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Mr. Chairman, Representative Akin, Members of the Committee:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on some of the potential developments that may confront us in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East and the wider world as a result of the war in Iraq. It is no exaggeration to say that the set of challenges that we have encountered in Iraq since 2003 have defied our powers of prediction over and again. The sad fact is that we should not expect that to change anytime soon. Iraq today is the center of a series of conflicts -- some full-blown, others nascent -- that are at once interlocking and overlaid. There is a bewildering array of drivers behind these conflicts and a panoply of triggers that might accelerate or decelerate certain trends. Prediction, in this environment, seems especially hazardous.

With that caveat, I would like to address some issues related to the terrorist threat and how it might develop in Iraq and how it will affect Iraq's neighborhood and our own.

We should begin by acknowledging a fact that should now be beyond dispute: There were essentially no jihadist terrorists in Iraq before the Unites States invasion of 2003. The Jordanian terrorist, Abu Mussab al Zarqawi, who would eventually emerge as the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, may have traveled in and out of that part of the country that was ruled by Saddam Hussein, but his base was in the Kurdish zone to the north, which was protected by the U.S. and the no-fly zone. Today, there are probably several thousand jihadists in the ranks of al Qaeda in Iraq. Some of the leaders are undoubtedly foreigners. Most of the suicide bombers themselves come from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. Nonetheless, this is a primarily Iraqi group, and it will comprise a significant security threat for some time to come.

What is the future of al Qaeda in Iraq? Much, obviously, depends on the success of U.S., coalition and Iraqi forces currently in the field. Recently, there have been indicators that some analysts interpret as encouraging. If there is indeed a positive turn of events underway, we should all be grateful. Given the relentless deterioration in conditions of the post-invasion period, we should, however, be prepared for more of the same. The perils of overly optimistic thinking about Iraq are too well known to require further recapitulation here.

**Al Qaeda in Iraq: The Question of Targets and the Myth of a Jihadist Takeover**

The first question to be addressed about al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) regards the group's orientation – its targeting priorities – and this is a matter of some debate. Over the last few years, it has focused its attacks overwhelmingly on targets inside Iraq: U.S. forces, Iraqi forces and the Shia civilian population. It has also managed to kill a significant number of Sunni leaders who have banded together to oppose AQI. The most recent instance of this involved the suicide bombing that claimed the lives of several al Anbar sheikhs who were meeting in Baghdad. We have also seen attacks outside the country, such as the bombing of American-owned hotels in Amman, Jordan in the fall of 2005, which appears to have been orchestrated by AQI. We have seen as well a "bleed-out" phenomenon begin in earnest with the uprising in the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon, which reportedly involved fighters who had seen action in Iraq.

It seems a reasonable surmise that as long as the security situation in Iraq remains unsettled, AQI will continue to devote the greatest part of its energies to operations within the country's borders. There are, of course, different scenarios for the future in Iraq, and it is worth examining each. For the time that U.S. forces remain in country, we can be confident that AQI will continue to target them; it is, after all, the aim of AQI to demonstrate its valor in opposing the occupation to the Muslim world. The videos of its killings of "Crusader" forces are among the most valuable and successful propaganda productions in memory, and they have played a critical role in motivating and recruiting radical Islamist terrorists around the world. We should also expect AQI to continue attacks designed to cause large numbers of Shia casualties with the aim of stoking sectarian strife. This has been an AQI strategy from early on, and there is no reason to believe it will cease any time soon.

And if the United States withdraws from Iraq? A central argument of President Bush and his Administration has been that a U.S. departure from Iraq could lead to a jihadist takeover of the nation. I do not find this to be a credible scenario. First, as we have seen in al-Anbar province, there is growing Sunni antipathy to al Qaeda, and what has been true in the province that was most dominated by al Qaeda is likely to be true in other provinces. Al Qaeda has grown considerably in Iraq, but it has failed to mobilize the population behind it. A force that numbers in the few thousands will never be able to take over the entire country. Even if all other Sunnis stood aside and the Iraqi military were to dissolve, al Qaeda has nothing like the manpower to defeat the Shia militias. The group has thus far shown itself incapable of holding territory over a sustained period of time. While it doubtless will continue to be capable of carrying out mass casualty attacks, much more is required to take Baghdad. In short, jihadist Iraq is an extremely improbable outcome.

