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al-Qaida: The Threat to the United States and Its Allies

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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the evolving nature of the al-Qaida organization and the continuing threat that it presents to the United States and our allies. This hearing provides a welcome opportunity to bring you and your colleagues up to date on this dangerous threat. I also will describe the steps we are taking to defeat the al-Qaida organization.

As the State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, I have been charged with managing the U.S. Government's international efforts to counter terrorism through the coordination of our efforts with those of our allies. It is precisely this sort of coordinated action that has scored some important successes against the al-Qaida organization.

Just over two and a half years ago, our nation suffered a devastating attack on its own soil, a day that none of us will forget. Since that terrible day of September 11, 2001, we have undergone a transformation as a nation, and have been fully engaged in a war with terrorism. The President's vision and message for the world has been crystal clear: Any person, organization, or government that supports, protects, or harbors terrorists is complicit in the murder of the innocent, and will be held to account.

We are carrying out the President's clear directive, and are taking the fight to terrorists worldwide using all the elements of national power. We are also enlisting the support of friends and allies in the international community, to great effect. We have made great progress in marshalling the collective strength of the international community into the counterterrorism fight, but we must continue to press forward to face and defeat terrorism.

Although there are numerous terrorist organizations of concern in the world today, the top priority of our efforts has been on the al-Qaida organization, its affiliates and those who support them. Al-Qaida remains a potent force, despite the continuing efforts of the community of civilized nations to remove this evil from the world. Al-Qaida is determined to strike the United States, our allies and interests wherever it can, using the most destructive means at its disposal. I have no doubt that al-Qaida would use unconventional weapons if it possessed the capability to do so.

Since the Coalition's successful ouster of the Taliban from Afghanistan, the al-Qaida organization has been deeply wounded. It

has been forced to evolve in ways not entirely by its own choosing. However, it remains bent on murdering Americans, whether overseas or in our own country. Al-Qaida has amply shown its willingness to kill and maim large numbers of innocent civilians around the world, regardless of faith, nationality, race, class and creed.

The Madrid Attack

The tragic events of 11 March in Madrid demonstrate the potent global terrorist threat. We continue to see mounting evidence of al-Qaida's links to the attacks, although we are still awaiting the conclusions of the ongoing investigation by the Spanish government.

The Spanish government is uncovering evidence of linkages between suspects in custody and the perpetrators of the 16 May 2003 Casablanca bombings. Time and Spain's progress in its investigation will tell us about the extent of al-Qaida's involvement, particularly its senior leadership.

One lesson from the Madrid bombings is clear. We have learned this lesson before on the streets of Istanbul, Riyadh, Casablanca, Bali, Moscow and Mombassa: No country is safe from the scourge of terrorism. No country is immune from attack, and neither policies of deterrence or accommodation will ward off attack. Al-Qaida seeks only death and chaos, which is why we will continue to pursue the only viable course of action before us: to destroy this enemy utterly, both with the cooperation of our allies and by unilateral action when necessary.

Sanctuary Lost

The removal of the Taliban regime from Afghanistan stripped al-Qaida of its primary sanctuary and support, and shut down long-standing terrorist training camps. Although our work continues in Afghanistan to root-out the remnants of al-Qaida's former strength, al-Qaida has lost a vital safe haven. With the loss of Afghanistan and its terrorism infrastructure there, al-Qaida has also been separated from facilities central to its chem-bio and poisons development programs.

We and our coalition partners have also removed the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, a long-time state sponsor of terror. The al-Qaida-affiliated Zarqawi network continues to spread terror and death as the Iraqi people move towards a brighter future free from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein.

Iraq is currently serving as a focal point for foreign jihadist fighters, who are united in a common goal with former regime elements, criminals and more established foreign terrorist organization members to conduct attacks against Coalition and Iraqi civilian targets. These jihadists view Iraq as a new training ground to build their extremist credentials and hone the skills of the terrorist. We are aggressively rooting out the foreign fighters in Iraq, and we will continue to devote the resources necessary to ensure that al-Qaida and other terrorist groups will be unable to use Iraq as a training ground or sanctuary.

We have relied on the support of our partners in the global coalition against terrorism to ensure that al-Qaida is unable to establish a new secure base of operations like that which existed under the Taliban in Afghanistan. The partnership of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Yemen and others has been, and will continue to be, essential to ensuring that al-Qaida is never able to reestablish comfortable sanctuary anywhere in the world.

The State of al-Qaida Leadership

Historically, al-Qaida has been a top-down organization with strong central leadership control over almost all aspects of its operations. However, our ongoing operations against al-Qaida have served to isolate its leadership, and sever or

complicate communications links with its operatives scattered around the globe. Unable to find easy sanctuary in Afghanistan and elsewhere, the al-Qaida leadership must now devote much more time to evading capture or worse.

