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Reyes returns from visiting security officials and troops in Iraq

House Intelligence Committee members travel to Iraq and Jordan

Washington, DC - Chairman Silvestre Reyes (D-TX) returned today from leading a House Intelligence Committee delegation to the Middle East. The delegation, which consisted of Intelligence Committee Ranking Member Rep. Peter Hoekstra (R-MI) and Intelligence Committee Member Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD) traveled to Iraq and Jordan to assess military, intelligence, and security issues in the region. They met with top security and intelligence officials in Jordan before traveling to Iraq, where they met with combat commanders and intelligence officials and had the opportunity during the Memorial Day weekend to meet with soldiers serving in Iraq.

After flying into Baghdad on a C-130 aircraft, the delegation met with General Lloyd Austin, Commander of the Multi-National Corps in Iraq, to discuss coalition efforts in the region.

"Our ground commanders believe that Coalition forces have made good progress pushing al Qaeda to the North," said Chairman Reyes. "We were briefed by Gen. Austin on President Maliki's campaign in Basra and his quelling of violence in Sadr City. Now that Maliki and the Iraqi Security Forces have shown they can take on insurgents, we must accelerate our efforts to turn over control to the Iraqis."

Congressman Ruppersberger also commented: "Based on the briefings we received, it's clear to me that the sooner the Maliki government can stand up and provide security for the Iraqi people, the sooner we can get our troops out."

While in Iraq, a sandstorm grounded helicopter travel, requiring the delegation to move in a heavily armored ground convoy. Visiting delegations generally do not travel in ground convoys due to the security situation. An improvised explosive device (IED) had been discovered in the vicinity of the delegation's movement hours before the delegation moved through that particular section of Baghdad.

"We've been at this for five years, and I'm concerned that we still don't control the streets, putting our troops in harm's way," commented Chairman Reyes.

The delegation met with security officials in the Green Zone. Regarding these meetings, Chairman Reyes said: "Our military and intelligence professionals believe that Iran continues to play an active role in Iraq, providing lethal force to Shiite militants and meddling in the Iraqi government's efforts at reconciliation."

Chairman Reyes and the delegation also had the opportunity to interact with soldiers currently serving in Iraq.

"I always look forward to talking face-to-face with the men and women carrying out missions daily in Iraq," said Chairman Reyes. "I appreciate their candid thoughts and admire their professionalism in the face of difficult work and a challenging environment. I met with a great group of Texas soldiers -- I am extremely proud of them and thankful for the opportunity to meet with them during Memorial Day weekend."

Added Congressman Ruppertsberger: "We respect the troops, our intelligence professionals and everyone on the front line. They and their families have sacrificed for our freedom, and we support and thank them."