

ALLEN B. WEST  
22ND DISTRICT, FLORIDA  
1708 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0922  
202-225-3026  
FAX 202-225-8398

6300 NE 1ST AVENUE, SUITE 100  
FT. LAUDERDALE, FL 33334  
954-202-6211  
FAX 954-202-6212

3111 SOUTH DIXIE HIGHWAY, SUITE 308  
WEST PALM BEACH, FL 33405  
561-655-1943  
FAX 561-655-8018



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-0922

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Mr. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
2120 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman McKeon:

I am writing a report on my visit to Afghanistan. This was the first Congressional Delegation (CODEL) visit into theater following President Barack Obama's troop reduction announcement last week on Wednesday.

I would like to draw your attention to these two quotes:

*"We need the American Forces,"*

Afghanistan National Army 215<sup>th</sup> Brigade Commander (Helmand Province) Major General Malik

*"We cannot have Afghanistan resemble building a sandcastle on the beach at low tide,"*

First of all let me tell you that it was an honor to be back in theater with our men and women in uniform. Unfortunately during our time in theater there were several losses of our warriors. In Bagram Airbase we were provided the privilege to participate in a ramp ceremony to render honors of two fallen, 1LT Castillo and SSG Kelly. I placed one of our Congressional coins on each casket.

I continue to hear how America is "war weary" but yet when I spoke to our men and women all they want is a green light to victory. They realize what is at stake in Afghanistan, and from my two and a half years there, so do I. We missed a window of opportunity to set things right in Afghanistan after the Soviet-Afghan War of 1979-1989. We cannot afford to miss a second window of opportunity.

Since I departed Afghanistan in November 2007, I did see great strides we have made, but yet there are some serious concerns. I would like to take the time to provide you my objective assessment. I will then provide a synopsis of the highlights of our visit.

Keys to Success:

The keys to success to Afghanistan are not complicated to assess. First of all, we lost 6-7 years as we sacrificed Afghanistan as an "economy of force" mission. However, we now have a defined operational strategy and we should allow it the time to result in the measurable conditions and measures of effectiveness which Generals on the ground establish.

First of all, we must establish a secure environment and the integral part there is to deny the enemy sanctuaries across the border in Pakistan. It is well known that the enemy trains, equips, consults, and resupplies across the border in Pakistan. The most evident is the Haqqani terrorist network led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and is based out of Miram Shah (Pakistan). As well, the Taliban leader Mullah Omar is operating out of the Quetta area of operations. We are seeing more activity of terrorist sanctuary in the Baluchistan provinces of Pakistan. The Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) have become what Cambodia was during the Vietnam War.

The increase in Improvised Explosive Device (IED) activity is being supported by explosive material, ammonium nitrate, coming out of Pakistan. In the Helmand Province, the Marine and Army EOD and Engineer units provided us with a very detailed and hands on demonstration of the type IEDS they are facing... which killed three while we were there in Helmand.

We can no longer ignore the Pakistan situation, and our troops know that. There will never be a secure Afghanistan unless we conduct precision strike operations against terrorist sanctuaries, bomb making facilities, and command and control headquarters in Pakistan.

Pakistan has abdicated its sovereignty by inviting in elements who are killing our men and women.

Second, we must continue to work on denying the internal sanctuary for the Taliban. I can report that there are many good stories about locals rallying against the Taliban. One such story was the hanging of four Taliban leaders in the Laghman Province.

The most impressive success story is the Village Stability Operation (VSO) which very much resembles the Strategic Hamlet program of Vietnam. This is where we have sent our Special Operators into remote areas right in the face of the enemy to work with tribal leaders and establish the Afghan Local Police (ALP). We visited such a site or VSP (Village Stability Platform) in Mirmandab, vicinity Ghereshk (Helmand Province). This is near the upper Sangin Valley which is still a hotbed of enemy activity.

