



PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Harald Stavenas (202) 225-2539

Opening Statement of Chairman Duncan Hunter
Hearing on the Iraq/Afghanistan Troop Rotation Plan

The transfer of power to the interim Iraqi government and the televised images of that government beginning the judicial process against Saddam Hussein and 11 of his henchman are some of the most recent indications that real progress is being made in Iraq.

Having just returned from Iraq last week and visited the areas of Mosul, Balad, Tikrit, Ramadi, Fallujah and Baghdad, I can report that there are many more good things going on in that country to restore freedom and provide a modicum of democracy to the Iraqi people. Without doubt, the most impressive part of my visit involved the American soldiers, marines and airmen I met who are doing a fantastic job, in difficult conditions in the most professional way.

One Marine I met made a particular impression. He was in the hospital at Landstuhl, Germany, with a wound from a bullet that had gone into his side, passed through his chest, and exited into his protective vest. This Marine, with eight years service, told me the story and showed me the bullet that he had hanging from his neck. He knew he was lucky to be alive. But he also said that his wound was not going to stop him and he was going to continue serving. I salute him and his dedication and commitment. There are tens of thousands like him wearing the uniform with that same kind of spirit. America can be proud of them and their willingness to continue performing a tough mission with dedication and bravery.

Today's hearing is about continuing the U.S. military mission in Iraq and Afghanistan. Specifically, we have asked our witnesses to address the plan for the third rotation of forces in Iraq and the sixth rotation of forces in Afghanistan.

There are a number of issues that we'd like to get into today. Among them are:

- The missions, size, scope, phasing and length of the OIF 3 and OEF 6 force rotations;
- The continued heavy reliance on the reserve components, which we understand will make up 43 percent of the force going into Iraq, and,
- The reasons behind the Army's need to involuntarily mobilize 5,600 people in the individual ready reserve – the IRR.

It's a given that the Army and Marine Corps are under stress because of deployments, but we want to know more about the measures being taken to preserve what I would call the "elasticity of the force" -- that is the ability to recover sufficiently from one commitment before committing to another. I am especially concerned that operational requirements in both the Army and Marine Corps are forcing the redeployment of forces without sufficient time to reset at home station.

I am also concerned that insufficient force structure and manpower are leading the services to make decisions that I liken to "eating the seed corn" -- that is, in order to make it through today we do things that mortgage the future. For instance, we need to know more about the Army decision to deploy the OPFOR unit from the National Training Center and some of the OPFOR from the Joint Readiness Training Center to Iraq and replace them with Guard units. Those two combat training centers have provided the bedrock of experience that has allowed our forces to be so exceptionally successful in combat.

Finally, the Army's 3rd Infantry Division is going back to Iraq, but in a new configuration with four modularized brigades. As the first of the Army's new units of action, we need to understand more about how these brigades will be employed and evaluated.

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