



MIDDLE EAST REPORT

Congressional Delegation Trip
November 19 - 25, 2015

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is ablaze with violence and Islamic extremism and more dangerous today than any time in recent memory. Recently, I participated in a Congressional delegation led by Congressman Rob Wittman to Egypt, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia to have a discussion with top officials on defeating ISIS and the increased involvement of Russian and Iranian influence in Middle Eastern affairs. This trip included meetings with the following top officials:

- President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, President of Egypt
- Colonel General Sedki Sobhi, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Egypt
- Lieutenant General Mahmoud Hegazy, Egyptian Chief of Staff
- President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of Afghanistan
- CEO Abdullah Abdullah, Afghanistan
- U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan P. Michael McKinley
- Afghan and NATO Military Leaders
- General Campbell, Commander, Resolute Support and United States Forces-Afghanistan
- Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Deputy Crown Prince, Second Deputy Premier, and Minister of Defense General of Saudi Arabia
- Abdulrahman bin Saleh Al Banyan, Chief of the General Staff of Saudi Arabian Armed Forces
- Prince Miteb bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Minister of the Saudi Arabian National Guard
- Dr. Khaled Al Jindan, Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs for Bilateral Relations
- Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs



Congressman Pittenger serves as Chairman of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, Vice Chairman of the Financial Services Task Force to Investigate Terrorism Financing, Member of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, and is also a member of the House Financial Services Committee.

Enclosed is a summary of meetings held with top officials from Egypt, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and NATO officials. The United States must have a clear plan for our allies and partners in the region to defeat Islamic terrorists.

Robert Pittenger
Member of Congress
North Carolina's 9th District

EGYPT



President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi
President of Egypt

We met with:

- President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi
- Colonel General Sedki Sobhi, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces
- Lieutenant General Mahmoud Hegazy, Chief of Staff

The primary topics discussed were current security issues and stability of the government.

Synopsis: Ambassador Beecroft reviewed the series of events and circumstances that brought President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to power. Millions of protesters took to the streets, rejecting former President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood and demanding an improved economy and higher standard of living. Ambassador Beecroft also noted that if President el-Sisi does not succeed, Egypt will likely elect another General because the army is the only stable force in the country and generally believed to have the people's best interest in mind.

My questions dealt with the current lack of commitment Egypt has from the United States due to President Obama's misguided view of the revolution by the people that brought President el-Sisi to power. Meanwhile, Russia has demonstrated a high level of engagement, building a nuclear power plant in Egypt for electricity (on the front page of the paper while we were there). The current instability in Egypt and Russian influence is directly related to the U.S. being unresponsive to Egypt's request for assistance in defeating the Muslim Brotherhood and other terrorist groups. President el-Sisi emphasized the reality of significant threats from many terrorist groups, not just ISIS, including al-Qaeda, al-Nusra, Boko Haram, Hamas, Hezbollah and others, and warned us not to take our eyes off of them.

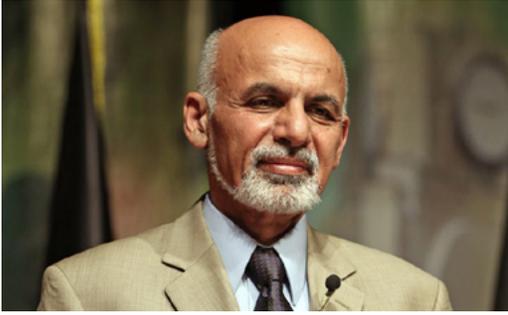
I also discussed our meeting two years ago when he was a General. Then-General el-Sisi and President Mansour laid out their vision for the future: within five

months they would have a Constitution; in six more months elect a President; and in twelve more months have Parliamentary elections. Not only did they accomplish what they promised, but President el-Sisi also stated to us that under the new government, the Presidency would not be a regime, but be limited to two terms.

Expressing my support, I told President el-Sisi he has earned the respect of the world and certainly the assistance of the U.S. to defeat terrorism. Our non-response to him was ill-advised and did not recognize the will of the people to be rid of President Morsi, who was following the interests of the Muslim Brotherhood. When I expressed gratitude for the respect and support he has given religious minorities, particularly Coptic Christians, he emphasized that there were no minorities in Egypt, as all are Egyptians and all are equal. He further responded to us that no religious sect that advocates violence and jihad is a true religion.

President el-Sisi and I discussed terrorism financing, the need to track money through the financial systems, and the need for sophisticated technology to follow the flow of money through the financial system as they work with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and our Treasury department. We also discussed the Interpol Stolen and Lost Travel Document database, an international database which houses information on stolen passports. He understood the importance, but the financial cost is high. This should continue to be an issue we press with Egypt and other countries (only ten countries are in compliance) as the downing of the Malaysian flight and recent passports confiscated in Honduras confirm the vulnerability of our security procedures in dealing with stolen passports. Our meeting ended with el-Sisi emphasizing that he and his country would always love and respect America for all we have done for them. "Though you may reject me, I will never reject you" was his affirming commitment to our relationship.

