



**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON TACTICAL AIR AND LAND FORCES
CURT WELDON, PENNSYLVANIA
CHAIRMAN**

PRESS RELEASE

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Opening Statement of Chairman Curt Weldon
Hearing on Body and Vehicle Armor, Rotorcraft Safety

WASHINGTON, D.C. – No other issue in the past two years has taken a higher priority for our committee as a whole and our individual subcommittees, than force protection. Early in the global war on terror, this committee established force protection and specifically, adequacy of vehicle and body armor, as a major area of interest and high priority for funding support. Over the past two years we have held five full committee hearings, five full committee “members only” classified briefings, and now three Tactical Air-Land Subcommittee hearings on force protection. We have also initiated legislation that became law that provides for rapid acquisition authority to the Secretary of Defense, providing streamlined acquisition authority during periods of combat.

It was this committee that first highlighted the need early in 2004 for additional funding to the budget request and a critical need for an early fiscal year 2005 supplemental, with a large vehicle and body armor component. The committee added nearly \$1.4 billion for vehicle and body armor to the fiscal year 2005 budget request. We again in fiscal year 2006 provided for an early supplemental which included nearly \$700 million for vehicle and body armor.

This committee and its subcommittees have been at the forefront in doing whatever is necessary to protect our men and women serving in the military. In meeting our responsibilities, this committee and Congress has and will 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. Chairman Hunter and the ranking member, Mr. Skelton, have been hands on, on the force protection issue, providing outstanding leadership. And we all have been fully supportive of their leadership.

The testimony we receive today will provide the current status of body and vehicle armor in Iraq. As the threat to our personnel has evolved, the requirements have continued to change. We as a committee need to be reassured that all body and vehicle armor programs are being accomplished expeditiously, the Services are communicating with one another, and that every effort is being considered to meet new force protection requirements.

Since April 2004, all military personnel serving in Iraq have been issued, at the minimum, the basic body armor configuration to meet the projected threat. The services face a difficult task: balancing the need to protect soldiers and Marines while not so inhibiting their mobility with additional armor that it actually endangers lives and effectiveness.

We understand the Army and Marine Corps are supplementing the basic body armor with side torso armor. These theater requirements need to be fulfilled and properly resourced.

The vehicle armor situation has steadily improved since the original strategy for armoring vehicles was implemented. Almost 100 percent of the vehicles in theater have factory produced armor and no vehicle leaves a secure area without armor. We expect to hear about the progress being made in transitioning from existing armored vehicles to those with even higher levels of protection

Our troops in theater continue to show their resourcefulness and innovation through incorporating their own enhancements to their armored vehicles. This committee needs to be reassured the senior Army leadership and senior Marine Corps leadership are recognizing, evaluating, and properly resourcing these in theater modifications in a timely manner.

With regard to helicopter operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, from 2002 through 2004, there was a yearly rise in Army combat and non-combat losses. The Marine Corps losses peaked in 2003. In 2005, both services experienced fewer losses than 2004. We are aware of three Army losses in January and ask that our witness address how this affects loss rate trends. Human factors are the primary cause of helicopter mishaps, and we look forward to hearing from the Army today about the actions that the Service is taking to reverse this trend.

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