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For Immediate Release

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Johnstown, PA - Congressman John Murtha today released the following statement about a lawsuit filed by a Marine Corps staff sergeant who led the squad accused of killing two dozen civilians in Haditha in November 2005. An Associated Press story filed earlier this morning said that evidence collected in Haditha "supports accusations that U.S. Marines deliberately shot" 24 civilians, including unarmed women and children.

"I don't blame the staff sergeant for lashing out. When I spoke up about Haditha, my intention was to draw attention to the horrendous pressure put on our troops in Iraq and to the cover-up of the incident.

"Our troops are caught in the middle of a tragic dilemma. The military trains them to fight a conventional war and use overwhelming force to protect U.S. lives. I agree with that policy, but when we use force, we often kill civilians. What are the consequences?

"Three years ago, there were fewer than 500 foreign fighters in Iraq. They were called 'dead enders.' Then there were 5,000, and they were called 'terrorists.' Now there are 20,000, and the administration calls this 'sectarian violence.'

"All this time, we've had at least 130,000 U.S. troops on the ground in Iraq. In the last year, incidents have increased from 49 per day to 100 per day. About 14,000 Iraqis were killed in the last year, mostly in the last six months. Oil and electricity production are below pre-war level, and unemployment is 60 percent throughout most of the country. Our troops are in 120-degree temperatures with 70 pounds of equipment on their back, and they don't know who the enemy is.

"This conflict cannot be won militarily. Our troops are caught in the middle of a civil war. It's well beyond the time to redeploy from Iraq."