



Giffords: Downturn in Iraqi deaths would indicate success of 'surge'

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Just how well President Bush's strategy to "surge" troops into Iraq will work won't be known for months, U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords said upon her return Wednesday from a trip to Iraq, Kuwait and Israel.

The Arizona Democrat was the first House freshman to travel to the war zone. She received briefings from American commanders, who told her success will be measured in fewer killings among Iraqis.

Fewer execution-style killings, killings of judges, civilian casualties and more Iraqi refugees returning home from neighboring countries will serve as indicators about how well the president's plan is going, she said.

There are a few encouraging signs that Iraqi leaders are taking the necessary steps to bring stability to their country, irrespective of the president's troop buildup, she said.

"The best news from this trip was a new sense of leadership from Iraq," Giffords said. "They know time is running out and they know Americans are losing patience."

Last week, Giffords voted to oppose the president's plan to send 21,500 more troops to Iraq.

Her trip, at the invitation of Arizona Republican Sen. Jon Kyl, gave her deeper perspective but did not change her mind. Kyl supports the buildup.

"A surge can temporarily drive out insurgents or drive them underground," Giffords said. "It's not a long-term solution."

She would prefer a corresponding surge in diplomatic activity and economic assistance. She opposes cutting off funding for the troops, as some Democrats hope to do to stop the war.

Also, she wants to use her position on the House Armed Services Committee to increase the role of Fort Huachuca's intelligence and foreign language schools.

"We can't just go into a country without knowing the language and not knowing the culture," she said.

She spent most of her time in Iraq secure inside the protected Green Zone.

"I learned a lot in Baghdad, but it's critical to get outside the Green Zone to learn what's really going on," she said.

That's something she hopes to do on her next trip. That trip has not been scheduled.