Mr. Speaker, I recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan

and Qatar with my administrative assistant Dan Scandling, and I wanted

to give a report on what I saw and some recommendations for the Bush

administration.

This was my third time to Iraq, second time to Afghanistan. This time

we went to Baghdad, Tikrit, and Kirkuk. I have now been to all parts of

Iraq except to Kurdish areas in the north. On previous trips we have

been to Baghdad, Nasaria, Alkoot twice, and Basra.

I want to begin by praising the military, both active duty, Reserve

and National Guard and note their very, very positive attitude and

great, great morale. I also want to publicly acknowledge and thank them

and praise their families in noting the sacrifices that they and their

families are making. I also want to offer condolences to the families

who have lost loved ones.

Before I go any further, Mr. Speaker, I want to read a passage from

an online journal being kept by a chaplain I met from Gloucester,

Virginia during my recent trip. We were in the Kirkuk area and he sat

across the table from me and he told me this story.

We then got this from his Web page. It is incredibly moving and

describes the quality of the men and women serving in uniform. It is

the hero mission from a trip report excerpted with permission from Army

chaplain J.D. Morris, ``Chronicles of Pastor J.D., January 27, 2005.''

He begins by saying, ``I was abruptly caught off guard today by one

of the administrative privates from flight operations. He told me that

the flight operations 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 20 minutes to ready myself and go back by Blackhawk

with Specialist Tussant 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 Tussant, gathered my gear, and made my way

to the flight line to board the aircraft. When I arrived everyone was

as sober 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, their faces were downcast, and

immediately you could sense their pain.

``Tussant 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 arm was a large red Bible

embraced against his chest.

``The soldiers carefully opened the back of the vehicle and solemnly

and with honor removed the fallen friend from the vehicle. The black

body bag hung in the hands of his friends.

``Tussant and I stood next to the vehicle and rendered a slow salute.

We slowly and reverently followed the soldiers and the 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 chief in 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 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 the

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. We began our assent. As the

helicopter blades aggressively moved the air and we began to rise off

the ground, I looked to my right out the window to see the unit being

swayed by the turbulence but still saluting their fallen hero.

``As long as I could see the hero's unit standing at attention in the

blowing turbulence, saluting their combat buddy, the soldiers remained

standing steadfast, saluting and honoring our hero.

``I certainly will never forget this hero mission. I was very quiet

back to Speicher, which was the base. I could only think of the pain a

family back home was getting ready to experience. I prayed for the

family.''

Why did I go to Iraq for the third time and Afghanistan for the

second time? I have been hearing a constant drumbeat of negative

stories all summer, so I wanted to assess the situation again with my

own eyes. Not believe the administration, nor believe the media, but I

wanted to see firsthand for myself.

I saw a lot of positive things. Hospitals are being renovated.

Schools are being built. Pipelines are being repaired. And the Iraqi

Army is being trained.

In the comparison of my first visit and my second visit and this

visit 2 weeks ago, I could see the improvement that was being made.

Security, however, is still the greatest challenge we face. Who did I

meet with? I met with Lieutenant General Petraeus, Ambassador

Khalilzad, members of Iraqi leadership including the President, Prime

Minister, and the Speaker of the National Assembly, NBC officials,

folks from the Department of Justice, Department of Transportation,

Department of Energy, the USAID, and a lot of soldiers from privates to

generals.

What were my impressions? There is real progress being made, but

there are still concerns. Security remains our greatest challenge. The

country is far from being safe. Everywhere I went I was escorted by a

full complement of heavily armed soldiers and security personnel; and

even when riding in an armored vehicle we had to wear 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,

nongovernmental organizations, 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 that many contractors remain unwilling to bid on work

because of the level of violence that still exists and those who take

on projects spend enormous sums of money on private security.

I was also told the World Bank, a critical element to rebuilding

Iraq, had refused to send staff because of security concerns.

But I saw improvement from when I was there the first time, an

improvement from when I was there the second time. And this

administration has failed to articulate the improvement that has been

made in Iraq.

To really understand what has happened in Iraq, you have to talk to

the service men and women, God bless them, who are serving or who have

served there. They are the fathers, the mothers, the sons, daughters

who put their lives on the line in this war on terror. They are the

neighbor down the street who has been called up for Reserve or Guard

duty. They are the Federal employee who has volunteered for a temporary

assignment.

