



HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

PRESS RELEASE

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Hunter Calls on American Citizens to Emulate “Purpose and Mission” of Brave U.S. Troops on Third Anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom

Washington, D.C. --- In recognition of the third anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom, U.S. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter (R-CA) today called on American citizens to have the same “purpose and mission” as the brave United States troops serving in Iraq. Hunter’s statement follows:

“Success of the American mission in Iraq depends on two things: the formation of a permanent unified government and an Iraqi defense force capable of protecting the government and the nation’s interests.”

“America’s progress in achieving these two goals is proceeding at a steady pace. The green, untrained Iraqi troops who fled the battlefield in Fallujah in 2002 have now matured into dependable soldiers who stand and fight alongside U.S. Marines in western Iraq. Overall, there are more than 240,000 trained Iraqi Security Forces between the Ministries of Defense and Interior. There are more than 130 Iraqi battalions fighting the enemy with 40 of those battalions in the lead. Iraqi units now control more than 30,000 square miles in Iraq. These same troops are now fighting in Samarra alongside troops from the 101st Airborne.”

“Make no mistake; Iraqi forces will not reach the competency or effectiveness levels of our Marines or 101st Airborne. The good news is they don’t have to. They simply have to hold their country together and provide a shield for the fledging government.”

“The ethnic and tribal divisions that have shaped Iraq for thousands of years continue to exist. The challenge for the newly-elected Iraqi politicians is to put aside ancient rivalries and work together for a unified Iraq. Make no mistake about it – this is no small challenge. Assassinations and bombings have pock-marked the rough road to a reliable government. Nonetheless, Americans were surprised by the enthusiasm with which Iraqi voters and political leaders embraced recent elections.”

“The next several months will be a critical time and the threshold test for Iraq’s experiment in freedom. It’s not realistic to expect the old divisions between Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds to evaporate, but the American proposal is to replace bullets with ballots and to press the new leadership to adhere to the standard of tolerance necessary for a civil, unified government to operate.”

“A few years ago in the aftermath of the Somalia debacle, the United States under President Clinton swore off nation-building. Yet, the lesson of 9/11 is clear – if America doesn’t change the world, the world will change us. Changing Iraq from a persistent enemy of America to a friendly state operating in freedom will benefit generations of Americans.”

“The question for the United States over the next several years is one of endurance. Can a nation that has been trained to expect quick victory in short wars keep its focus and support for a nation-building mission that is dangerous, tedious and costly? The answer is we must. Now is the time for all American citizens to have the same sense of purpose and mission as the 130,000 troops who are performing so magnificently in Iraq.”

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