

Untitled document

It's time to redefine our purpose there

By Rep. Charles F. Bass, printed in the Concord Monitor

June 13, 2011

As I travel throughout the 2nd District, I am honored to meet service members and veterans who are serving, and have served, our nation so bravely. Because of their great sacrifice, we enjoy boundless freedoms. These men and women, regardless of when or where they have served, all share one thing in common: They have all left their loved ones behind to put their lives on the line for each and every one of us.

This selfless dedication to preserving our freedoms and protecting our nation deserves our greatest respect and admiration. That includes keeping our promise to them to bring them home to their families when their mission is over.

Since the beginning of the war on terror nearly 10 years ago, the men and women of our military have been engaged in a war the likes of which we have never seen before, fighting an enemy whose dogged determination to destroy our way of life knows no bounds. While our ultimate goal of defeating terrorism will not change, the location and tactics of our enemy will.

We are facing an enemy in al-Qaida that has no nation of its own. It is driven by a radical ideology not defined by borders, operating in countries that offer refuge or turn a blind eye. Al-Qaida had such a place in Afghanistan under the Taliban.

But since the start of our engagement in Afghanistan, we have removed the Taliban from power, supported efforts to transition to a democratic government, and killed terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden - all stated goals of our involvement in the region. With these goals accomplished, we have reached a pivot point in our mission.

Recently, during the debate on the Department of Defense Authorization Act, I voted for two amendments that seek to redefine our role in Afghanistan. The first would have required U.S. military leaders to establish a plan for troop reduction in Afghanistan but leave small, targeted forces to continue our engagement in counter-terrorism operations. The second would have required the administration to develop a plan for an accelerated transition of military operations to Afghan authorities.

I supported these amendments because they accomplish the goal of refocusing our mission in Afghanistan while still providing the necessary manpower and resources to seek out and eliminate terrorist groups who wish to do us harm. Unfortunately, when presented to the full House of Representatives for a vote, both amendments failed by a narrow margin. I will never vote to cut vital funding for our troops in the field, but I will vote to force Congress and the administration to take a thorough look at our involvement in the region.

It is time we redefine our purpose in Afghanistan and start reducing our military presence there. While we still have work to do before we leave completely, we can start to transition security

operations in the country to the Afghan government without affecting our mission. The mission in Afghanistan at this stage is to eliminate any existing terrorist threats, which we can accomplish through the use of smaller forces and by maximizing our intelligence resources to prevent future threats to our country. As we have demonstrated with the killing of bin Laden, we have the capability to eliminate terrorist threats without having to command and control the Afghan government.

We have made great strides in our fight against terrorism and tyranny, thanks to our men and women in uniform.

It's time to bring them home from Afghanistan and move forward with a new strategy in the country that continues our war against terrorism but also allows the Afghan people to take responsibility for their future.

(U.S. Rep. Charles F. Bass is a Republican representing New Hampshire's 2nd District.)