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The Current Situation in Iraq
and Afghanistan

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee:

The overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and of Saddam Husayn in Iraq as well as our determined pursuit of al-Qa'ida worldwide have inaugurated a new era of risk and opportunity for the United States in its engagement with much of the Muslim world. We are now face-to-face with whole societies which are in profound and volatile transitions and whose fate will directly affect the security of the United States. With US forces deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan and with the United States leading the global response to the threat of terrorism, we are now actors to an unprecedented degree in supporting states—especially Iraq and Afghanistan—which are attempting to create and sustain a stable new order.

- ***Against this endeavor significant new forces are arrayed.*** Political and ethno-sectarian forces previously subordinated are now competing to shape the identity of states. Although some of this competition is taking place within the legitimate democratic process, in other cases radical Islamic groups—including terrorists and insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan—are able to preempt governments and eclipse more moderate actors.
- At the regional level, opponents of the United States—like Iran—are seeking to capitalize on the instability of this transitional period to expand their own influence and contest the vision sustained by the United States and its allies.

Afghanistan

With these trends in mind, let me begin by focusing on Afghanistan where we have made important progress in the face of substantial challenges.

Afghanistan's future depends heavily on the international community's willingness to continue delivering concrete resources to the Afghan Government. It depends equally on international willingness to help protect the Afghan Government against the Taliban and other extremists who are waging a bloody insurgency in the south and east of the country.

Neither of these tasks will be simple, and neither will be completed soon, but the past few years have been a story of success for the Afghan Government and people, as well as the international community. ***The country made remarkable political progress through the completion of the 2001 Bonn Accord—the political roadmap for rebuilding the country.*** The international community and the

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Afghan Government, under the leadership of President Karzai, have built national-level political institutions—including a new constitution, legitimate presidential elections, and a democratically elected parliament.

- These are all remarkable achievements given the ruinous decades of war Afghanistan experienced prior to 2001.

The success of the past few years hasn't lessened the need for international involvement in the country—it has only provided a foundation upon which to build. Now, we need to bolster the Afghan Government's ability to provide sound governance at all levels of government. Ambassador Neuman recently said the effort would take a long time—in my view, at least a decade—and cost many billions of dollars. I would add that the Afghan Government won't be able to do it alone.

The capacity of the government needs to be strengthened to deliver basic services to the population—especially security. The problems span Afghanistan, but they are especially prevalent in rural areas. The quality of life for millions of Afghans—spread across desolate land and isolated villages—has not advanced and in many areas the Afghan Government is nowhere to be found.

- The social situation will get worse if it is not addressed. Right now, about 55 percent of the Afghan population is under the age of 19; millions of young Afghans will enter the labor force over the next 5-10 years, adding to an unemployment burden that is already hovering around 40 percent.

The illicit drug trade is a significant hurdle to the expansion of central government authority and it undercuts efforts to rebuild the economy. The drug trade also fuels provincial and local corruption. According to the IMF, the Afghan opiate GDP in 2005 was \$2.6 billion—roughly a third of the country's \$7.3 billion licit GDP.

Key to making progress is bolstering security. Even in areas of the country where the insurgency is not active, security is falling short.

- There are not enough properly trained, equipped, or well-paid security forces. Even though the Afghan National Army continues to become larger, stronger, and more experienced, progress has been slow and little progress has been made in constructing an effective Afghan National Police force.

The Taliban has built momentum this year. The level of violence associated with the insurgency has increased significantly and the group has become more aggressive than in years past. The Taliban almost certainly refocused its attacks in an attempt to stymie NATO's efforts in southern Afghanistan.

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- Kabul's ability to provide sound governance and badly needed aid to these areas will be key to preventing the Taliban and other extremists from intimidating the population into acquiescing in its activities.
- Kabul needs help because it lacks capacity—not because it lacks political will or lacks support. President Karzai understands this and recognizes his government's responsibility.

