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We have learned many valuable lessons since American military forces first entered Iraq more than five years ago. Perhaps the most valuable of these lessons originated from our efforts to protect American military personnel from the threat of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) - the primary source of combat casualties in Iraq.

Through the utilization of persistent Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) coverage, which was deployed under Task Force Odin in 2006 to combat the threat of roadside bomb attacks in Iraq, more than 3,000 insurgents have been captured or killed. Additionally, the number of IED attacks against coalition forces has decreased significantly. In fact, since August 2006, coalition deaths attributable to roadside bombs decreased by 85 percent while the number of troops wounded by IEDs fell by 52 percent.

This decrease in IED attacks and coalition deaths in Iraq is due in large part to Task Force Odin and the capability delivered by ISR. While it is important that we continue to build on this success, replicating this capability and applying it to Afghanistan will prove equally valuable, especially now that IED attacks in the region are at an all-time high. Last year, roadside bomb attacks in Afghanistan increased by 45 percent - a threat to coalition forces that can be mitigated by ISR assets.

ISR capability utilizes cameras and other technology attached to unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and other aircraft that can cover any high-threat area and provide real-time tactical surveillance on IED placement and terrorist movement. In Iraq, a combination of platforms from Warrior UAVs and modified C-12 aircraft are being used for this purpose. Some ISR assets are currently being utilized in Afghanistan, but more are needed.

The President's recent announcement that 17,000 more troops will deploy to Afghanistan in the next few months puts greater urgency on deploying ISR assets to the region. President Obama himself rightly acknowledges that mission success in Afghanistan hinges on our partnership with Pakistan and preventing the incursion of terrorists across the 1,500-mile border separating these two countries.

This rugged border terrain is not well suited for infantry patrols and will not become any easier to navigate as more combat troops arrive in the region. While an increased troop presence will certainly help leverage the Afghan mission in other areas, advanced ISR capability would cover mountainous terrain that cannot easily be covered by ground operations.

A corps of UAVs, supplemented by manned systems and linked to quick reactionary forces, such as helicopters and artillery, will help target IED emplacements and interdict terrorists moving across the borderland. More importantly, it will save lives.

The U.S. military should move quickly to establish ISR assets across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and, in the process, address other insufficient capabilities, such as special operations forces and MEDEVAC resources. Doing so will provide another dimension to our efforts in Afghanistan and bring us one step closer to achieving our mission objectives and leaving in victory.

Earlier this month, I traveled to Iraq and Afghanistan to visit with military and civilian leadership and coalition troops. American servicemen and women in both countries, as well as our international partners, remain committed to their mission and continue to perform their duties with an unwavering sense of selflessness and patriotism. They deserve our full support and the best possible resources and technology that we can provide.

Developing a comprehensive and balanced strategy in Afghanistan will require more than an increased troop presence. It will require a combination of personnel and assets that are capable of meeting the challenges of the region, as well as greater contributions from our NATO allies. In the case of ISR operations, we must look toward our experiences in Iraq and move to rapidly deploy similar capability in Afghanistan.

As Congress works to strengthen the readiness and operability of our military, the importance of deploying comprehensive ISR coverage in Afghanistan must not be overlooked. If additional budgetary support is necessary to ensure its immediate and effective operation, then Congress should provide that support.

As demonstrated in Iraq, ISR coverage markedly improves the safety and performance of coalition forces. Similar capability should be quickly and fully implemented in Afghanistan.

