

THE GOVERNOR



I sit with Governor David Patterson in his car, watching a heavy snow fall on the tarmac of LaGuardia Airport. We are waiting for a plane to take us to Andrews Air Force Base, where we will meet Reps. Anthony Weiner (D-NY), Ed Whitfield (R-KY) and Tom Cole (R-OK); and then board a military flight to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Nearly 10,000 New York troops are in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some are on their third deployment and the strains are acute during the holidays. The purpose of our visit is to provide moral support and also to assess rapidly changing conditions in two separate military theaters.

While we wait, snowplows begin to clear LaGuardia's runways. With that, the Governor reaches for his cell phone.

"Better make sure they're plowing the Thruway," he says.

CORKSCREW LANDINGS

The lumbering C-130 seems to stop in mid-air and then begins a steep dive towards Baghdad International Airport. It is called a "corkscrew landing," designed to avoid the possibility of ground fire. Even though this is my sixth trip into the military theater, the maneuver remains unnerving. (Disclosure: When my kids were small, my job at amusement parks was to stand on solid ground, guarding souvenirs, while they rode roller coasters and even carousels). The plane veers sharply, and finally lands with a soft thud. We deplane, clad in body armor and helmets. Welcome to Baghdad.

POWERPOINTS

In military headquarters in Baghdad and Al-Asad, Generals offer PowerPoint slides glowing with maps and lines and acronyms. They tell an interesting story.

IMPROVEMENTS IN IRAQ

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