



## **Guest Opinion: Trip by Giffords to Middle East reinforces her stance on war in Iraq**

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Growing up in Tucson near Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, I have long understood the importance of the military to our community.

But during my recent trip to the Middle East, I gained a much greater appreciation for southern Arizona's role in making our armed forces the most formidable in the world.

Davis-Monthan, the Army Intelligence Center at Fort Huachuca and the committed men and women serving at these installations give every Arizonan - no matter how they might feel about the war in Iraq - a real reason to be proud.

These airmen and soldiers are vital to the success of the ongoing global war against terrorists.

The congressional delegation trip to Kuwait, Iraq and Israel was led by Sen. Jon Kyl and included Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee and Rep. Steve Pearce of New Mexico. I was the only Democrat in the group and the first freshman of the 110th Congress to visit Iraq.

As a member of the House Armed Services and Foreign Affairs committees, this trip was an opportunity to get a firsthand look at the region that has been the topic of most of my briefings and hearings on Capitol Hill.

Questioning policy experts in a congressional hearing room cannot compare with questioning top U.S. commanders on the ground in Kuwait and Iraq.

There is no substitute for meeting with our military leaders and soldiers face to face.

I was privileged to meet several service members from southern Arizona, including soldiers and airmen from Fort Huachuca and Tucson's 162nd Fighter Wing.

They are outstanding military professionals, with an inspiring commitment to their mission.

Sadly, not all the troops deployed from southern Arizona have come home.

Since I was sworn into office in January, four young men from Arizona's 8th Congressional District have died in Iraq, and many have been wounded.

Their sacrifices are profound, and the nation will be forever in debt to them and to their loved ones.

Although our trip was brief, it offered me a vivid context in which to examine issues facing Congress such as military readiness, veterans' health care, foreign relations and the status of equipment being used by our troops in combat.

I came away more convinced than ever that we must move quickly and responsibly to end our country's presence in Iraq.

The problems there are not just the result of 35 years of Saddam Hussein's regime, but also of centuries of sectarian divisions.

It is not reasonable to expect our military to be able to resolve such ancient conflicts.

In addition, this war has diverted precious military assets away from Afghanistan, where the Taliban is once again on the rise, and it has eroded our standing in the Middle East and with our allies.

It has imposed extraordinary burdens on the military - especially the Army.

Top military leaders have expressed concerns that stretching the military so thin threatens our ability to respond to other crises.

Instead of supporting a "surge" of troops, I agree with the many military and foreign policy experts who have been calling on the administration for a diplomatic surge.

Maybe such advice is finally being heard. This past week, the secretary of state announced that the U.S. will participate in regional talks in the Middle East.

Focusing on multilateral and regional diplomacy, one of the central recommendations of the Iraq Study Group, is a step in the right direction.

Visiting Iraq made me even more proud of the contributions being made by southern Arizonans in making the U.S. Armed Forces the most impressive military in the world.

It also confirmed my belief that adding 21,000 more troops is simply not the answer. It will not bring long-term security to the region.

We need a more targeted strategy to identify and combat terrorists around the globe while also encouraging economic stability and sustainable peace in the Middle East.