

MICHAEL WILKEN: The Defense and State Departments have teamed up to launch Serving Abroad: Through Their Eyes, a photography project calling out to all active duty troops and Foreign Service Officers. Renowned New York Times photographer Joao Silva and Lieutenant Colonel Luke Knittig join us to talk more about this project.

Gentleman, thank you so much for joining us. First, can you tell us about this project and how it all got started.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL KNITTIG: Well, it's an amazing thing that has come together here, teaming up with State, but the simple idea behind it is some of the top talent in the world, represented here by Joao Silva and the Arts in Embassies program, we're going to go out and find the 1,000 most compelling photographs from those who've served abroad since 200.

MICHAEL WILKEN: And what kind of pictures are we talking about? And how did you get Mr. Silva involved?

LIEUTENANT COLONEL KNITTIG: Well, yeah. We should get him right in here, but it's photos of compelling things that you've seen over there whether that's loss, triumph, faces, places; the categories are all spelled out in there. But we know— we know that missions direct us overseas but it's human inspiration that inspires us to do things every day, and that's usually what usually compels folks to take that picture. We want your best shot. We want you to go through your hard drives and get it to us, so we have it recognized nationally at the Smithsonian, in a traveling exhibit, and all sorts of ways that get at the 1,000 words behind the best of any picture out there.

MICHAEL WILKEN: Well that certainly seems like a great way for service members to get their photos out there. Mr. Silva, I know we have some of your photos. Can you talk a little bit about some of your photos and what they mean?

JOAO SILVA: Well, I've been covering Afghanistan I guess since the civil war, so it's— it's been a long time, early 90s. And it's been amazing to see how history has changed and how the country has in some ways progressed and in other regressed, but that's just the reality of life.

And as far as this project goes, I'll be assisting with the selection of images. I'm honored to be part of that. I think it's a fantastic unique project, and there's huge historical value to the images. It's important for America to see a completely different perspective of Afghanistan, Iraq, the country where they boys are— boys go out serving and you know. So I think it's amazing. It's important and I urge everybody out there to keep shooting and to send what they have, and you know from my point of view, don't be scared. Send whatever you've got, you know. Because we want to see the reality — we want to see the reality through your eyes, so I look forward to that. I look forward to seeing all of these amazing images, which I'm 100% sure exist because the guys have cameras. Everybody's got a camera.

MICHAEL WILKEN: Right, and I'm sure it will be a very different perspective than even the images that we see from embedded reporters and things of that nature.

JOAO SILVA: Without a doubt.

MICHAEL WILKEN: Being on the front lines, right there in the fight, having a camera, being able to get those- capture those images is going to be something that's going to be great for everyone to see. Now, for you sir, what do you hope this project is going to accomplish in the long run and in the short term?

LIEUTENANT COLONEL KNITTIG: Well, I just think it could connect so many things. It can- it can have pictures that would otherwise just sit on a shelf somewhere or in a hard drive, or maybe be striking and impress family members, but it can be seen on a national stage and just connect things that really get at the human inspiration of what has us working together and serving abroad. Of course it's foreign service officers, it's all of us at work together overseas on behalf of America.

MICHAEL WILKEN: And how can service members who are interested get involved?

LIEUTENANT COLONEL KNITTIG: Well, we try to make it as simple as we can via a form and a website. You simply go to the website, look over the rules. Put your photo in there in a form, and send it to us starting tomorrow.

MICHAEL WILKEN: Awesome. Thank you guys. And gentlemen, thank you so much for joining us. I appreciate you taking the time to chat with us. And if you - I'm Petty Officer Michael Wilken for everyone here at the Pentagon channel, thanks for watching. We leave you with more pictures from Serving Abroad: Through Their Eyes.