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For Immediate Release

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Washington D.C. - Congressman John P. Murtha, Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, delivered the following remarks today at the National Press Club:

Last week Americans heard the testimony of General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker. General Jones and the GAO have reported their findings to us. Americans listened to the President's prime time address. Despite the mixed reports, moving benchmarks and morphed messaging, this Administration remains committed to U.S. troops in Iraq for an indefinite period. Rather than taking ownership of its own failed policy, this Administration asks our military to carry the full burden and now to defend it politically. Rather than taking immediate corrective action, this Administration now appears content with running out the clock.

On November 17, 2005, I said that the President's war in Iraq is a "flawed policy wrapped in illusion." Although his slogans might have changed, the President's most recent appeal is still more of the same. More flawed policies and more illusions.

I joined the Marine Corps as a private in 1952. It was the middle of the Korean War, but also towards the end of the Indochina war. In 1953, as the Korean War ended, General Navarre, commander of French Forces in Indochina said, "A year ago none of us could see victory. There wasn't a prayer. Now we can see it clearly - like light at the end of a tunnel."

A year later, in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu the French were ignominiously forced out of Indochina.

In 1966, I went to Vietnam. At that time, President Johnson said, "most of all, we must give them (the Vietnamese) our understanding, our support, and our patience."

When I left Vietnam in 1967 General Westmoreland said, "the morale of the South Vietnamese forces is better than ever. They are improving the quality of their force and they are fighting better than they did 2 years ago."

At the same time, President Johnson said, "I believe that we are making progress."

Two years later, President Nixon said, "As our commanders in the field determine that the South Vietnamese are able to assume a greater portion of the responsibility for the defense of their own territory, troops will come back."

When I came to congress in 1974, I believed General Westmoreland. The first speech I made on the floor of the House was in support of the appropriations to the South Vietnamese.

It took me a long time to recognize that a military solution could not work in Vietnam.

We learned the lessons of Vietnam and applied what we learned to Desert Storm under Bush I: the execution of a limited military mission, with a well-defined strategy that would lead to a clear-cut and achievable outcome. The mission, then, was to diminish Saddam's power, while maintaining a buffer between Iran and Syria.

In Afghanistan, during the 1980s, the Soviet Union stated that it "would fulfill to the end its duty of providing assistance to friendly Afghanistan."

And at that time, even their Communist allies criticized Soviet officials for not having a timeline for withdrawal. My point here is that even the military strength of superpowers has limitations.

If you look back at what Napoleon learned in Spain, what the French learned in Indo-China and Algeria, what the Soviets learned in Afghanistan, and what the U.S. learned in Vietnam, the lessons of history are clear: there is a limitation to military power. Economic, political and diplomatic challenges must be solved. They can't be solved by military means and they shouldn't be distorted by rhetoric.

Rhetoric, spin and slogans do not win wars. Likewise, the war in Iraq will not be won with charts, projections or sound bytes saying, "we will return on success."

The Administration claims we are witnessing another turning point in Iraq. They claim progress is being made and now depending upon the "conditions on the ground," more troops will come home.

But we have heard this before. The same predictions were made with Saddam's capture, the adoption of the constitution, with national elections, and with the capture and killing of several terrorists in Iraq.

A week ago on a Sunday talk show, a reporter expounded on a personal moment with the President in the White House when she asked him, "Mr. President, how do you continue to press forward when the war is so unpopular and things seem to be going so wrong in Iraq?" The President responded, "Because I am right."

Right about what Mr. President?

Right about weapons of mass destruction?

Right about Saddam's involvement in 9-11?

Right about mission accomplished?

Right about thinking he could fight this war on the cheap?

Right at the ease at which Iraq could be transformed into a pillar of democracy?

We've heard the rhetoric, now let me talk about the facts.

To date, there have been more than 3,700 Americans killed in Iraq. For every American soldier that dies, 9 are wounded, many with catastrophic trauma with long term effects. This translates into an additional expenditure of \$350 to \$700 billion in medical and disability costs to veterans, not to mention the suffering of countless thousands of American families for years to come.

We on the appropriations committee required the Defense Department to submit status reports on Iraq beginning in the fall of 2003. From these reports, I have seen no progress. At least 70,000 Iraqi civilians have died since the beginning of the war, with many believing the numbers are actually in the hundreds of thousands. Two million Sunni Arabs have left the country, mostly to Jordan and Syria and many of them members of the educated middle-class. An additional two million have been internally displaced in what I believe is ethnic cleansing.

Oil production has never been above pre-war level. What does oil production mean? Oil production is financial capital their government uses for its own revenue. Oil is their cash crop. It represents 95% of their national income.