There the objective is shape, hold, build, expand, transition... populace engagement! Our own Special Operators, along with Afghan Army Commandos (a huge success story) are developing relationships with local tribal leaders. While there we got a brief on local operations and met with the tribal leader who heads up the ALP. He articulated to us that the relationship with our "bearded Warriors" is making a difference and that his biggest disappointment is the lack of contact and communication with the central Afghanistan government.

This leads to my third point, "governance," the central government in Kabul led by Hamid Karzai is replete with corruption and fraud. One of the recent examples is the embezzlement of some \$1 billion from the Kabul Bank by relatives of Karzai and the Senior Vice President. These funds have been used to purchase and develop properties in Dubai and other abuse. There must be an independent audit not only of this bank but also of the Azizi Bank.

There is a concern that Karzai will make a move at the upcoming Loya Jurga (National Council) to defy the Constitution and seek a third term as President, possibly establishing himself as President for Life. We must make ourselves unequivocally clear that we will withdraw any support to the Afghan government if that becomes the case.

The focus for good governance in Afghanistan has to be at the Provincial and District levels. I believe a bottom up concept will work better and is within the cultural framework of Afghanistan.

We must also recognize that there is already a move toward regional hegemonic dominance by Iran and Pakistan. If Karzai were committed to the efforts the US and NATO has made he would be measured in his engagements with these Nations. There can be no doubt that the biggest threat to long term stability in Afghanistan is central government corruption.

I do not trust Hamid Karzai.

The fourth key to success is something that has truly taken a positive turn, mandatory education for the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF). During our briefing with the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) we learned that previously 86% of new recruits were illiterate and there was no literacy training... and that is what I remembered. Today there is a 100% mandatory literacy training program. The goal is to have these troops at a first grade level by end of basic training and at a third grade level by 2014.

We are seeing more desire to join because they are now receiving education as part of enlisting, and it is becoming a status symbol to be able to read.

As well, there is a push for gender integration in the ANSF; 320 females in the Afghan Army, 10% mandated female acceptance to the National Military Academy, and 1200 females as part of the Afghan National Police.

The United States surge has enabled a surge in the training and development of the ANSF which is critical for the long term stability and success in Afghanistan. And yes, the Afghan Air Force (AAF) is almost 5000 strong and has about (60) air platforms. They are at the early stages of conducting their own troop transport. And lastly, we are seeing the development of Afghan businesses to support the ANSF, over 15,200 Afghans employed, to include some women-owned businesses.

Lastly, the final key to success in Afghanistan will be information operations, tell the positive story. I came back to Afghanistan for the first time since November 2007 and in Kabul there is a Marriott Hotel being built. We have to attack the enemy with the power of words. The Afghan people have been at a constant state of conflict for nearly 40 years. We have to show that we are there for their future.

The Taliban message of trying to paint us as an occupying force is failing... it is failing because we surged into the countryside and into remote valleys offering a new direction for this country.

The President's message about troop reductions is met with skepticism and concern, not just with the Afghan people but even with some of our own troops. I fear that we have a repeat Tet moment where we had an enemy on the ropes... but thanks to Walter Cronkite and the media we lost the initiative and the messaging. That enabled a resurgence for the enemy, trust me, read the memoirs of North Vietnamese General Giap.

We should not have any intonations about Taliban negotiations that enables a message spin, combined with troop withdrawal talk, which gives propaganda advantage to the enemy, just like after Tet in Vietnam.

Is Afghanistan easy, heck no, this is PhD level strategy and far more complex. However, Victory is achievable, and what is Victory... an Afghanistan which denies the enemy sanctuary via Provincial and District level sound governance. Victory also means that there is an external cordon which precludes the establishment of enemy sanctuary affecting a developing Afghanistan.

#### Battlefield Circulation:

Very quickly I would like to provide you a synopsis of where we visited, first of all, the doggone TSA confiscated by toothpaste at Dulles Airport as we were departing... you want to talk about scaling back the federal government!

- Visited the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) in Al Udiel AB in Doha Qatar. From here all air operations are coordinated and controlled, to include theater missile defense. Met with Command team and troops from Florida... and also a former soldier who served with me in 2-20<sup>th</sup> FA in Iraq.

