

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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House Congressional Delegation Returns From Iraqi Theater of Operations

WASHINGTON – A bipartisan delegation of eight members of the House of Representatives returned today from a five-day visit to the Iraqi theatre that included stops in Kuwait, Baghdad and Kirkuk, Iraq. The delegation, appointed by the leadership of the House of Representatives, was led by Representative Duncan Hunter (R-CA), Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee and Representative Neil Abercrombie (D-HI), a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee.

Upon arrival in Washington, Representative Hunter stated, “The purpose of the delegation visit was two-fold. First, we wanted to get a first-hand assessment of the progress being made in achieving a more secure environment in Baghdad and the rest of Iraq to enable the necessary restoration of basic services and the transition to a new Iraqi civil authority. Second, we wanted to spend Memorial Day visiting with our men and women in uniform who, having achieved a spectacular military victory, are now applying their professionalism and dedication to rebuilding a devastated Iraqi society.”

“In Baghdad, we met with Ambassador Bremer, General Garner and senior U.S. military officials, all of whom reported on the significant progress being made in transitioning from security and stabilization operations to the reconstruction of Iraqi civil authority. Contrary to the impression of a general state of lawlessness in Iraq, our brief visit to the heart of Baghdad found a city bustling with activity and evidence of a return to normal life. In Kirkuk, the situation is even more encouraging with the establishment of an Iraqi civil leadership well under way. American officials face tough and diverse challenges across the country in restoring basic services to an acceptable standard that in many instances did not exist prior to the conflict. That said, I am optimistic that a free and prosperous Iraq is achievable. As rapid as this military victory was, the watchword for reconstruction has to be patience.”

Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee’s Total Force Subcommittee, Representative John M. McHugh (R-NY), said, “The two biggest emotions I feel as we return from Iraq are pride mixed with deep concern. I feel an overwhelming sense of pride for the way our troops carried out their mission on the battlefield, as well as their roles in peacemaking and nation building. My feelings of gratitude for our troops were shared and echoed by the children we passed on the streets of Baghdad and Kirkuk. They eagerly smiled and waved at our fully armed military convoy. Their joy was almost poetically juxtaposed by the hesitation and look of caution in the momentary glances from their parents.

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My concern is that the Iraqi people's worst fears will be realized unless we stay until the job is done. We know there is potential for Iranian mischief and that they have agents working on their behalf in Northern and Southeastern Iraq. It was clear to us that Ambassador Paul Bremmer and General Jay Garner recognize this threat. I only hope the Congress and the American people will not lose interest and support for the necessary continued operations in the region."

Representative Abercrombie added, "This delegation is united in its support for our men and women in uniform. Our stunning military victory would not have been possible without their extraordinary effort. In particular, National Guard and Reserve forces have contributed immeasurably to the success of this operation. At the same time, the challenges of rebuilding a stable society in Iraq are formidable. Frankly, we found conditions in Kirkuk, in Northern Iraq, to be more stable and progress toward a society where the rule of law prevails further along than in Baghdad. Unfortunately, Iraq's infrastructure has been neglected for many years, and the Iraq people have been deprived of basic necessities for a long time.

"We were all impressed with the work United States forces now occupying Iraq are doing in putting together the building blocks for a new government," Representative Abercrombie noted, "but we are just beginning to understand the long term implications of this occupation. We have superb military leadership, but it's clear that reconstructing Iraq is a complex and difficult task that will take a long time and be costly. We will need an extensive troop presence there for some time to come."

"I was more than pleased with what I saw," Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's Strategic Forces Subcommittee, Representative Terry Everett (R-AL) said of his visit which also included Kuwait, Italy and Germany. "Food supplies are in good shape, near prewar levels, but sufficient water supplies continue to be a problem for the Iraqi people. Water service cannot be completed until the nation's electrical grid is repaired. City councils have been elected by the Iraq people in 17 of the 26 cities with population's over 100,000," Everett added. "Their officials, none members of the former Baath ruling party, are already at work reorganizing their local governments.

In Kuwait, the delegation visited the command charged with facilitating the flow of U.S. forces and supplies into and out of the Iraqi theater and the 47th Combat Support Hospital which handles all level IV medical care for the theater.

In Baghdad, the delegation met with officials from the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistant (ORHA) and Army V Corps of Combined Joint Task Force 7, which is charged with responsibility for all U.S. military forces in Iraq.

In Kirkuk, the delegation met with the leadership of Task Force Ironhorse, comprised of the 4th Infantry Division and the 173rd Airborne Brigade, which has responsibility for the northern sector of Iraq.

Other members of the bipartisan delegation included Ed Royce (R-CA), Vito Fossella (R-NY), Anna Eshoo (D-CA), and Stephen Lynch (D-MA).

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