I was struck by the number of people saying the Iraq they see on TV

every day is not the Iraq they know. In the mess halls, throughout the

mess halls there are six to eight television sets that are on every day

to CNN. One junior officer told me that he does not even watch the news

anymore. Most soldiers said they were bewildered on what they were

seeing on the news compared to what they know was taking place

firsthand in Iraq.

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. The televisions, as I said, in the mess hall and sleeping

quarters are turned to CNN and MSNBC 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 that he had been watching the news

about the protests and wanted to know if the American people were still

behind the soldiers. I reassured him they were, but he just looked at

me and asked me again, almost as if he did not hear me, when he said he

did not believe me. Then he said that when some of his fellow soldiers

learned about the antiwar vigil, their morale was impacted.

I raise this point because I believe that it is important for the

antiwar protesters to know how their actions may potentially be

perceived by our soldiers on the front lines who are doing their jobs.

Protest and dissent is the beauty of democracy, and it is important in

a democracy, and everyone has the right to protest and dissent, but I

think it is important that the antiwar demonstrators need to understand

that our soldiers know about their actions. They need to realize that

those actions can have a negative impact on the soldiers' spirits.

Personally, I believe that President Bush should have met with Cindy

Sheehan. I still believe that President Bush should meet with Cindy

Sheehan. I have read news accounts of some of the President's meetings

with families of soldiers who have been killed in action. You cannot

help but get emotional reading the reports.

The President's a compassionate man. He shares in the grief of those

families who have lost a loved one, and I know that the burden on him

as Commander in Chief is tremendous. So, therefore, I believe that he

should include Cindy Sheehan in his next meeting with families of

fallen or wounded soldiers.

Some of my thoughts on return. There are good people on both sides of

the decision to send U.S. forces to Iraq. We are now there. We cannot

abandon the mission to bring peace and stability to Iraq and its

people. We need to recognize the rebuilding of Iraq needs to be based

on a different timetable and not necessarily on our timetable or what

we think is going to take place today.

The Bush administration needs to do a better job of explaining what

failure to succeed in Iraq means to the average person in the United

States. Let me state that again. The Bush administration needs to do a

better job of explaining what failure to succeed in Iraq means to the

American people.

I asked everyone I met with, at every meeting I went to, and when I

would get up in the morning and go into the mess hall by myself at 5:30

or 6 o'clock in the morning, I would sit down with the soldiers and ask

them and ask everyone this question: What does failure mean if we fail

in Iraq? The responses were chilling.

Somalia, one person said. Have you seen the movie Black Hawk Down, he

said. Another person said the former Yugoslavia, and I was in the

former Yugoslavia during the fighting in Sarajevo and Vukovar, and the

gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. Smith) and I were in Vukovar before the

slaughter took place. All the people that we met with in Vukovar all

were later slaughtered when the Serbs came in and slaughtered them in

Vukovar.

Civil war. More foreign fighters pouring in across the border, the

destabilization of the entire region. They said maybe the Kurdish area

might make it. They said in the south the Iranians will come across the

border for the Shiite and the Sunni triangle. Civil war, militia

against militia. Killing and death and destruction. Foreign fighters

coming in from Syria, pouring in, with more killing taking place.

Others said the destabilization of the gulf region. Some said perhaps

the overthrow of the Jordanian Government. Others said perhaps the

overthrow of the Saudi Government. Another said perhaps the overthrow

of the Egyptian Government.

Oil exports. One person said, if you think oil's expensive now, if

this region explodes, the price of oil in the West will be

astronomical. The impact on the economy of the West.

Others said that Iraq will turn into a haven, a haven for terrorists,

similar to what happened when the West left Afghanistan on its own, and

then the Taliban was able to constitute itself. Osama bin Laden moved

to Afghanistan and Kandahar and Jalalabad and Kabul. We saw the

pictures of gunning down women in burqas, and we saw what took place,

and there will be a haven for terrorists to operate.

Loss of American credibility. Danger, danger. We put in our report:

danger to the American people. More emphasis with regard to the

Jihadists in the West thinking that they can bring terror again. Thirty

people from my congressional district died in the attack on the

Pentagon, and we all know what took place with regard to the World

Trade Center because we just went there and remembered on 9/11 what

took place.

The administration has failed to tell the American people the

ramifications of failure in Iraq. If we were to pull out of Iraq and

fail in Iraq, the ramifications on the war on terror are very, very bad

for the average American.

I want to take a few minutes to read what others are saying about the

potential consequences of failure in Iraq.