AFGHANISTAN



President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani
President of Afghanistan

We met with:

- President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, CEO Abdullah Abdullah
- Ambassador P. Michael McKinley
- Afghan and NATO Military officials
- General Campbell, Commander, Resolute Support and United States Forces-Afghanistan

Our discussions centered on U.S. efforts to defeat Taliban and other embedded terrorists groups.

Synopsis: The scope of our military mission in Afghanistan is to train, assist, and advise. There has been some progress in building management and budgeting structures in the military, with training limited to Corp leaders and not field operations. We have a very strong intelligence presence in Kabul, which is also the NATO headquarters. While the Taliban is the major terrorist organization in the country, ISIS and other terrorist groups continue to increase their presence.

Iran does not want ISIS to expand into Afghanistan, and therefore is supporting the Taliban. General Campbell stated that terrorists with money lead to deadly outcomes. At each meeting, including with President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, I raised the issues of poppy cultivation, as it is a \$3 billion industry in Afghanistan generating \$100-\$200 million annual revenue for the Taliban. If Afghanistan is ever to defeat the Taliban it must find a way to successfully cut off their funding from poppy production. The nexus between criminals and terrorists is growing stronger, with drug trafficking as a major joint effort along with mining.

My emphasis in each meeting was for Afghanistan to commit to infrastructure and the rule of law, both of which would encourage extraction of scarce minerals and oil and gas exploration. Referring to the U.S.' shale boom, I pointed out how new technologies have allowed us to tap in to previously unknown oil and gas reserves, creating thousands of jobs and generating millions in revenue to support the economy. Our

current reserves exceed that of Saudi Arabia.

Afghanistan has significant known resources and additional resources that could be identified.

The vision is to extract resources in Afghanistan and provide subsidies to poppy farmers so they can grow other agricultural products, like corn, etc. While there are challenges, as poppy production has become very ingrained into their society, it seems very clear, as I told several U.S. Generals, that we could be sitting around the same table 20 years from now discussing how we are going to defeat the Taliban because of their major cash infusion from heroin production and sales.

Any real plan to defeat the Taliban must include eradication of poppy or we are wasting our time. If we don't cut off the Taliban's funding there is no way to achieve the desired outcome, and certainly not in the military's current projected three year time frame. Elimination of poppy production is also a humanitarian cause. Russia is severely impacted by heroin addiction from Taliban poppy, as well as Iran, which has little regard for human life.

President Ghani listened attentively and responded affirmatively while outlining the obstacles in the way, including security for mineral extraction and massive infrastructure requirements. Gas reserves have already been found in the coastal region with unknown potential throughout the country. These requirements should all be factors in a business plan for private industry to partner with them, but they must establish the rule of law to protect private investment.

One of the highlights for me was the opportunity to share two meals with soldiers from North Carolina in Bagra and Kandahar. They were all very special young men who love their job, even under very trying conditions. While they are fed well, there are two soldiers in a small very Spartan unit, about 6 feet by 15 feet and no bathroom. They have a community bathroom. Nonetheless, they were all smiles. You had to love and respect them for their courage and dedication.

SAUDI ARABIA

We met with:

- Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Deputy Crown Prince, Second Deputy Premier, and Minister of Defense General
- Abdulrahman bin Saleh Al Banyan, Chief of the General Staff of Saudi Armed Forces
- Prince Miteb bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Minister of the National Guard
- Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

Our discussions centered around terrorism and growing Iranian and Russian influence in the region.

Synopsis: Saudi Arabia has been a strong ally of the U.S., in spite of their increase of oil production to drive oil prices down to \$40 per barrel, which has killed off hundreds of U.S. oil producers. They remain troubled by the lack of American leadership on the world stage, which is creating a void that is

being filled by jihadists. In their words, the world understands the need for clear, focused leadership from the United States, which they would follow. The Saudis begged for this kind of leadership and pledge that they would always follow and support America.

My questions related to the Saudi's commitment to prosecute parties in their country who were supporting terrorists. The U.S. has received reports of Saudi's financing terrorists as donors or facilitators through trade-based money laundering, drugs, oil, antiquities and other means. We also discussed stolen passport verification through Interpol. They pledged their full support on the terrorism financing issues and the passports, but we must follow up with the Saudi Ambassador in the U.S. and with U.S. Ambassador Westphal, who was at all of our meetings and offered full support of the Embassy.



Congressman Robert Pittenger and other members of the Congressional delegation and members of the U.S. military.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



Congressman Pittenger in the cockpit of an Air Force C-17 during his Congressional visit to Egypt, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia.



Congressman Pittenger at the headquarters for NATO's Operation Resolute Support in Kabul, Afghanistan.



Chinook CH-47 which transported Congressman Pittenger and his House colleagues to meetings around Afghanistan.



U.S. Air Force C-17 used to transport the Congressional delegation on their Middle East trip.



Congressman Robert Pittenger aboard a U.S. Air Force C-17 in Cairo.



Congressman Pittenger was honored to meet troops from North Carolina, currently defending our freedom while stationed at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan.

*Additional pictures from this trip are available at:
<https://goo.gl/photos/F2eL1bxc2FPWkHA38>*

pittenger.house.gov