

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer my reflections on a trip I recently took with the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), leader, and the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES) to Iraq and Afghanistan. I think it is important to publicly discuss the situation in those countries because events there have implications for all of us here in our country, as well as for the future of our foreign policy.

We are less than 5 months from the planned transfer of sovereignty to a new Iraqi government. Yet it seems clear from talking to many groups in Iraq that the administration's proposed deadline for the transfer of power is unrealistic. Commanders we talked to indicated it would be logistically difficult, if not impossible, to conduct an election before July 1. There is no census. There are no registered voters. The likelihood of fraud would be great, and I think there is a strong likelihood that the United Nations representatives now in Iraq will reach the same conclusions. By the same token, Shia religious leaders in Iraq do not support the caucus system for choosing a new government that the administration has advocated.

Finally, I do not think we can transfer sovereignty to a new Iraqi government until the rules of engagement for our forces are agreed upon. We simply cannot afford to have restrictions on the ability of our forces to pursue terrorists and to protect themselves.

Simply put, we must handle the transition right, even if it means rethinking our original timeline. The outcome must be a government with legitimacy, a process that prevents civil war from erupting, and rules of engagement that leave our forces free to continue to fight against the insurgents.

A second related conclusion from my trip is that it is clear that whatever new government assumes power must not be seen as a puppet of the United States Government or it will lack legitimacy. One way to help build that legitimacy is to get NATO involved in helping to establish security and provide stability in Iraq, as they are already doing constructively in Afghanistan. NATO involvement will reinforce the perception that it is the international community, not just the United States, that wants a new representative government in Iraq to succeed. Bringing NATO troops to Iraq to supplement our forces will also likely reduce the number of American military casualties, something I know we are all concerned about.

My third conclusion about Iraq is that we are in a guerilla war there. It is not really terrorism because I do not think the attacks against Iraqi citizens and our forces are aimed just at terrorism. Their purpose is to prevent the installation of a new, stable regime and to expel our forces, a classic goal of guerrilla warfare.

□ 1730

I also want to mention Afghanistan. The simple truth is we are short-changing our effort to establish a viable Federal government and rebuild the country of Afghanistan. I understand that, on the face of it, Afghanistan is not as strategically as important as Iraq, but our efforts there are critical.

Mr. Bin Laden and other leaders of al Qaeda and the leadership of the former Taliban regime remain at large. In the near term, the United States must bring renewed attention to our offensive operations there to flush those forces out. Over the long term, we need to ensure that a terrorist harboring the regime never again gains hold. If we poured half as many people and resources into Afghanistan as we have into Iraq, I think that country would be well on the way to recovering from the 20-plus years of warfare that have plagued that country.

With few natural resources, little infrastructure, and a long history of tribalism, Afghanistan has a long way to go. I do not think we are making progress as fast as we need to in order for the Karzai government to survive in the long term. Simply put, we need to do more in Afghanistan.

My final observation concerns our great men and women in uniform. They are doing a fantastic job under the most trying circumstances. They are living under the most arduous of conditions, and are literally putting their lives on the line every day. They are superbly trained, superbly led, and they are the finest force the world and our country have ever seen. We owe them a deep debt of gratitude. As we go into this budget cycle, we owe it to them to provide them everything they need in order to succeed, in Iraq as well as Afghanistan.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BEAUPREZ). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LIPINSKI) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. LIPINSKI addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

TRUE COST OF WAR TO BE HIDDEN UNTIL AFTER ELECTIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COOPER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. COOPER. Mr. Speaker, I addressed the House last night on the subject of President Bush's State of the Union message and compared his words on that evening in this Chamber just some 3 weeks ago in which he said he would present to us a budget which paid for the war, and let me read his words exactly. "In 2 weeks, I will send you a budget that funds the war."

Well, 2 weeks later, the President failed to do that. He failed to include any of the cost for the conflict in Iraq

and Afghanistan in his budget. You might think that is just a conflict, maybe a miscommunication with speech writers. But yesterday on the Senate side in a very important hearing the service chiefs of the Marines, Army and Air Force all said that this funding gap, the possible failure of our forces in Afghanistan and Iraq to have the money that they need come this fall, could create serious consequences.

Let me read the article from today's New York Times. "In an unusual display of difference with the White House, the top officers of the Army, Marine Corps and Air Force all raised questions on Tuesday about how the Bush administration plans to pay for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq after the current financing runs out at the end of September.

"Appearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, three of the four chiefs of the Armed Services expressed concerns about a financing gap, perhaps of 4 months, for the two missions, whose combined cost is about \$5 billion a month.

"They were left out of President Bush's budget request for the 2005 fiscal year, with the administration saying it would make a supplementary request for up to \$50 billion probably next January, after the elections this year.

"I am concerned," General Peter J. Schoomaker, the Army Chief of Staff, said in response to a question from Senator Jack Reed, Democrat of Rhode Island, 'on how we bridge between the end of this fiscal year and whenever we could get a supplemental in the next year.'

"General Michael W. Hagee, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and General John P. Jumper, the Air Force Chief of Staff, agreed with General Schoomaker's concerns."

A little further down in the article, General Schoomaker stated, "We are all concerned about maintaining continuity of operations. We want to make sure that we minimize the bridge." He emphasized that the timing and mechanics of seeking a supplemental spending bill were up to the Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and White House officials. He said that he was simply describing the possible consequences for the Army.

Mr. Speaker, America knows we are at war. We know that 120,000 of our men and women in uniform are in daily, constant danger in Iraq, and 10,000 more troops are at danger in Afghanistan. Yet none of the cost of this war is in the President's budget. The President has said that he will get a supplemental request to us after the election. That is probably not time enough, according to these top military officials.

Our men and women in uniform deserve better treatment. They deserve full funding, full continuity of funding, and full, honest accounting of how much this operation costs, and the American taxpayer is ready to step up