

House Armed Services Committee Testimony GEN Abizaid--15 November, 2006

Chairman Hunter, Congressman Skelton, Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I refer the committee to my 3 August opening statement where I outlined the broader strategic dangers to United States interests in the Middle East.

Indeed the dangers outlined in that statement; al Qaida's extremist ideology, hegemonistic revolutionary Iranian ambitions, and the corrosive effect of continued Palestinian – Israeli confrontation represent major dangers to international peace and security for several decades to come. American, regional, and international diplomatic and security policies must be articulated and coordinated to confront these problems. Despite our current focus on the struggle underway to stabilize Iraq, the interests of the international community still require the confrontation and defeat of al Qaida's dark ideology, the containment of Iranian expansionism, and progress toward Arab – Israeli peace. In the current atmosphere in the region, with the use of powerful non-state militias, the development of weapons of mass destruction, and the acceptance by some of terror as a legitimate tool of normal discourse, American leadership in diplomatic, economic, and security elements of power is essential to protect the international order. How we confront these problems and empower forces of moderation in the region to resist them will define our future.

Today, over 200,000 men and women of the Armed Forces are deployed in the Central Command Area of Operations. They protect the flow of global commerce; they confront terrorists; they work hard to stabilize young, unsteady, yet elected governments in Iraq and Afghanistan; and they indirectly support stability by increasing regional security capacities of our partners and friends in the region. Well over 1.5 million Americans have served in the region since September 11th, 2001. Many have given their lives, and even more have suffered life-changing injuries. Whatever course our nation chooses in the years ahead, we must be ever mindful of the sacrifice and courage of our troops and the debt we owe our veterans and their families. We must also remember that hundreds of thousands of Coalition and partner forces fight directly or indirectly with us in the broader region.

Today the committee will no doubt focus on the way ahead in Iraq and rightfully so. Yet we must be mindful of increasing threats from Iran as evidenced by its recent military exercise, which was designed to intimidate the smaller nations in the region. We must also be mindful of the real and pervasive global threat presented by al Qaida and its associated movements. Failure to stabilize Iraq could increase Iranian aggressiveness and embolden al Qaida's ideology. It could also deepen broader Sunni-Shia fissures throughout the region. The changing security challenges in Iraq require changes to our own approach to achieve stability. Let me remind the committee, however, that while new options are explored and debated, my testimony should not be taken to imply approval of shifts in direction. It is my desire today to provide an update on current security conditions in Iraq and elsewhere and current thinking about the way ahead on the security lines of operation. I remain optimistic that we can stabilize Iraq.

I just departed Iraq, where I visited with GEN Casey and his senior commanders. On the Iraqi side I had meetings with the Prime Minister, the Defense Minister and the Interior Minister. Over the past 4 weeks levels of sectarian violence are down in Baghdad from their Ramadan peak. The Iraqi Armed Forces, while under sectarian pressure, continues to perform effectively across Iraq. Our focus against Al Qaeda in Iraq continues to take a toll on Iraqi AQI members and foreign fighters. Operations against selected targets on the Shia death squad side also have had good effect, and our understanding of these complex organizations continues to improve. Sunni insurgent attacks against ISF and MNF remain at high levels, and our forces continue to experience attacks from armed Shia groups, especially in the Baghdad region. In the north

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significant progress is being made in transitioning security responsibilities to capable Iraqi forces. Currently around 80% of the sectarian violence in Iraq happens within a 35-mile radius of Baghdad. Nonetheless, security transitions continue in most of the country.

Iraqis and Americans alike believe that Iraq can stabilize and that the key to stabilization is effective, loyal, non-sectarian Iraqi security forces coupled with an effective Government of National Unity.

In discussions with our commanders and Iraqi leaders it is clear that they believe Iraqi forces can take more control faster, provided we invest more manpower and resources into the coalition military transition teams, speed the delivery of logistics and mobility enablers, and embrace an aggressive Iraqi-led effort to disarm illegal militias. This is particularly important with regard to the Jaysh al Mahdi elements operating as armed death squads in Baghdad and elsewhere. As we increase our efforts to build Iraqi capacity, we envision coalition forces providing needed military support and combat power to Iraqi units in the lead. Precisely how we do this continues to be worked out with the Iraqis as ultimately capable independent Iraqi forces, loyal to an equally capable independent Iraqi government, will set the conditions for the withdrawal of our major combat forces.

Our commanders and diplomats believe it is possible to achieve an endstate in Iraq that finds Iraq at peace with its neighbors, an ally in the war against extremists, respectful of the lives and rights of its citizens, and with security forces sufficient to maintain order, prevent terrorist safe havens and defend the independence of Iraq. At this stage in the campaign, we'll need flexibility to manage our force and to help manage the Iraqi force. Force caps and specific timetables limit flexibility. We must also remember that our enemies have a vote in this fight. The enemy watches not only what we do on the ground but what we say and do here at home. Also, Prime Minister Maliki and his team want to do more; we want them to do more. Increased Iraqi military activity under greater Iraqi national control will only work however if his government embraces meaningful national reconciliation. His duly elected, legitimate government deserves our support and his Armed Forces, backed by ours, deserve his full support.

While I know the committee has a wide range of interests, including developments in Central Asia, Afghanistan – Pakistan, Lebanon and the Horn of Africa, I will defer comment on those subjects in order to take your questions. In closing, thank you for your support of our great Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines in the field. Their still-unfinished work keeps us safe at home.