so. However, the American people need to understand the real dangers we are facing, not just the political rhetoric of elected leaders. In my personal view, the White House has done a poor job at conveying the magnitude of the threat we are facing. With significant successes in preventing further terrorist attacks on our homeland, many Americans have been lulled into a false sense of security.

As your Congressman, I will continue to aggressively seek the facts concerning our mission in Iraq. If necessary, I will return to the country with my colleagues.

At this time, our military leaders believe we are making progress and they have a plan to continue the development of Iraq's security independence. Given the stark reality associated with defeat and the very real danger of terrorism, I believe Congress must continue to support our efforts in Iraq.

At the same time, Americans must come to realize that victory in Iraq will not result in the absence of violence. Victory will be manifested by a stable government and a capacity for self-defense.

Devin Nunes
Member of Congress

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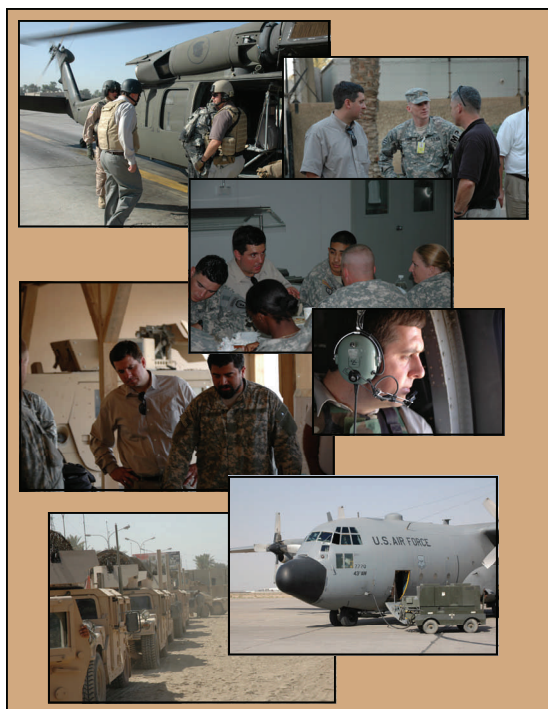
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