Iraq

Iraq provides another example of how the forces of change are reshaping the Muslim world. The deep fissures among the groups fighting in Iraq were not created by the Coalition's overthrow of Saddam's dictatorship. Throughout Iraq's modern history, a Sunni minority ruled with the support of the military; Saddam's cult of personality tragically reinforced this pattern by using extreme violence to suppress the vast majority of Iraq's inhabitants. Saddam killed tens of thousands of Kurds and Shia in the short period from 1988, when he launched the Anfal campaign against the Kurds, to 1991, when he brutally suppressed Shia and Kurdish revolts:

- Saddam ruled during his last years through violent repression and by favoring a small elite within the Sunni community from his home region of Tikrit—to the dismay of other Sunnis.
- Saddam deliberately diverted resources to his powerbase, depriving much of the rest of the country of economic and educational opportunities, and in the case of the Shia majority, basic religious liberty.

Operation Iraqi Freedom completely upended the Saddamist state and Iraqi society. In every respect—political, social, economic—OIF instituted a sea change in the way Iraq is governed. The dissolution of the Iraqi military and the Ba'th party swept away the tools that a small group in power had used to terrorize Iraq, and the subsequent vacuum of authority gave vent to deep seated hatreds that had simmered for years in a brutalized society:

- The Shia now focus on assuring that Iraq's new government reflects the will of the majority Shia population and making sure the Ba'thists never regain power. This fear of a return to Ba'thism is almost palpable among Shia elites. Sunnis view the Shia as Iranian controlled and the current government as predatory. The Kurds, for their part, want to keep and strengthen the substantial autonomy they have exercised since 1991.
- It is also noteworthy, however, that the Shia and the Kurds, with some Sunni participation, crafted a democratic constitution that could provide a structure to allow Iraqis to settle their differences peacefully. For this

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to happen, Iraqi leaders—Shia, Sunnis and Kurds alike—will need to flesh out the document through extensive legislation in such a way that all parties, and particularly the Sunni public, accept as legitimate.

We are all acutely aware that Iraq today is very far from peaceful. While some Sunnis participate in the political process, many seek to undermine it through violence. These Sunni insurgents might disagree on Iraq's future, but all reject the Coalition presence and the constitutional regime they erroneously assert the Coalition has imposed on Iraq. Moreover, since the bombing of the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra last February, violence between Arab Shia and Sunnis has grown to such an extent that ***we assess that sectarian violence is now the greatest threat to Iraq's stability and future.***

- ***Last year violence was mostly limited to Sunni insurgent attacks on Coalition and Iraqi targets, but now Shia militia attacks against Sunnis and Coalition forces are an integral part of the pattern of violence.***
- The Kurds live in a fairly homogeneous region under self-government. Yet in the seamline where Kurds, Arabs, and others meet, we see worrying signs—such as a recent surge in violence in the city of Kirkuk—that the legacy of Iraq's repressive past continues to shape both the Arab/Kurd and the Sunni/Shia fault lines in Iraqi society.

Any Iraqi leader, no matter how skillful, would be hard pressed to reconcile the divergent perspectives that Shia, Sunnis, and Kurds bring to the table—and also to the streets. To strengthen the common ground that all Iraqis can share, the government of Prime Minister Maliki will have to overcome several formidable obstacles:

- Internal divisions and power struggles among the Shia make it difficult for Shia leaders to take the actions that might ease Sunni fears of domination. Radical Shia militias and splinter groups stoke the violence, while brutal Sunni attacks make even moderate Shia question whether it is possible to reconcile the Sunnis to the new Shia-dominated power structures. The Iranian hand is stoking violence and supporting even competing Shia factions.
- The Sunnis are even more divided. Many see violent opposition as the only way to overcome the democratic rules that, due to demographic realities, place a ceiling on Sunni political influence.

Even if the central government gains broader support from Iraq's communities, implementing the reforms needed to improve life for all Iraqis will be extremely difficult. Iraq's endemic violence is eating away at the state's ability to govern. The security forces are plagued by sectarianism and severe

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maintenance and logistics problems; inadequate ministerial capacity is limiting progress on key issues; and the civilian bureaucracy, buffeted by corruption, inefficiency and partisan control, is not currently up to the challenge of providing better services to the Iraqi people. Only if the Iraqi state asserts its authority across the board can the government in Baghdad begin to turn its goals into concrete realities.

