

PRESS RELEASE



House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER

U.S. Central Command Fiscal Year 2005 Posture Hearing

This morning the Committee will continue its review of the fiscal year 2005 defense budget request by turning our attention to the combatant commanders – those elements of the Department of Defense who are actually charged with fighting and winning the nation’s wars around the globe.

For some time now, I’ve taken a moment at virtually every hearing to remind the American public that the United States is a nation at war. I don’t say that for members of this committee, many of whom have visited the theater or have been in constant contact with returning troops. I certainly don’t need to remind our witnesses, who are at the heart of our war effort.

I beat that drum because sometimes we sometimes see disturbing signs that our nation may be forgetting this essential fact.

As we meet today in the comfortable confines of Washington, D.C., American soldiers are on the ground in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the world defending our interests, our friends, and our allies. Most importantly, they’re defending the lives of their fellow citizens by draining the swamps that allow terrorists to flourish and grow.

That’s why the political, diplomatic, military, economic, and cultural work that goes on in General Abizaid’s area is so important. Even a quick review of the State Department’s list of terrorist groups indicates that there are at least fourteen organizations operating in the CENTCOM area. Of the State Department’s list of seven state sponsors of terrorism, three were in Central Command’s area of operations—we’re down to two, now, as a result of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Nevertheless, the region remains a key source of international insecurity. Extremists continue to assault efforts to bring security, stability, and democracy to Afghanistan and Iraq. Iran’s half-hearted attempts at political reform have largely failed, leaving us with a state controlled by extremist supporters of terrorism who the International Atomic Energy Agency caught violating their nuclear safeguards agreements.

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In Pakistan, we face a country with nuclear weapons, a long-standing rivalry with its nuclear neighbor, popular support for Osama bin Laden in key regions, and a governmental system that hasn't succeeded in building a stable democracy. And these are just the highlights!

September 11 forced the United States to jump into this mix with both feet. Osama bin Laden proved it wasn't enough to contain or deter threats to our security; they had to be eliminated. To that end, the Administration is using all the tools at its disposal to improve the security situation in the region, from increased military cooperation with the Central Asian states to diplomatic initiatives in Pakistan and military training in the Horn of Africa. We're making progress. General Abizaid leads many of our efforts along these lines, and will offer some greater detail during the hearing.

That said, much of our success to date should be credited to the men and women serving their country and their willingness to go in harm's way. While they're out there defending us, we have a responsibility back home to make sure that we're leaving no stone unturned in giving them all the support they need to do the job. Some people forget that and look to cut the defense budget in order to pay for other priorities. I believe that this would be a mistake in the middle of a war, while our service personnel are engaged with the enemy. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how the President's budget request will enable us to continue making progress in the global war on terror and why it's vital that Congress give them the resources they need to complete the mission.

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