



HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

PRESS RELEASE

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House Armed Services Committee Holds Hearing to Assess Ongoing Operations in Afghanistan

Washington, D.C. – Today the House Armed Services Committee continued its oversight of ongoing military operations and stability efforts in Afghanistan. Members of the committee received testimony from Department of Defense (DOD), Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) officials on successes and current challenges in Afghanistan.

“Our forces in Afghanistan typify the quiet dedication and professionalism that we as Americans have grown used to seeing from our military personnel,” said Chairman Duncan Hunter (R-CA). “U.S. men and women continue to serve in the security sector, both within NATO and through the Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan... Coalition partners are also maintaining or even increasing their commitment to Afghanistan’s stability and reconstruction. This summer, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force will take over primary security responsibility for three quarters of the country and will lead reconstruction efforts in northern, western and southern Afghanistan.”

Army Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry, Commander of the Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan, highlighted ongoing missions, such as Operation Mountain Thrust, which “seeks to deny the enemy safe havens, to interdict his movement routes, and, most importantly, extend the authority and writ of the central government.”

He added, “The combat phase of this operation is only the precursor to our longer-term goal of strengthening good governance, the rule of law, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance and economic development.”

Gen. Eikenberry cautioned that while terrorists and Taliban forces may not be particularly strong, the “middle ground” of civic society had been decimated by the Soviet invasion and years of civil war. The General cited continued work by Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) to build infrastructure, engage provincial leaders to promote democratic and representative governance and medical and humanitarian assistance as key to the long-term rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Members of the committee also received testimony regarding drug interdiction efforts, as Afghanistan continues to be a major producer of opium for global consumption. According to written remarks by Karen Tandy, Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the “DEA has undertaken an aggressive approach to combat the production of opium in Afghanistan.” Ms. Tandy cited collaborative efforts with other coalition partners including the DOD and the State Department to reduce drug production and dismantle drug trafficking organizations.

USAID’s Alternative Livelihoods Program has focused on alternative crop production to encourage farmers to abandon poppy production for other crop cultivation. James Kunder, Assistant Administrator for Asia and the Near East, USAID, spoke of the need to link interdiction and infrastructure projects, since they were integral parts of the solution. Infrastructure projects such as irrigation, for example, would be a critical component for the viability of some orchards and crops – unlike the cultivation of poppies which does not require supplemental watering.

Kunder also listed other projects, such as the Kandahar – Herat Highway, as efforts vital to Afghanistan’s reconstruction. According to his written remarks submitted to the committee, “USAID has built 524 schools serving nearly 400,000 students and 528 clinics serving 340,000 patients per month. By the end of 2006, USAID anticipates completing more than 600 schools and 600 clinics. This is a phenomenal number, averaging 19 schools and clinics per month.”

Members questioned the witnesses on reports of Taliban activity in the southern part of Afghanistan, and asked whether their prognoses were unduly optimistic. In response, Gen. Eikenberry stressed the need for patience and an uncompromising long-term commitment to Afghanistan’s success. “We shouldn’t be daunted by these challenges. Instead, we should take stock of the tremendous progress that Afghanistan and the international community have made to date and apply that same commitment to the difficulties that lie ahead.”

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