



*PRESS RELEASE*

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**OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER**

*Full Committee Hearing on Status of Forces in Iraq after June 30.*

This morning the Committee continues its examination of Operation Iraqi Freedom with a specific focus on the status of U.S. military forces following the hand over of sovereignty on June 30<sup>th</sup>. We are also planning another hearing on this topic next Tuesday, June 22, with Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz who is presently in Iraq reviewing these very issues for Secretary Rumsfeld.

Just two weeks from today, the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq will hand sovereignty over to an Iraqi Interim Government. This event marks the latest step in a plan that has been unfolding since last fall. It will be followed by:

- national elections to a transitional government just after the new year,
- a popular vote on a new Constitution next fall, and
- direct elections to a constitutional government before the end of 2005.

Some people here, and in Iraq, may be impatient with the process, but I think Jefferson, Washington, Adams, and Franklin would be astounded at the speed with which things are happening.

June 30<sup>th</sup> is a milestone on the road to a stable, democratic, and secure Iraq in which Iraqis decide the future of their own country. More importantly, the momentum towards a fully-sovereign and democratic Iraq will accelerate. Already, roughly 60 percent of the Iraqi government has been turned over to Iraqi control. The Coalition Provisional Authority has issued an order transferring Iraqi security forces from under the command and control of the multinational force to the Iraqi Interim Government.

Additionally, the multinational force is continuing its efforts at training the Iraqis to take over the security mission themselves. Roughly 150,000 Iraqis are either on duty or in training to serve on the Iraqi Police Force, in the military, as members of the Civil Defense Corps, or in the Department of Border Enforcement. This is a clear sign that Iraqis are moving forward in taking over the responsibility for securing their country.

The handover is significant on a strategic scale, but June 30<sup>th</sup> won't mean much change in the daily lives of our soldiers. They will still be in Iraq. They will still face a determined, terrorist enemy. They will still work with Iraqis to defeat that enemy. They will still be under American command. And they will still need every ounce of support this country can muster to succeed in their mission. This is where the outcome of Operation Iraqi Freedom will be decided, and this is where we must focus our attention in the coming months.

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