



HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
March 15, 2006

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CHAIRMAN HUNTER OPENING STATEMENT

Full Committee Posture Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2007 Budget Request for the U.S. Central Command

Washington, D.C. – Today, we will consider the challenges facing the United States Central Command (CENTCOM). Our witnesses are General John Abizaid, Commander of U.S. Central Command, and the Honorable Eric S. Edelman, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Gentleman, thank you both for being here today and thank you for your continued dedicated service to the Nation.

As in years past, this budget cycle poses a number of important policy and budgetary issues that will receive considerable debate and attention over the next few months. But at the end of the day, the fundamental issue that this Congress and this Committee must address is whether or not the proposed Fiscal Year 2007 budget request establishes the proper policy framework; funding sufficient to meet current and future challenges; and supports the needs of our military defending the nation around the world. More specifically to today's hearing, does the budget support the needs of the brave men and women who proudly serve within the CENTCOM's Area of Responsibility (AOR)?

A few weeks back, I went to Iraq and met with Iraqi brigade commanders and the American soldiers and Marines overseeing their training. Their reports were encouraging. They told us that Iraqi troops were becoming more and more effective and increasingly holding their ground – in contrast to green Iraqi troops who abandoned the battlefield in Fallujah nearly two years ago. And according to CENTCOM, as of January 2006, ninety-eight Iraqi Army and special operations forces battalions were conducting counter-insurgency operations – compared to five in 2004. Thirty-seven Iraqi Army battalions now control their own battle space, with Coalition forces in a supporting role – compared to none one year ago.

As far as we have come, there is still much more to do. A long and difficult road lies ahead, not just in Iraq and Afghanistan, but in the entire region. Recognizing that, we need to turn our attention to building long-term capabilities to become more effective.

General Abizaid, this committee and the American people deeply appreciate the work you do and the service that the men and women under your command are performing for our country. We are more secure at home because of what they are doing on the front lines. We appreciate your appearance today, and the country is fortunate to have your public service.

We also have a job to do—and that is to make sure you have the tools you need to defeat our enemies. That's a big part of what this hearing is about.

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