

# PRESS RELEASE



## House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

April 29, 2004

**CONTACT**

Harald Stavenas  
Angela Sowa  
(202) 225-2539

### **OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER**

*Hearing on Security and Stability in Afghanistan*

Just two and a half years ago, U.S. and coalition military forces initiated operations to eliminate Afghanistan as a safe harbor for terrorists in general, and Al Qaeda in particular. By all accounts, the United States and its allies have made monumental progress in accomplishing that mission. The Taliban regime has been deposed; most of its senior officials are dead, in custody, or being hunted. Many of Al Qaeda's senior leaders are similarly dead, in custody, or on the run. Most observers would agree that this particular end of the swamp that fosters global terror is in the process of being completely drained.

That said, as the President reminds us so frequently, it's not enough to eliminate terrorist regimes. We must also lay the foundations for stable countries whose governments reflect the will of the people, participate peacefully in global affairs, and respect individual rights. We have come a long way on that front in Afghanistan over the last 30 months.

Of course, there is still work to do. Not every warlord has placed the interests of his nation ahead of his selfish desires. And, heroin may be making a comeback as Afghanistan's chief export. But, we understand these problems and are actively working to solve them in cooperation with a significant international coalition that includes Afghanistan's key neighbors, the Afghan people and government, and a host of other countries.

Last year, Afghanistan held an emergency "Loya Jirga," a kind of national council, which brought all the major groups in Afghanistan together to peacefully establish the rules of governance. Last month, participants in that process proposed a constitution compatible with representative government and respectful of individual rights and prerogatives. General elections are scheduled for this fall. Provincial Reconstruction Teams from several nations are focused on rebuilding the country's infrastructure and ensuring the return of law and order after nearly three decades of its absence. Finally, the hunt for bin Laden and Mullah Omar continues. In other words, the foundations for a successful Afghanistan are being laid. We need to keep that big picture in mind as we move forward.

###