



Hear a General, Hug a Sheik: Congress Visits Iraq

By Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Damien Cave

New York Times

August 26, 2007

WASHINGTON, Aug. 25 — On a Sunday morning in early August, just hours after Congress had recessed,

“It was a lovely lunch, a nice-napkin lunch,” said Ms. Schakowsky, a liberal Democrat and ardent war critic.

The featured guest was Gen. David H. Petraeus, the top American military commander in Iraq. With an audience

The meal was just one stop in a jam-packed tour that included visits with Sunni and Shiite tribal leaders

The trips, highly choreographed affairs known as codels, for Congressional delegations, are an annual rite

Last week, Senator Carl Levin, Democrat of Michigan and chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said

Congress has had notoriously testy relations with the Pentagon over the war. But with a new defense secretary

Inside the Pentagon, some were concerned about how the top generals in Baghdad could fight the war and

“You can’t fight the war in a vacuum,” Mr. Morrell said. “The reality is that there’s an audience in Washington

The trips have clearly set the story line for the September debate, cementing the perception that the mili

Ms. Schakowsky, for example, came away from the Petraeus lunch convinced more than ever that “the s

In Baghdad on Saturday, just hours after his own meeting with General Petraeus, James P. Moran, a Vi

The Pentagon is pleased and a senior White House official called the trips “a net plus.” And at least one

Mr. Baird was especially struck by his trip to Yusufiya, a farm town about 15 miles south of Baghdad in a

“That’s real progress,” Mr. Baird said, though he confessed he did not tell his wife about the region’s nic

The Congressional Iraq tours rarely include chats with ordinary Iraqis. “You don’t have the mobility for th

Iraqi officials view the Congressional visits — quick in-and-out trips — with a blend of appreciation and s

“They need to get out of the circle, to meet some new people, to understand, to hear some new ideas,” s

Some lawmakers were frustrated too. “I call it the embassy P.R. tour,” Ms. Schakowsky said.

For members of Congress, visiting Iraq is a badge of honor, a license to stand on the House or Senate f

The trips also confer a certain credibility at home. Representative Peter Roskam, a freshman Republican

That is not entirely surprising; after a while, a kind of “how I spent my summer vacation” sameness emerges.

There is the helicopter ride out of the Green Zone to an open-air market, maybe in Anbar Province, a state

Mr. Saleh is a regular on lawmakers’ itineraries; he said he has met with about two dozen this summer alone.

“He painted a very direct picture for us,” Mr. Kingston said. “He said: ‘You need to understand how far we

For his part, Mr. Saleh, who welcomed Mr. Moran and two other members of Congress to his spacious home

“I tell them not to expect any miracles,” he said.

Sheryl Gay Stolberg reported from Washington, and Damien Cave from Baghdad. James Glanz contributed