Electricity production is 2 to 6 hrs a day in Baghdad when the temperature is 130 degrees. 30% of Iraq's population lives in Baghdad. Imagine what summer would be like in Washington D.C. without refrigeration or air conditioning. Only 30% of homes and businesses in Baghdad are connected to water lines. By most reports, 50% of Iraqis remain unemployed with no benefits from the government. 61% of Iraqis say their lives are going badly, and more than 60% say they want us out of their country.

Finally, the United States military is viewed as occupiers by the Iraqis. Our Headquarters are in Saddam Hussein's Palaces and we have our own city in the Green Zone where we protect their legislators. As the Times of London said during the British occupation of Iraq in 1920, "How much longer are valuable lives to be sacrificed in the vain endeavor to impose on the Arab population an elaborate and expensive administration which they never asked for and do not want?" Nearly a century later we are struggling with the same questions.

47 months ago I spoke on the Floor of the House and said that "we need either more active-duty troops or we need to find a way to have foreign troops, Coalition forces, to replace our troops" in Iraq. I wrote in my additional views to the supplemental spending report in October 2003, just seven months after the initial invasion, that "the United States, the Iraqi people, and the international community must work to undo the damage done by the architect's miscalculations and quickly stabilize Iraq." And, I concluded that, "we could face a long and more costly guerrilla war -- a heavy price for our soldiers and their families to pay."

Almost two years ago, I publicly voiced my concerns about the U.S. policies in Iraq -- concerns I started having from

visiting the region five months after the initial invasion. I wrote to Secretary Rumsfeld on the urgent need for body armor, electronic jammers, Kevlar blankets for humvees, and a severe shortage of vehicle spare parts. I sent a letter to the President saying that we "severely miscalculated the magnitude of the effort we are facing, and that we must Energize, Iraqize, and Internationalize our efforts." I told him I agreed with an assessment completed by former Deputy Secretary of Defense John Hamre that said we have a narrow window of opportunity to deliver progress in terms of economic infrastructure, security and basic services.

Seven months later I received a reply from a Deputy Under Secretary at the Department of Defense who ignored my concerns and told me that, "we have made substantial progress in the very ways that you suggest."

In the next two years I made additional visits to the region and again came home and reported to my colleagues and the Administration what I found to be the facts on the ground. I watched in disbelief as the pictures of abuse and torture began surfacing from Abu Ghraib in 2004. To this day we have not recovered the international credibility that we lost because of these heinous and disgraceful acts.

After having no success privately voicing my concerns and suggestions to the Administration, I publicly stated in November 2005 that the war in Iraq was a "flawed policy wrapped in illusion." In that speech I said that "our military and their families are stretched thin" and that the "burden of this war has not been shared equally - the military and their families are shouldering this burden" not most Americans. Our military has accomplished its mission, and as I had been saying for over a year before this speech, "Iraq can not be won militarily."

21 months ago I spoke about my concerns of an overstretched Army that had to lower recruiting standards to meet its recruiting goals. I concluded that "it would be almost impossible for the U.S. to meet the current military strength deployment schedule without sending combat units back to theater with less than one year of rest."

19 months ago I wrote a letter to the President outlining my plan to redeploy, replace, reallocate, and reconstitute. "The longer our military stays in Iraq, the more unwelcome we will be. We will be increasingly entangled in an open-ended nation building mission, one that our military can not accomplish amidst a civil war."

16 months ago I said that "we must change direction because the nature of the war has changed. We have gone from fighting Saddam's army, to fighting insurgents, to being caught in the middle of a growing civil war." I also noted that, "Although the President touts the political milestones as a success in Iraq, in reality we have not made the progress we anticipated nor have we met the high expectations of the Iraqi people. Indeed when it comes to this war, we have lost the hearts and minds of both the Iraqi people and as polls indicate, the American public."

14 months ago I held a press conference with Chairman Dave Obey and outlined the deterioration of our Army's readiness. We discovered that non-deployed units here in the United States "are critically short of equipment and personnel" and "most of the Army units here in the U.S. don't have the right equipment and ammunition to train on before going to war."

10 months ago the American people rejected this Administration's argument for a strategy of "stay the course" and elected Democrats to change the direction of the war in Iraq.

When letters go unanswered, when suggestions go ignored, when the pleas of the public fall on deaf ears, how are the American people expected to continue to support flawed policies and undefined missions? Today we have a clear choice between responsible Congressional oversight and this Administration's blindness.

There's a real difference between strategy and tactics. The President touts the surge as a long-term strategy while many of our military commanders recognize the surge to be a temporary tactic.

But this war will not be won by a boatload of patchwork tactics presented without a definite and achievable strategy for guiding the boat. That leaves me with two questions: If we don't know where we're going, how can we get there? And, how long does this administration expect to continue this disastrous voyage?

The purpose of the surge was to provide enough security for political progress to be made by the Iraqis. Unfortunately this has not been the case. When the Iraqis don't perform, what happens - we step forward and take their place. As the Jones Commission recently reported, "There is a fine line between assistance and dependence." I believe that we have crossed that line and the Iraqis have become far too reliant on U.S. forces.

