



**PRESS RELEASE**

---

For Immediate Release: June 14, 2004

Contact: Harald Stavenas (202) 225-2539

**OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER**

*Mark-up of H.Res. 640, Resolution of Inquiry Concerning Abu Ghraib Prison.*

Tonight the Committee will consider House Resolution 640, a “Resolution of Inquiry” by Rep. Chris Bell concerning Abu Ghraib prison. This resolution was introduced on May 12<sup>th</sup> and referred to this committee. We have to mark-up and report the legislation this evening in order to preserve our jurisdictional prerogatives, which is why I called this meeting.

The resolution requests the Secretary of Defense to transmit photos, videos, pictures, communications, or reports produced in conjunction with the Taguba administrative investigation into abuses at Abu Ghraib prison last fall. It also requests such information associated with any completed investigation of contractors involved in these allegations.

While these issues are of continuing interest and importance to the Committee, I plan on voting against this resolution and encourage my colleagues to do the same. There are several reasons to do so.

First, the Department has already provided more information to this committee than the resolution requires. We have received the Taguba report—all 6,000 pages of it—which you can see there on the witness table. We’ve also had several opportunities to view the photographic evidence associated with abuses at Abu Ghraib prison, whether or not they would be covered by this resolution. Moreover, we’ve held one open hearing and three closed briefings on Abu Ghraib, plus a closed briefing on the treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay. I’ve requested, and the Department has promised, additional briefings as the situation develops. In other words, the Department is cooperating fully with this committee and there is absolutely no indication that they have not and will not continue to do so.

Second, the appropriate authorities are presently pursuing an aggressive criminal investigation into the mistreatment of people detained by the U.S. military. Congressional intervention in that investigation may well undermine the final dispensation of justice. There is no reason to doubt the Department of Defense’s commitment to ensuring that those responsible for mistreating enemy detainees are identified, investigated, charged, and punished. They have disgraced the uniform and the country; it is in the Department’s self-interest to root them out. That’s why the Department initially brought the reports of abuse to light. The Department immediately ordered criminal investigations. The Department immediately followed up with administrative investigations. The Department, so far, has charged 7 people with crimes, recommended four for a court martial, and attained a guilty plea in one case. The Department also took action against those in the chain of command by removing two people from command, reprimanding six, and admonishing two. Those

are career-ending moves.

Further, the Department has initiated another eleven different investigations related to the abuses. I have no doubt that more bad actors will be identified, investigated, charged, and punished as a result of this process.

Third, I believe that as a Congress and as a nation, we must set priorities. In my mind, there are no higher priorities than winning the global war on terror, ensuring our troops are properly resourced to carry out their difficult mission, and making the American people as safe as we can. Duplicating ongoing investigations into the abuses at Abu Ghraib will not ensure that justice is done any more quickly, but will distract us from these more important matters, including doing our job in Congress to make sure we pass the bills necessary to keep resources flowing to our troops in the field, understanding the strategic implications of changing our force laydown in South Korea, and ensuring the transition in Iraq goes well.

Whether they admit it or not publicly, I think most members of this Committee share that conclusion. To date, only four members have requested an opportunity to review the classified Taguba report in the Committee's possession.

All this is not to say that what happened at Abu Ghraib is not important. Clearly it is and this committee has taken its responsibilities seriously. When you add up the hearings, briefings, documentation, and press reports that this committee has reviewed, we've probably spent more time on Abu Ghraib than on any other topic this year. More importantly, we took proactive action in the defense authorization bill we passed last month. Mr. Meehan and I were thinking along similar lines about providing additional guidance to the Department of Defense on the proper and humane treatment of prisoners and the training of detention personnel. We combined our thoughts in Section 906 of the bill. Mr. Abercrombie had some very good ideas on improving contractor oversight, including as it relates to interrogation activities, and we passed those ideas as Section 1205 of the bill. That's oversight; that's substantive; that will make a difference; and, that's where we should focus our attention as it relates to the treatment of detainees: on supporting the ongoing criminal investigations and prosecutions and taking preventive action to ensure that such abuses do not happen again. The Bell resolution does not advance those goals.

In sum, we are doing and will continue to do our job and passing these kind of resolutions does nothing to advance that goal. Therefore, I urge the Committee to join me in reporting this resolution adversely to the House.

###