



HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

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REP. WELDON OPENING STATEMENT

Hearing on New Discovery of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq

Washington, D.C. – Today, the full committee meets in open session to receive testimony on information – released just last week by the Director of National Intelligence – about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. This declassified information specifically states that coalition forces have recovered about 500 munitions containing mustard or sarin nerve agent – the same types of chemical warfare agents that Saddam Hussein used to kill thousands of Iranians during the Iran-Iraq war and to slaughter thousands of his own countrymen in northern Iraq.

This hearing comes at a timely moment. Four months ago it was brought to my attention by several former U.S. Intelligence Officers, that we may not have searched all suspected WMD sites in Iraq. After countless meetings and briefings with the Intelligence Community and former intelligence officers, I was surprised to find out, that, as Charles Duelfer stated in a recent briefing “we just didn’t have the resources to check all sites”.

Like most on this committee, I always defer to the Commanders on the ground in Iraq to get a sense of the current situation.

On my next trip to Iraq I plan to question our military leadership on the reports that some suspected sites have yet to be inspected, to gauge their perspective on unsuspected sites and how they plan to handle such sites.

I applaud the leadership and tenacious oversight of the Chairman of the intelligence committee Pete Hoekstra. The Chairman has been dogged in his role, and has been working tirelessly to get the National Ground Intelligence Center report that we are about to discuss here today declassified so that the American people can gain further insight into the WMD search in Iraq.

We expect to hear more about the declassified portions of the intelligence report from our first witness, Lieutenant General Michael Maples, who is the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Before General Maples begins his testimony, I want to be absolutely clear about what we are talking about here: these 500 chemical munitions are weapons of mass destruction.

Some may want to play down the significance of this report or even deny that WMD have been found in Iraq.

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For those who claim these weapons are not the weapons of mass destruction that the United States went to war over, I would like to refer them to the 17 United Nations Security Council Resolutions that Saddam Hussein violated – and in particular, the 14 that specifically addressed WMD. The very first one after the Operation Desert Storm – UNSCR 687 – directed the destruction of Iraq’s stockpiles of chemical weapons. Saddam Hussein violated this resolution and others like it, and the verified existence of such chemical weapons proves that. In part because of such violations, we voted to authorize the use of military force in Iraq.

Other may claim that this newly declassified information is not significant. In fact in the September 2004 report of the “Special Advisor to the Director of Central Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction” - Charles Duelfer – states that coalition forces could expect to find numbers of these munitions throughout the Iraqi countryside. This bears repeating: we will find weapons filled with deadly chemical agents in Iraq. We now have verified the existence of about 500 such weapons, and the intelligence report assesses that others – ones that could be sold on the black market, that could fall into the hands of terrorists or insurgents, that could end up outside of Iraq – still exist there.

Third, some people claim that these weapons are pre-Gulf War munitions with a badly degraded chemical agent that is no longer lethal or even harmful. To them, I point to the declassified statement from the intelligence report that chemical warfare agents might degrade over time, but they still remain hazardous and potentially lethal. I also point to the Secretary of Defense himself, who expressed strong concern about these weapons just last week. Secretary Rumsfeld said, QUOTE “They are dangerous... They are weapons of mass destruction. They’re harmful to human beings. And they have been found. And they had not been reported by Saddam Hussein as he inaccurately alleged that he had reported all of his weapons. And they are still being found and discovered.” UN-QUOTE

Finally, there are some who insist that despite finding more than 500 munitions filled with mustard or sarin nerve agent, there are no WMD in Iraq. Allow me to quote statements made two weeks ago on the floor of the House during the debate on the Iraq resolution, straight from the Congressional Record:

- “Absolutely no evidence of any kind of weapons of mass destruction.”
- “There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.”
- “I am struck to hear people still defending the arguments about the weapons of mass destruction.”
- “We know that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. We know that to be the case.”
- “I knew from the very beginning that there were no weapons of mass destruction.”
- “We are certain that Iraq does not possess weapons of mass destruction—and never did.”

This is patently not the case.

I hope that from today’s hearing, we can learn more about the intelligence report, which other Members and I would like to see declassified to the maximum extent possible. I don’t want to endanger the lives of our troops by creating a scavenger hunt by terrorists and insurgents. I also don’t want to keep the American people in the dark about the evidence of WMD in Iraq – I think they deserve to know what we’re finding over there.

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