



## **HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN**

### ***PRESS RELEASE***

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## **CHAIRMAN HUNTER OPENING STATEMENT**

### ***Full Committee Hearing on the Status of United States Marine Corps HMMWV Underbody Armor Kits in Operation Iraqi Freedom***

Washington, D.C. -- This morning the committee continues its review of the status of Marine Corps tactical vehicle armoring. Specifically, we will receive testimony on Headquarters Marine Corps' and Marine Corps Systems Command's actions to fulfill urgent force protection needs identified by our Marines serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom, in the fielding of HMMWV underbody armor protection kits.

I would like to welcome back two distinguished officers, representing the United States Marine Corps: General William L. Nyland, Assistant Commandant, and Major General (select) William D. Catto. Gentlemen, thank you for your service to the nation. It is good to see you again.

When, in order to provide for a more secure America, this nation sends its young men and women into harm's way, the Members of this committee are entrusted by the American people to provide those young men and women the necessary systems and equipment so they can be successful in accomplishing their mission at anytime, anywhere in the world, and return home safely. In meeting our responsibilities, this committee and Congress must continue to exercise the required oversight of Department of Defense and the military services acquisition activities to make sure that what we all agree needs to be provided to our service men and women, is not only in fact being provided to them, but is done so in a timely manner.

Early in the global war on terrorism, this committee established force protection and specifically the adequacy of tactical wheeled vehicle protection as a major area of interest, concern and high priority. This is our second hearing on this issue in less than two months.

The terrorists in Iraq continue to adapt to our tactics and force protection initiatives and continue to use deadly improvised explosive devices to attack our troops – averaging about 30 attacks a day. Until we have a better solution, adding armor to our military vehicles in theater must be expeditiously accomplished to protect our personnel from this continuously evolving threat.

We're here today to discuss the Marine Corps acquisition system's actions in meeting the urgent need to fulfill add-on armor requirements for tactical vehicles in Iraq – specifically HMMWV underbody armor protection kits.

In February our staff met with senior Office of the Secretary of Defense officials and the Marine Corps regarding a substantive technical proposal for tactical vehicle underbody armor put forth by a Gunny Sergeant serving in Iraq. In April, after no action resulted from that meeting, I met with General Nyland to discuss the continuing threat to Marines in Iraq from mines and IEDs. We agreed that the availability of steel in Kuwait could be used to satisfy the urgent need to fabricate and field 650 HMMWV underbody armor kits to the II Marine Expeditionary Force Forward. We met on April 21, 2005. The contract for the underbody armor kit was signed yesterday. I understand that deliveries of the underbody armor kits will begin in three weeks and “the job will be completed in eight weeks.”

So, the question is, given the availability of the material necessary to meet the armoring requirement, on-hand in Kuwait in April, is four months a realistic time-frame in satisfying the requirement? We don't think it is. This hearing is not about the incredible commitment and professionalism being demonstrated by our Marines on a daily basis in Iraq. This hearing is about instilling the same sense of urgency, commitment and professionalism back here in Washington within our acquisition community as our Marines demonstrate everyday in Iraq.

I know the Marine Corps is capable of moving out and getting a job done when it makes up its mind to do so. Before the deployment of the First Marine Expeditionary Force to Iraq, the Corps outfitted over three thousand vehicles with first generation armor within three months. That is what I view as the standard of performance the Corps has established and we applaud the Corps on that effort.

This is why we find it perplexing that it should take at least four months to begin fielding 650 underbody armor kits when the material was in theater to begin with. With lives on the line everyday in Iraq, there is no reason for less than a daily, all out effort here at home to provide the force protection required for our men and women in Iraq.

General Nyland, General Catto, we look forward to hearing your assessment of the underbody armor kit situation and any suggestions you may have for enhancing the acquisition process – particularly the timeliness of meeting requirements. Our troops deserve nothing less.

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