This has further complicated al-Qaida's communication and coordination efforts, which are much harder and time-consuming in the current operating environment. We have also seen examples of terrorist activities delayed for extended periods as al-Qaida affiliates await instructions from an increasingly isolated central leadership.

Also, as al-Qaida's known senior leadership, planners, facilitators and operators are brought to justice, a new cadre of leaders is being forced to step up. These individuals are increasingly no longer drawn from the old guard, no longer the seasoned veteran al-Qaida trainers from Afghanistan's camps or close associates of al-Qaida's founding members.

Critical gaps have been cut out of the al-Qaida leadership structure, and these relatively untested terrorists are assuming greater responsibilities. We are relentlessly going after these new leaders as they are identified.

This confluence of factors may be resulting in a lack of clear strategic direction and operational mistakes by al-Qaida. An example is the November 8, 2003 bombing of the Muhaya housing compound in Riyadh which killed 18 persons, predominantly Muslims during the month of Ramadan. This target selection, made either by mistake or due to poor judgment, was a public relations disaster for al-Qaida, which in turn has assisted aggressive Saudi efforts to roll-up the al-Qaida presence in the Kingdom. Whether this operation was plagued by operational or strategic error is still a matter of debate, but I believe that it is indicative of the complications faced by al-Qaida in its truncated and besieged state.

Allies in Sowing Terror

A few words now on how al-Qaida's influence has spread to other terrorist organizations. There are growing indications that a number of largely Sunni Islamic extremist groups are moving to pick up al-Qaida's standard and attempting to pursue global jihad against the United States and or allies.

There are also growing indications that al-Qaida's ideology is spreading well beyond the Middle East, particularly its virulent anti-American rhetoric. This has been picked up by a number of Islamic extremist movements which exist around the globe. This greatly complicates our task in stamping out al-Qaida, and poses a threat in its own right for the foreseeable future.

Literally scores of such groups are present around the world today. Some groups have gravitated to al-Qaida in recent years, where before such linkages did not exist. This has been, at times, merely an effort to gain greater public renown for their group or cause, but more troubling have been the groups seeking to push forward al-Qaida's agenda of worldwide terror.

In particular, groups like Ansar al-Islam and the Zarqawi network pose a real threat to U.S. interests. This has been shown very clearly by their deadly activities in Iraq. Other groups of great concern include the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC), which operates mainly in the countries of North Africa and Salafiya Jihadia, which claimed responsibility for the May 2003 Casablanca bombings. Jemaah Islamiya (JI) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) should also be on this short list.

While it would be a mistake to believe that we are now confronted by a monolithic threat posed by legions of like-minded terrorist groups working in concert against our interests, it would be fair to say that we are seeing greater cooperation between al-Qaida and smaller Islamic extremist groups, as well as even more localized organizations.

Identifying and acting against the leadership, capabilities and operational plans of these groups poses a serious challenge now and for years to come.

In addition to these groups, there are literally thousands of jihadists around the world who have fought in conflicts in Kosovo, Kashmir, Chechnya and elsewhere. As I said earlier, we see these “foreign fighters” operating in Iraq, where we are fighting them on a daily basis with the Coalition and Iraqi partners. These jihadists will continue to serve as a ready source of recruits for al-Qaida and other affiliated terrorist organizations.

A Strategy to Defeat Terrorism

Let me go back for a moment to frame the overall strategy we have been employing to defeat terrorism.

Following the September 11 attacks, we have forcefully applied the Bush doctrine: any person or government that supports, protects, or harbors terrorists is complicit in the murder of the innocent, and will be held to account. We have done so through our National Strategy to Combat Terrorism, which creates the policy framework for coordinated actions to prevent terrorist attacks against the United States, its citizens, its interests and its friends around the world and, ultimately, to create an international environment inhospitable to terrorists and all those who support them. We have implemented this strategy to act simultaneously on four fronts:

- Defeat terrorist organizations of global reach by attacking their sanctuaries, leadership, finances, and command, control and communications;
- Deny further sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists by cooperating with other states to take action against these international threats;
- Diminish the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit by enlisting the international community to focus its efforts and resources on the areas most at risk; and
- Defend the United States, its citizens and interests at home and abroad. The National Strategy highlights that success will only come through the sustained, steadfast, and systematic application of all elements of national power -- diplomatic, financial, law enforcement, intelligence, and military.

While the United States is committed to combating terrorism the world over, in whatever form it takes to threaten the American people and American interests, the focus of our efforts since September 2001 has been on the al-Qaida organization. Let me tell you about the progress we have made, and how the al-Qaida organization looks far different than it did in September 2001.

