

**Statement of John F. Tierney
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs
Oversight Hearing on “Iraq: IEDs and Munitions, Are
They Secured?”**

As Prepared for Delivery

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Good morning, and welcome to our National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee members. I also want to thank our witnesses for being here today, especially to General Newbold for sharing with us your experience and your expertise.

Earlier this month, the Subcommittee held a field hearing at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. We heard from Specialist Jeremy Duncan, who fractured his neck, and lost an ear and sight in his left eye due to the explosion of an Improvised Explosive Device – an IED – near Samarra in Iraq. We met with other soldiers who suffered severe injuries, ranging from loss of limbs to serious traumatic brain injuries – as a result of IEDs.

Defense Secretary Gates has stated that 70 percent of all casualties in Iraq are caused by IEDs. And the Pentagon in its official February 2007 request for additional funding for the Iraqi effort specifically states, and I quote, “*Insurgents use munitions from stolen caches to construct IEDs.*”

Today's hearing asks the question of whether the Pentagon is doing everything in its power and ability to protect our military personnel by identifying and securing munitions storage sites in Iraq.

Unfortunately, the past record is not comforting. In a report that is being released today for the first time, the Government Accountability Office – whom we'll hear from today – documents in great detail the dangerously-naïve assumptions imposed by top civilian leadership upon our troops – assumptions that we would be greeted as liberators and that this would be a short, easy war.

The GAO goes on to document how these controversial assumptions and poor planning led very directly to countless unsecured munitions sites throughout Iraq that has fed into widespread looting of the very material that is now being used in IEDs to injure and kill our troops. Or as one commentator has put it, Saddam “*never wanted to run out of bullets. And he never did.*”

400 tons of powerful conventional explosives, for example, disappeared from the Al Qaqaa military installation 30 miles south of Baghdad. But this is just one example, and there are countless undisputed others.

And this stolen ammo we didn't secure is maiming and killing our troops to this day. In a March 1, 2007 article, *USA Today* put it this way: “*Four years after the Iraq war began, the country remains awash in Saddam-era munitions that provide key ingredients for homemade bombs used against U.S. troops.*”

What is even more troubling is that the GAO report raises serious questions about whether we've finally secured and destroyed all of these ammo dumps. They conclude, "*the sites remained vulnerable from April 2003 through the time of our review... [I]n October 2006, we could not verify that all sites had been physically secured.*" The GAO also reported very disturbing anecdotal evidence, for example, "*in early 2006, local Iraqis stole rockets and mortars from an old storage area after rumors began to circulate that the site was to be cleaned up.*"

This is troubling to say the least, and this is why I called this hearing today. There are so many unanswered questions that demand answers:

- What specifically is the Department of Defense doing in Iraq to deal with this problem?
- Do we at the least finally have our hands around the problem by having undertaken a full accounting of what's still out there?
- Has the Pentagon ever conducted a theatre-wide survey of munitions sites in Iraq as the GAO has suggested?
- Are press reports accurate that the Defense Department has had a hard time maintaining a full complement of explosives disposal experts?
- The Administration is requesting money in the 2007 supplemental specifically to secure "*known weapons caches.*" Have we done all we can to identify all weapon sites, and if not, why not – given the potential consequences?

- And, finally, have we learned anything over the past four-plus years that would assist in future military operation planning?

Unfortunately, we may not get the full answers to these questions today. Although the Department of Defense responded in writing to the GAO draft report, we wanted to extend to DOD the opportunity to address the Committee about the concerns raised by the report and so asked the Department of Defense to send us a representative of their choosing to testify today. They communicated that they would not care to have a witness present. We offered to postpone our hearing a week in case scheduling was a concern. They still declined.

This is troubling on many levels. These are the people tasked with having their act together to protect our troops going forward. What does it say that they don't even have their act together to put forward a single witness to talk with us about these issues?

Let me again conclude by thanking our witnesses who are here today. These are incredibly grave and important issues and we must do everything in our power working together to protect our soldiers both now and in the future. We owe the Jeremy Duncans of the world nothing less.