



## HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

### *PRESS RELEASE*

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## CHAIRMAN HUNTER OPENING STATEMENT

### *Full Committee Posture Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2007 Budget Request for the United States Southern Command*

**Washington, D.C.** – General Craddock, welcome back. Thank you for joining us this morning.

For the last few years, the public's attention has been focused on the Middle East, for obvious reasons. But that should not distract us from national security issues in the rest of the world, our own hemisphere in particular. Developments in South America and other areas of the world are as crucial to our future security as the outcome of the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan. Fortunately, you recognize the challenges in your area of responsibility (AOR) and are working to get ahead of any threats, even as Washington sometimes focuses its attention in other places.

The U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) has been involved in combating narco-terrorists in Colombia for years. President Uribe, his government and the Colombian people, continue to be our allies and committed to this fight, which is a very welcome sign. We look forward to your remarks regarding this important ally and how things are progressing in Colombia.

At the same time, other countries in Latin America continue to appear to be running against the tide of history. Venezuela continues to be led by a Castro admirer and is aggressively importing weaponry out of proportion to his needs and recklessly provokes the United States. Bolivia has a new government that may be on the tipping point in regard to their relationship with the United States.

Several countries remain unstable or may become so soon, with Haiti and Cuba being of prime concern. Experts tell us we may have to send troops back to Haiti in the foreseeable future.

We are also concerned about the unconventional threats in your area, including extremists groups and supporters of Islamic terrorist groups. As we've seen, so called "ungoverned spaces" can become safe havens for terrorists. In addition to the terrorist groups we are also concerned about the possible shipment of weapons of mass destruction through your AOR.

We are interested to hear your thoughts on our facility in Guantanamo Bay. I visited there last year along with eight of my colleagues on the committee. I came away satisfied that the detainees are being treated humanely. In our Fiscal Year 2006 defense authorization bill, we addressed concerns regarding the treatment of detainees. Additionally, the committee would like to follow up on your appearance before the committee last summer where you discussed interrogation tactics and the investigation you authorized by Lieutenant General Schmidt and Brigadier General Furlow. Finally, it has been brought to my attention that there are detainees being force fed at Guantanamo Bay, and we are interested to hear about the techniques being used for that procedure.

General, you are on the frontlines, dealing with threats to our security and reversing these threats before they result in a full-fledged attack to the security of the United States.

We look forward to hearing how the United States Southern Command is addressing of these challenges. Thank you again for being with us today.

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