



## HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

### ***PRESS RELEASE***

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For Immediate Release:  
March 8, 2006

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## **CHAIRMAN HUNTER OPENING STATEMENT**

### ***Full Committee Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2007 National Defense Authorization Budget Request from the European Command***

Washington, D.C. – First, welcome to our witness, General James L. Jones, USMC, Commander, European Command. General Jones, it's difficult to believe that it's been three years since you assumed your present command. Those three years have been a time of change and consequence—in very great measure because of the tremendous work of the men and women who serve us in NATO and U.S. European Command. We welcome you back, and thank you, their leader, for your service and for your leadership during this critical time.

Today, this committee will consider the challenges facing EUCOM and NATO—challenges seemingly as broad as the vast reach of General Jones's responsibilities. But, optimists see this as a time of great opportunity.

And well they should, considering how NATO has grown to include new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, countries which have, in turn, enriched NATO. We have seen a new relationship develop with Russia, something that once seemed unthinkable ... as evidenced by the Russian Navy's participation in a recent NATO maritime counterterrorism mission.

General, I believe that you yourself have said that 2006 is a pivotal year for NATO. Based on how much has been accomplished in a few short years, 2006 does indeed promise to set a bold direction for the Alliance. As a result of the 2002 Prague Summit, European Command has led the way in transforming NATO by working with our allies to develop military capabilities useful outside Europe. We are reaping the benefits of that investment, especially in the important work of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. This year, your "new NATO" will embark on an ambitious campaign to expand operations into Afghanistan's southern and eastern sectors. Some 35 countries, including 10 nations that are not members of NATO, are working together to help build a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Even as NATO transforms, it is helping transform this nation in ways that will benefit us all for decades to come.

We look forward to seeing another facet of the new NATO grow to maturity. The NATO Response Force is projected to achieve a pivotal milestone in October with its full operational capability. The NRF acquitted itself admirably in its first mission, providing humanitarian relief to the victims of the earthquake in Pakistan.

I would note especially NATO Training Mission Iraq, which is playing a key role in helping professionalize officers in the Iraqi Army. A few weeks back, I went to Iraq and met with Iraqi brigade commanders and the Marines overseeing their training. Their reports were encouraging. They told us that Iraqi troops were developing and increasingly holding their ground, in contrast to green Iraqi troops who abandoned the battlefield in Fallujah nearly two years ago. As we know, the extent to which Iraqis continue to take on the defense of their country and take part in their own political process is the key to the future—ours and theirs. In this role of helping shape the officers who will lead the Iraqi Army, it is gratifying to see NATO demonstrate its continuing commitment to the common values of freedom and democracy, even as it proves its flexibility and its continuing relevance.

General Jones and his team also deserve credit for increasing our attention in Africa. As we've seen, so called "ungoverned spaces" can become safe havens for terrorists. And EUCOM's work in Darfur—helping assist African Union military components—is certainly a positive step toward meeting the pressing challenges that face parts of Africa.

Clearly, General, this is a pivotal time for the men and women under your command. I know their work will continue to strengthen the vitality and the relevance of an alliance that will play an important role in dealing with the new threats that have emerged after the end of the Cold War. We especially look forward to what the Riga Summit will bring in the fall.

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