I am convinced that nothing in Petraeus's testimony, nor the Jones Report, or the President's speech will change the way the American public feels about this war. They want this war to end. Yes, many Iraqis consider us the occupier, but it is also true that Iraq is occupying us. We are bleeding money at a rate of twelve billion dollars a month.

We hear talk today about a national mortgage crisis, yet we are mortgaging our future with this war. This war is warping our priorities, disfiguring our national debates, shortchanging health care - 1,500 Americans die every day from cancer, yet the NIH only spends \$5.5 Billion per year on cancer research. This war is shortchanging education - 33% of people in our nation's capital are classified as functionally illiterate, and China is graduating 600,000 engineers per year while we graduate only 70,000. And this war is shortchanging our infrastructure - there are more than 70,000 structurally deficient bridges throughout our nation

I frequently visit our military hospitals and bases throughout the world and speak in detail with our troops and their families. In doing so, I have come to the conclusion that our involvement in Iraq can be described as the tale of one America with two families:

The military family, stressed to the limits, who have gone without their loved ones for far too long, whose children are suddenly performing poorly in school, who live everyday in fear of that dreaded phone call or knock at the door that could forever change their lives.

Then there is the other family, clearly a majority of America. They support the troops, they display yellow ribbons, they are patriotic Americans, but they have not been asked to make the same blood sacrifice.

For the past six years, this country has funded this President's war on credit. Down the road, both families will feel the pain when these enormous payments finally come due.

Today we have over 160,000 U.S. servicemen and women serving in Iraq, not to mention thousands more serving in Afghanistan. Almost 40% of our active ground forces are deployed, many for the second, third, and even fourth time. This is the first conflict in my lifetime that we have not surged our force structure to fight a protracted war.

In the 2008 House Appropriations mark-up for Defense, the committee I Chair set a new course for the Department of Defense.

In the introduction to the report I stated, "Our national conscience is justifiably focused on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Committee and the country are deeply grateful and inspired by the dedication, service, and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform, their families and those who support them. Yet, we cannot let this concentrated national focus distract our attention from the needs of our service members and their families here at home, and the imperative to prepare our forces for current and future conflicts."

I believe more than ever that our national security interests are not being served while our military remains over 160,000 strong in Iraq. We do not have the force available to confront other potential threats in the region or the world.

We are faced with growing threats in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Africa and South and Central America. In Africa, we have significant strategic interests, but no influence. Russia, China and India are advancing their global interests while we are bogged down in Iraq. There is uncertainty with respect to future energy supplies and those who control the world's supply of these resources. China's military might is expanding and we need to be continually watchful of the nuclear ambitions of rogue states, like North Korea and Iran. Just because this Administration wears blinders, we cannot afford the limitations of their short-sighted world view.

Our military is stretched thin today policing the streets of Baghdad. In this one year alone, the American taxpayer will contribute over \$1 trillion in defense spending, and by the end of this year, we will have provided \$750 billion for this war. While we continue to spend at this colossal rate in Iraq, with questionable results, our Military Chiefs advise that as a nation we must be concerned about the eroding strength of our military. They estimate it will take 100s of billions of dollars to rebuild our capability to deter and prevail in future conflicts.

As a trustee of the American people, I cannot defend spending another \$750 billion of our nation's treasure nor can I tolerate the loss of thousands more of our sons and daughters to a war without end and to a war that only the Iraqi people can resolve.

In the end, what the President asks is for our military to be committed to an open-ended Iraqi civil war. Let us not forget that over 35,000 troops died in Vietnam after General Westmoreland stated, "Backed at home by resolve, confidence, patience, determination, and continued support, we will prevail in Vietnam."

The longer our military remains in Iraq, policing their streets, providing weapons, training and funds to whoever our alliances are for the moment, the longer and bloodier their war will be. If security and stability is the final goal, it will never be accomplished under continued U.S. occupation, the continued propping up of a paralyzed Iraqi government or the continued dependence on the Iraqis for U.S. military support.

Many have threatened that there will be chaos, a bloodbath, when the United States redeploys from Iraq, and this in fact may be the case. But it will not happen as a result of U.S actions, but rather as a result of Iraqi inaction. It is up to the Iraqis to decide. If they continue to choose to spill blood it will not be on the conscience of the U.S. and its heroic military. It will instead be a continuation of decades of its own conflicts, which they and they alone can solve.

This Administration has again given the American people a false choice: EITHER we stay in Iraq indefinitely OR, they say we face chaos, genocide, and an Iraq whose biggest export is terror not oil. There are many other choices that haven't been tried, such as concerted regional diplomacy coupled with strategic redeployment of troops. I believe redeployment is the way forward. They say, 'what happens if we leave?' and I say 'what happens if we stay?'