From Lawrence Kaplan, senior editor at New Republic, speaking at a

recent conference by Notre Dame's Kroc Institute and Fordham

University's Center on Religion and Culture, said the following:

``Preventing Iraq from coming apart at the seams means preventing the

country from becoming what Afghanistan was until recently, a vacuum

filled by terrorist organizations, which is what one National

Intelligence Council report suggested Iraq is now fast becoming.

``Hence, Americans must ask themselves exactly what they owe Iraq.

``If U.S. policy truly has a moral component,'' and our policy must

have a moral component, ``if U.S. policy truly has a moral component,''

he said, which I believe it does, ``the answer must be something

better, or, at the very least, not worse, than what went before.''

From Kenneth Pollack, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute, a

distinguished scholar in this region, in an op-ed that ran in the New

York Times on July 1, said, ``No matter what one thinks of the

invasion, it is clearly in our best interest, to say nothing of the

Arab world's, that we succeed in Iraq.''

From Francis Fukuyama, professor of international political economy

at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, in a New

York Times op-ed piece on August 31, said the following: ``If the

United States withdraws prematurely, Iraq will slide into greater

chaos. That would set off a chain of unfortunate events that will

further damage American credibility around the world.''

From Michael Ledeen of the American Enterprise Institute and author

of, ``Making War on the Terror Masters,'' in a June 17 article in the

Dallas Morning News said, ``A precipitous U.S. withdrawal would

obviously encourage the terrorists and the countries that support them.

It would probably encourage them to expand their activities because

they, too, are fairly focused against us in Iraq right now. They'd

probably be more inclined to attack us elsewhere.''

Keep in mind the two attacks, the London subway bombings not too long

ago, that al Qaeda has now taken credit for.

In the same article, Tony Cordesman, who is a distinguished military

analyst for the Center for Strategic and International Studies said,

``A withdrawal that left an Iraqi Government unable to defend itself

would shatter U.S. standing in the Middle East, making it harder for

moderate Arabs to stand up to Islamic extremists who hope to overthrow

their governments.

``Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan and other U.S. allies would find it

very, very hard to hold together and deal with this problem without

distancing themselves from the United States.''

Then he went on to say, ``And we need to remember that we are talking

about a region in the gulf with about 40 percent of the world's proven

oil resources.''

That is unbelievable. Now, why has the administration not laid out

carefully to the American people what the ramifications are to our

country and our citizens of failure? Time is not on the side of the

administration. There is a sense that public support is waning in both

the United States and Great Britain. No one believes we will lose the

war in Iraq. If the war in Iraq is lost, it will not be lost in Iraq.

It will be lost here at home. One general officer told me point blank:

The center of gravity for our success in Iraq is the American public.

The Bush administration also needs to do a better job of letting the

American people know how they can participate in this effort. In World

War II, my dad served in World War II. We had war bonds. We had victory

gardens. We had scrap metal collections. The American public supports

the troops and wants to do more. There ought to be more opportunities

where the administration can let the American people know how they can

participate to help the effort, to help the young men and women who are

serving in the military and their families.

For example, at a rest and relaxation facility in Qatar, there is a

need for clothes for servicemen and -women after their activities, and

they get 4 or 5 days off. They come to this center, and they have no

shirts, and they have no shaving gear. There they have skirts and

dresses and T-shirts and sweatshirts to wear. Well, the American

people, if they knew it, would love to participate, would love to help.

And the administration has to do a better job of telling the American

people how they can participate and help, because there are many

Americans wearing the uniform today and their families who are making a

major sacrifice. Others would like to participate and be part of that.

Some of the major recommendations: The Bush administration should

select a group of capable and distinguished individuals, some with a

military background and others with extensive foreign policy

experience, to go to Iraq and other parts of the gulf region and

Afghanistan to comprehensively review our efforts. All the individuals,

and I can name who they would be but I think it would be inappropriate

because they have to be picked by others, but all of the individuals

selected would be known for their honesty, for their integrity, for

their competence, for their patriotism. They would love their country

more than they would love their political party.

The group would essentially provide what I call fresh eyes on the

target; the target, of course, being how we bring about success in Iraq

and lead to whereby our young men and women can return home.

Upon this group's return, they would report to the President and the

Congress, but more importantly, they would report to the American

people. The motive would not be to find fault. One can always go back

and say there were mistakes. Quite frankly, I believe that we should

have never disbanded the Iraqi Army. But it would be a forward-looking

report, to see what we can do in the best interests of our servicemen

and how we can bring about success.

