



## HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

### *PRESS RELEASE*

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Contact: Josh Holly (202) 225-2539

## CHAIRMAN HUNTER OPENING STATEMENT

### *Full Committee Hearing to Review Operations in Iraq*

**Washington, D.C.** – This hearing comes at a critical time. Iraqis have successfully drafted a constitution and will vote on it in just a few weeks. Assuming it is adopted, they will move directly to electing a constitutional government and seating it before the end of the year.

This political progress is happening in the middle of a war. The enemy seeks either to bring Al Qaeda's vision for the Middle East into reality or to restore to power a regime like the one led by Saddam Hussein. Neither outcome would be acceptable for U.S. national security. We cannot allow men like Zarqawi to defeat pro-democracy Arabs any more than we can let the thugs who ran Iraq under Saddam return to their brutal ways.

The insurgents in Iraq know what they are up against. They cannot beat us on the battlefield, so they are attacking the Iraqi people—and us—psychologically. They're trying to convince the Iraqis that they would be better off living under the tyrannical rule of someone like Zarqawi or Saddam. They're trying to convince us that victory is not worth the cost.

We need to remember what we're fighting for, and the nature of our enemy. Ultimately, Zarqawi and his group of foreign fighters, want to do to Iraq and its neighbors what the Taliban did to Afghanistan. They want to return to soccer-stadium executions, public stoning of women who refuse to wear the veil, brutal persecution of anyone who fails to adhere to their violent version of Islam, and to build a launching pad for terrorist attacks against the civilized world. To achieve that goal, they're employing suicide bombers against innocent civilians and trying to foster a civil war.

Former regime elements and their recruits are fighting to restore the kind of ethnic dictatorship that they had under Saddam. Under that kind of regime, Iraq invaded two of its neighbors, killed hundreds of thousands of its own people, destroyed an Arab marsh culture that was over a thousand years old, and used chemical weapons.

We're fighting for an Iraq that treats its people with respect that practices democracy, that does not threaten its neighbors, and that is an ally in the war against violent extremism. The majority of the Iraqi people want the same thing. They're fighting for it alongside our soldiers and Marines. Over 4,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces have died to build that future.

Success depends on standing up an Iraqi government and creating Iraqi security forces capable of defending the country. We are well down this path. The Iraqis are moving forward with a political process, while the Iraqi Army and police grow larger and more experienced every day. Our job is to hand this fight over to the Iraqis and then support them while they win it. We have to be steady while they build up that capability. The stakes are that high.

Before I turn to the gentleman from Missouri, I want to again thank General Myers for his service to the country. As most of our members know, this is your last appearance before the committee wearing the uniform of the United States Air Force. From combat in Vietnam through leading our military in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, you have served your country well and made us all proud of the United States armed forces. The President and the Secretary could not have asked for a better Chairman and I know the members of this committee will miss your insight and judgment. On behalf of the committee, thank you again for your service to the country. General, we're also aware that your retirement dinner is this evening. So, when the time comes, just let us know that you need to depart and we'll continue on without you.

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