- Visited with the United States Embassy staff in Kabul, met with Ambassador Eikenberry and discussed his "civilian surge" which went from 325-1200. My assessment is that we need more focus from diplomat/civilian surge activities downrange and not so much in Kabul... where that should be the supporting effort. We win in the provinces and districts!

- Visited BG Miller and the Combined Forces Special Operations Coordination Center (CFSOCC) and this is one of the success stories. He has some 6000 personnel at (93) locations, the Afghan Army now has (9) Commando Battalions... when I left in Nov 2007n there were only (2) stood up. They are also working towards (72) 16-man Afghan Special Forces Operations teams... we are currently at (20). This is the headquarters from where the VSO program is coordinated.

- Visited with MG Mallory, Deputy Commanding General of NTM-A who has the responsibility of training a capable ANSF, but it, is not going to be a US Military by 2014. My biggest surprise was the mandatory education program and the focus on gender integration, a big step. Also, we are paying the Afghan troops by electronic fund transfers and cell phone mobile techniques. This is better since we are improving their education and this reduces the senior level military corruption which would skim off funds.

- Met with General Petraeus who gave us his Anaconda strategy against the insurgents. Bottom line, we have to contend with the enemy sanctuary being established in Pakistan, anything less will not lead to success in Afghanistan. He also provided us with a 90-day Special Operations roll up; 2,299 operations, 517 insurgent leaders killed/captured, 2,870 insurgents captured, and 750 insurgents killed.

- Visited FOB Shank in Logar Province... and was reunited with a couple of friends, BG Uberti and CSM Ackerman and met with soldiers. They asked why the President made his speech about troop reductions and when shall we deal with Pakistan? The increase in ammonium nitrate from Pakistan has led to an increase in IEDs in Wardak and Logar provinces.

- Visited Regional Command-East and MG Allyn (1<sup>st</sup> CAV Div) where he is seeing more desperate attacks by enemy... (50) Afghans were killed at a local hospital in Logar Province. Khost Province is the hotbed for Haqqani network activities but we are seeing success. There have been limited cross-border engagements using artillery and aircraft in pursuit of fleeing enemy forces. And it was there I was able to participate in the ramp ceremony for our fallen warriors.

- Visited with TF5-35 (Joint Special Operations) and this is where we are putting a real hurt on the enemy. And just to quell some concerns, here are some numbers; there have been (40) total CIVCAS (civilian casualties) in a segment assessed (24) missions. And due to the exceptional precision planning and execution of these highly specialized Warriors, there have been some 2,143/2,429 missions where no shots were fired... but we all know that two very good shots were fired in a compound in Pakistan!

- Visited with MajGen Toolan (USMC), Commander of RC-SW (Regional Command-Southwest) and after a short PowerPoint brief (THANK GOD) we headed out to Marjah to meet the Marines and the local Governor... rode on a V-22 Osprey, what an incredible aircraft. In Marjah we had a traditional Afghan meal and spoke with the Governor. We then took a walk through the area, which a year ago was the scene of intense fighting. We have successfully cut off southern Helmand Valley from the enemy; Marjah is just 25 miles from Pakistan. However, the enemy has found bypass routes to "re-seed" his efforts in northern Helmand by transiting west by way of Nimroz and along seams between Helmand and Kandahar Provinces in the Maiwand District. Again here, the IED supplies from Pakistan are coming in from Chaman and creating a dangerous situation in Sangin, Musa Qaleh, and Now Zad.

In conclusion, my desire was to present to you all a very detailed report. President Obama is clueless when he states, "we have shifted to a transition phase, one from combat to support." There are gaps in Afghanistan but overall I was impressed with the progress since my years there. I shall seek to return to the combat theater of operations in October after summer combat campaign season has concluded.

Steadfast and Loyal,



Allen B. West  
Member of Congress

cc: Speaker of the House John Boehner  
Majority Leader Eric Cantor  
Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy  
Republican Conference Chairman Jeb Hensarling  
Ranking Member Committee on Armed Services Adam Smith