An independent, comprehensive review could help assure Americans, no

matter what their position is on the war, that every effort is being

made to protect our troops and realize their goal of a secure and

peaceful Iraq, that it would look at what is going right and what is

going wrong. I recognize that the Bush administration has sent other

individuals to Iraq to assess the ongoing situation, but what I call

``fresh eyes review'' would be different, in that rather than just

reporting back to the President or the Secretary of Defense or the

Secretary of State, this group would also report back to the Congress

and to the American people.

Frankly, I believe the administration has a moral obligation to the

American people to do this and to provide this information. There are

no downsides in such a review. In our daily lives, we regularly seek

second opinions. 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 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 goals in Iraq.

In September of 1998, when I returned from having been in Algeria,

where terrorism has killed over 100,000 people, the bombing of our

embassy in Kenya and in Tanzania took place, and I introduced a bill to

create the National Commission on Terror. When I introduced the bill on

the floor of this House, I said that Osama bin Laden lived in Sudan

from 1991 to 1996. There was very little interest by the Clinton

administration for this. Very few agencies wanted to participate and

cooperate, but, finally, they did.

This is the report of the Bremer Commission. It says, ``Countering

the Changing Threat of International Terrorism,'' and it came out in

the year 2000. And distinguished Members served on the commission,

bipartisan members of the commission, Republican and Democratic members

of the commission. In fact, the gentlewoman from California (Ms.

Harman), who is the ranking Democrat on the Permanent Select Committee

on Intelligence today was on the commission. The commission was made up

of Paul Bremer; Maurice Sonnenberg; Richard Betts, Wayne Downing, who

is a U.S. Army General, retired, with expertise; Jane Harman, a good

Member of the House; Fred Ikle; Juliette Kayyem; John Lewis, Jr.;

Gardner Peckham; and James Woolsey, who was the head of the CIA.

On the cover of the commission report that they came out with is a

picture of the World Trade Center on fire. Now, the World Trade Center

bombing took place on September 11, 2001. This was the picture of the

World Trade Center on fire from the attack that took place in 1993, and

no one paid any attention to it. They neglected it.

This group, this National Commission on Terror, could ensure that we

are successful in this effort. They would travel to all parts of Iraq;

the Shi'a south, the central Sunni Triangle, and the north, where the

Kurds reside. They would have to go to the region for 7 to 10 days to 2

weeks. They would meet with general officers, junior officers, NCOs,

specialists and privates in Iraq and in Afghanistan. They would meet

with embassy officials and other Federal Government employees working

in Baghdad. They would meet with civilian contractors and NGOs,

nongovernmental organizations operating in the country. They would meet

with Iraqi leaders and also ordinary Iraqis in country towns and

villages.

And to better educate the American public about our ongoing efforts

in Iraq and the gulf region, perhaps a select group of media should

also 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.

Because as many of my colleagues know, it is very difficult for the

media to move around Iraq. The media has lost roughly 60-some people.

Media have died. It is very difficult to get from point A to point B,

from Baghdad to Kirkuk, or Baghdad to Nasaria, or Baghdad to Tikrit.

This would give the media the opportunity to travel to all parts and to

report on both the good and the bad. And the pool would include both

broadcast and print media.

This fresh-eyes review would assess answers to such questions 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 the Iraqi Government? What

role is Iran playing in the evolving political and security situation

in Iraq?

We heard that the Iranians have poured across the border and are a

destabilizing influence in what is taking place in Iraq. They would

take a look at that.

What role is Syria playing? We have been told that the Syrians are

allowing foreign fighters to pour across their border. This group could

look at that and see if that is the case and see if there are ways of

securing the Syrian border.

They would look at what will it take in terms of resources and

organization and time to effectively control the Iraqi borders. Is

there an anti-sabotage strategy to protect the energy infrastructure?

If so, why is it not working? Are there alternatives?

They would look at 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 the questions. We owe it to the American

people. I urge the administration, having been there three times in

Iraq, two times by myself, without anybody telling me where I could go

or where I could not go, and two times in Afghanistan, where I led the

first congressional delegation to Afghanistan with the gentleman from

Lancaster, Pennsylvania (Mr. Pitts), and my best friend and former

Congressman Tony Hall of Ohio. We owe it to the American public.

So in closing, Mr. Speaker, I urge the administration to act quickly

to put together this team to offer fresh eyes on the target. There is

nothing to lose.

And, lastly, Mr. Speaker, we owe it to the men and women who are

mentioned in this article that I opened up with in the excerpts by Army

Chaplain J. D. Moore, ``Hero Mission.'' I am asking this administration

to support this group.

Mr. Speaker, I submit herewith for the Record the commission report I

referred to earlier.