U.S. Accomplishments, al-Qaida Losses

A global dragnet has tightened around al-Qaida, made possible by a broad coalition of 84 nations, all focused on the common goal of eradicating the terrorist threat that endangers all civilized nations. Since September 11, 2001, 70 percent of al-Qaida senior leadership and more than 3,400 lower-level al-Qaida operatives or associates have been detained or killed in over 100 countries, largely as a result of cooperation among law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Terrorist cells have been wrapped up in nations in all corners of the globe, from Singapore to Italy and Saudi Arabia, as well as here at home in Buffalo, Portland, and North Carolina.

A growing list of senior al-Qaida leaders and associates will no longer threaten the United States and our allies:

- Al-Qaida operations chief Khalid Sheikh Mohammad,
- Senior planner for Southeast Asia Hambali,
- Persian Gulf operations chief Nashiri and his suspected successor Khaled Ali al-Haj,
- Yemen’s most senior al-Qaida figures Abu Ali al-Harithi and Abu Assem al-Makki.

The al-Qaida figures we take out of circulation performed roles in all operational areas, including financing, logistics, training

and procurement, among others. This has sapped al-Qaida's strength by disrupting its ability to coordinate complex operational plans and gather the operatives, materials and funding required to carry them out.

We have made extensive efforts to attack al-Qaida's financing, which is the lifeblood of its murderous activities, providing for the movement of operatives, the cooption of officials and local populations, and the acquisition of arms and explosives. More than 172 countries have issued orders freezing or seizing approximately \$200 million in terrorism-related financial assets and accounts.

In addition to attacking known accounts, more than 100 countries worldwide have introduced new terrorist-related legislation or regulations, including new laws to block money-laundering and the misuse of charities in the support of terrorists.

An important tool in countering terrorism financing is the authority the Secretary of State uses to formally designate Foreign Terrorist Organizations. This authority, under the AntiTerrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 freezes a designated group's assets in the United States, makes it a criminal offense for Americans to provide funding and other forms of material support and denies visas to members of the designated group. Thirty-six groups are currently designated.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to express our appreciation to you and your staff for your sponsorship of the pending legislation to make the provision even stronger by making it easier to designate an alias of group if it adopts a new name and to simplify the time consuming review of the designations every two years. This will allow us to focus our resources on the legal documents needed to designate new groups, such as offshoots of al-Qaida, when they emerge.

Meanwhile, we have strengthened our defenses here at home, including a comprehensive reorganization of our government to better protect the homeland. We have also implemented more stringent screening measures, and engaged with our international community to raise global standards. For example, in Africa, we and our colleagues in the Departments of Transportation and Homeland Security are implementing a program to secure airports in countries where the danger to aviation is particularly striking (Safe Skies for Africa).

We must also continue to provide frontline countries the training and assistance needed to support their counterterrorism efforts. The Department of State's Anti-Terrorism Training Assistance (ATA) Program, Terrorist Interdiction Program (TIP) and other counterterrorism training are vital parts of this effort.

The support of the Congress for this and other capacity-building programs will be essential to eradicating al-Qaida and other terrorist groups. Many of our most important successes have come through joint or unilateral actions by foreign governments. Improving the counterterrorism capacity of key states is clearly in our interest. While the dividends of such investment may not be immediately apparent, we must think of our global war on terrorism as a long-term fight that will take years or, indeed, decades, as was the case with the Cold War.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I should stress that while we have made substantial progress toward eradicating the threat posed by al-Qaida, we are on a long, tough road, and we cannot afford to falter.

The al-Qaida organization has been gravely wounded, and forced to evolve in new ways to survive. However, al-Qaida is a patient, resourceful and flexible organization and is able to draw from a global support base of jihadists and international mujahedin movement. It must be denied safe haven and kept on the run, while we starve it of its resources, dismantle its cells, and apprehend its foot soldiers at our borders. We must more than match its flexibility and resolve, and commit to combat al-Qaida over the long haul, for there can be no accommodation with this evil.

As President Bush recently said, “The war on terror is not a figure of speech. It is an inescapable calling of our generation....There can be no separate peace with the terrorist enemy. Any sign of weakness or retreat simply validates terrorist violence, and invites more violence for all nations. The only certain way to protect our people is by early, united, and decisive action.”

Our continued dedication to the eradication of al-Qaida with the support of our international partners is the only way to ensure the elimination of the threat posed by al-Qaida. The fates of the civilized nations of the world are inextricably linked – we must face this fight together and eradicate the al-Qaida scourge from the face of the Earth.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you. I would be happy to take your questions.

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