

# PRESS RELEASE

## House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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

*Full Committee Hearing on DOD FY04 Acquisition Program and Policy*

Today, the committee continues hearings on the fiscal year 2004 defense budget request by focusing on the proposed defense acquisition program and associated policy.

Before we proceed, I should note that yesterday Secretary Aldridge announced his plans to leave government service after dedicating 18 years of his life working in numerous important positions throughout the Department of Defense.

As this could very well be the last time you appear before this committee as a government official, we want to thank you for your years of dedicated service to the nation and wish you well on whatever future pursuits may follow.

But for now, we still have business to discuss.

We meet this afternoon as hundreds of thousands of American men and women are answering the ultimate call of their nation by placing their lives at risk to liberate Iraq. Once committed to battle, these brave Americans are wholly dependent on the quality and effectiveness of the technology, weapons and equipment that we have provided them through our defense acquisition process.

Over the years, this process has produced the most technologically advanced and capable weapon systems known to man. But, over time, this process has also become overly ponderous, expensive, and increasingly unable to take advantage of the rapid evolution of technology available in the private sector.

In my view, today's defense acquisition process:

- is too slow to field new technology and capabilities;
- is more interested in eliminating process and budgetary risk than yielding battlefield results;
- has way too many people involved consuming limited budgetary resources with little value added; and
- suffers from an entrenched culture and bureaucracy that is highly resistant to change and fairly successful at waiting out wave after wave of attempts at reform.

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I realize that these are not particularly new observations or concerns, but we have reached a point where the cost and effectiveness of our acquisition process is resulting in diminishing battlefield combat capability that we absolutely cannot sustain. Mr. Secretary, I sincerely hope that you and your successor will continue to work with us to vigorously attack these fundamental problems.

But even the most efficient process cannot compensate for years of under funding our modernization accounts. As I have stated before, this Administration deserves great credit for finally reversing the decade-long trend of declining modernization budgets. The past two years have seen significant increases to these accounts – particularly for RDT&E – to lay a solid foundation for next-generation capabilities critical to ensuring that our troops maintain a technological edge.

However, we seem to have stalled out on reaching a level of procurement spending minimally necessary to sustain our current forces with existing capabilities. The proposed level of \$72 billion for procurement in fiscal year 2004 falls significantly short of the levels broadly identified as necessary to sustain the existing force with sufficient numbers of combat systems.

Further, we seem to be moving backwards in selected areas. The proposed budget recommends retiring or canceling programs in virtually every key combat category to carve out additional resources to reinvest in “transformational” future capabilities.

It is fair to say that there is broad support in this Committee and in the Congress for most of the Department’s transformation strategy. But that support cannot come at the expense of the very combat systems and capabilities that are sustaining our forces today in Iraq, Afghanistan and other areas of operations.

Our military forces will not prevail on today’s or tomorrow’s battlefield solely because they can talk to each other better or spot the enemy faster. They will still require a large enough inventory of equipment to overwhelm and defeat any potential adversary as rapidly and with the least number of casualties as possible.

As Jim McDonough writes in today’s Washington Post:

*“As technology advances, the conditions of warfare change, but the essential elements of combat power remain timeless, no different today than when the Greeks and the Romans marched through the Tigris and Euphrates valleys.”*

Mr. Secretary, it is absolutely imperative that we keep pace and wherever possible leverage technological change. However, such pursuit cannot result in increasing operational risk to our forces by sacrificing those key combat capabilities that sustain our forces in today’s very dangerous and unpredictable world.

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