Complicating these historic forces is the pernicious effect of al-Qa'ida's presence in Iraq. Despite Zarqawi's death, al-Qa'ida continues to foment sectarian violence and seeks to expel coalition forces. An al-Qa'ida victory in Iraq would mean a fundamentalist state that shelters jihadists and serves as a launching pad for terrorist operations throughout the region—and in the United States.

Turning next to al-Qa'ida...

Al-Qa'ida sees its war against the West as the continuation of a decades, perhaps centuries-old, struggle to defend Islam from political and cultural domination by a Judeo-Christian alliance now led by the United States and Israel. Since Bin Ladin declared war on the United States in 1998, al-Qa'ida has focused primarily on attacks aimed at weakening and punishing the United States and its immediate allies.

- The group sees the United States as the main obstacle to realizing its vision of an extreme fundamentalist social and political order throughout the Muslim world.
- Although the group has suffered significant losses since 9/11, it is resilient and thoroughly dedicated to mounting new attacks on the US Homeland and our interests abroad.

Understanding the source of al-Qa'ida's resilience is key to defeating it. With regard to the central organization headed by Bin Ladin, that resilience stems from several factors:

First, the group's **cadre of seasoned, committed leaders** has allowed it to remain fairly cohesive and stay focused on its strategic objectives—despite having lost a number of important veterans over the years.

- Usama Bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri continue to play a crucial role in inspiring jihadists and promoting unity. Their demise would not spell the end of the threat, but probably would contribute to the unraveling of the central al-Qa'ida organization.

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- The loss of a series of veteran al-Qa'ida leaders since 9/11 has been mitigated by the group's "deep bench" of lower-ranking personnel capable of stepping up to assume leadership responsibilities. Although a number of individuals are new to senior management in al-Qa'ida, they are not new to jihad: they average over 40 years of age and nearly two decades of involvement in jihad.

A second critical factor is the group's physical **safehaven** in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area. This safehaven gives al-Qa'ida the physical—and psychological—space needed to meet, train, expand its networks, and prepare new attacks.

- Many locals have ties to al-Qa'ida dating back to the 1980s war against the Soviets in Afghanistan.
- Rooting out al-Qa'ida elements there is complicated by the rugged terrain and a local culture that is intensely suspicious of—and, at times, overtly hostile to—outsiders, including government security forces.
- The safehaven not only gives al-Qa'ida and the Taliban a venue for terrorist plotting, but also serves as a jump-off point for its guerrilla forays into Afghanistan.

A third important factor is Bin Ladin's **extremist ideology and strategic vision**, which continues to attract recruits, inspire like-minded groups, and helps our enemies weather setbacks and reconcile themselves to a long struggle.

- In addition to planning attacks of its own, al-Qa'ida supports terrorist activities by other groups and seeks to encourage Muslims worldwide to take up the cause of violent jihad.
- Al-Qa'ida spreads its propaganda through taped statements—sometimes featuring relatively sophisticated production values—as well as books and websites.
- As a Western nation, we have limited tools to counteract this propaganda. We need to make sure our own message is clear and we need work with our Muslim allies.

Finally, it's important to note that the asymmetric nature of al-Qa'ida's style of warfare gives it certain advantages.

- Our open society presents an almost endless source of targets, and the enemy has demonstrated its ruthlessness through a willingness to attack civilians—including other Muslims—a preference for spectacular, high-casualty operations, and its own adherents' desire for martyrdom.

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- As 9/11 showed, even a handful of committed attackers, with relatively modest resources, can inflict terrible damage.

Mr. Chairman, in all aspects of today's global struggle, we are dealing with deep historical forces and it will require patience and wisdom as well as power for us to deal with them. This will be a long struggle.

Thank you.