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Outsmarting the terrorists

By Joe Wilson

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When visiting the Middle East over Memorial Day weekend, I must admit that I did not expect to see a sign for "Big Bob's Truck Stop and Up-Armor Facility" in Balad, Iraq. But again demonstrating the fortitude of the U.S. military, our soldiers established this facility in response to the increasing numbers of roadside bombs used against our convoys. As I toured "Big Bob's," I was overwhelmed by the U.S. military's tremendous ability to recognize a problem, work to find a solution and adapt to the challenges of the global war on terror. A ruthless band of cowardly terrorists are no match for our brave men and women in uniform.

Since September 2003, I've traveled to Iraq four times, and I've witnessed extraordinary progress on each visit. As a member of the House Armed Services Committee and the father of three sons currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces, my connection to Iraq is both professional and personal. In February, my oldest son Alan returned from serving a one-year tour of duty in Iraq with the South Carolina Army National Guard.

After participating in congressional briefings on the global war on terror and receiving daily e-mails from my son Alan about his experiences in Iraq, I recognize the tremendous dedication and patience needed to win this unpredictable war. However, I remain convinced that we are making consistent and significant progress in the global war on terror.

When I traveled to the Middle East in July 2004, touring the Iraqi Police Training Facility in Amman, Jordan was one of the highlights of my visit. The facility was new, and I was encouraged by the number of Iraqis who courageously volunteered to defend their country and safeguard their democracy. However, I expressed my concerns about whether they had the proper equipment to defeat the mounting insurgency.

Upon return to Iraq, I was pleased to see that the Iraqi Security Forces, led by Gen. David Petraeus, are now a skilled team of soldiers who are better equipped to protect their country and defeat terrorists. Today, seven basic police academies are operational. Together, they train and equip over 3,500 police officers each month. There are now more than 168,000 trained and equipped Iraqi police, soldiers, sailors and airmen. Day by day, Iraqi forces are taking increased responsibility for the security of their country.

Each visit to Iraq reminds me that U.S. soldiers are articulate, capable and dedicated to the cause. During my recent trip, I spoke to an economist who had been serving in Iraq for a year. He extended his tour of duty for five more months after recognizing the tremendous opportunity to serve his country and ensure that Iraq continues down the path to freedom. His selflessness is one of the many shining examples of men and women who are working so that Iraqis will one day enjoy the freedoms we have as American citizens.

Recently, I've heard critics complain that U.S. leaders are viewing Iraq through rose-colored glasses. Not so. We recognize that the challenges in Iraq are large and often overwhelming. During my most recent visit to Iraq, the Iraqi defense minister spoke of the

difficulty in sealing Iraq's borders, and he informed us that most of the terrorists filter in through Syria and Iran. As we fight an asymmetric enemy that can adapt to U.S. technology and tactics, violence will increase at times. However, the skill of the U.S. military and the dedication of the Iraqi people will continue to confront and systematically defeat terrorism.

On June 3, the New York Times reported that 75 percent of Iraqis support the Iraqi government, and that 65 percent of Iraqis believe Iraq is headed in the right direction. The report also noted that Iraqis are providing authorities with far more tips on insurgent activities than even a few months ago. The recent major discovery of an underground bunker that served as a haven for terrorists is yet another example of the Iraqi people working with coalition forces to defeat the terrorists. After Marine and Iraqi security forces received tips from local citizens, they discovered the bunker, as long as three football fields, divided into rooms that apparently housed terrorists.

In America, some of our smallest freedoms are also some of our most cherished. The people of Iraq are beginning to experience privileges shared by citizens in democracies around the globe. The opportunity to invest money in the stock market, to send their children to school, to cheer their athletes in the Olympics, to fly domestically, to surf the Internet, to read independent news and to complain to their neighbors about their government leaders are all freedoms that are emerging in communities throughout Iraq.

The progress in Iraq is real. Our soldiers and the Iraqi people will continue to defeat the terrorists and establish a flourishing democracy. When I return to the country in the future, I'm certain I'll see more examples of the innovation and determination that exists today at "Bob's Truck Stop."

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