Indeed, one could argue that a more likely result of a U.S. departure would be that the Shia militias would be energized to take on al Qaeda directly. That is, those sectarian groups that have been sitting back and watching while the U.S. has done them the favor of fighting Sunnis would be mobilized into action; those that have been confronting U.S. forces militarily would redirect their fire at Sunni insurgents and the hated AQI. We should not have any illusions about what this would look like: It would occur within the context of considerable sectarian violence. AQI, it should be added, will not shy from

this fight. The group's strategy of targeting Shia reflects not only an understanding of how to keep Iraq destabilized but also a powerful anti-Shia animus. Jihadist communications have described the Shia as "worse" than the Americans, and the rise of Iran is viewed as a deplorable event. AQI will seek to strengthen its claim of leadership of the anti-Shia cause in Iraq and throughout the Muslim world, especially if a U.S. withdrawal turns the conflict in Iraq into a primarily sectarian one.

Let me emphasize: I do not consider withdrawal from Iraq and leaving the Shia militias to take the lead against al Qaeda to be an attractive course. The costs will likely be high in terms of civilian suffering. But I am skeptical that the United States can achieve in the near term the "complete victory" that President Bush called for in his speech in South Carolina just last week. However positive the recent news out of al- Anbar has been, AQI has shown itself to be an adaptive and mobile organization. It has can move operations to areas of greater opportunity, it is resilient and it has demonstrated the ability to penetrate the Iraqi forces and regime, undermining our ability to corner it. Absent a broader political agreement that creates a framework for nationwide security, we may reduce the group, but it is difficult to imagine eliminating it. The tool we have used against al Qaeda – our military – is far from the ideal one for combating terrorism. Until we have a strong Iraqi intelligence service working in the country, we will continue to face considerable difficulties.

We should understand that this will remain the case however our forces are configured in the next phase of the war. Much has been said about withdrawing Army and Marine units into garrisons to remove them from the midst of the sectarian strife, reserving them instead for missions primarily against al Qaeda. Another camp argues for redeploying U.S. forces to the periphery – either inside or outside Iraq – and keeping them on call for counterterrorism missions. There will be some utility in this, especially when intelligence indicates that centralized bases are appearing or even large centers of jihadist activity. But the military remains a poor instrument for dealing with small, highly dispersed and widely distributed terrorist cells. Moreover, the use of military force against such cells often results in the kind of collateral damage that spurs anger and further radicalization.

Let me add that if we do depart Iraq, we will need to solve the problem of devising a reliable covert capability for dealing with the problem of a terrorist safe haven in largely ungoverned spaces. This problem already exists in Pakistan, and it may well materialize in Iraq. Our senior military commanders seem chronically averse to deploying Special Forces on counterterrorism missions. I have recently argued, together with Steven Simon of the Council on Foreign Relations, that it is time to take another look at these kinds of missions and to build up the CIA's capabilities and responsibilities in this area. I am submitting our article in The New York Times on this subject for the record.

**An Emboldened Enemy**

Another Administration argument is that a U.S. departure from Iraq will embolden the terrorists. This is, to a significant degree, true. But it should be noted that the jihadist

movement has already declared victory in Iraq and appears to be delighted by its accomplishments. No doubt there is some bluster in these statements. But there is also plenty of genuine satisfaction at the role AQI has played in foiling our efforts to stand up a democratic and friendly regime in Iraq and to pacify the country. We need to ask what the implications of this sense of achievement will be.

It is often suggested that leaving Iraq before the destruction of AQI will lead to an enhanced jihadist threat to the U.S. homeland – this is the clear sense of President Bush's repeated remarks to the effect that the al Qaeda group that attacked the United States on September 11, 2001 and AQI are the same. We are also all familiar with the argument that we must fight the terrorists "over there" so that we don't have to "over here." There is an element of truth here insofar as more jihadists means a greater aggregate threat to the United States, and this is not to be taken lightly.

It is worth considering, however, the nature of the AQI threat. Most of the fighters in the group are not going to be capable of participating directly in attacks on the U.S. homeland because they lack the cultural capabilities to navigate in Western societies. Many and perhaps most will continue to fight for the upper hand in Iraq. As suggested earlier, I am skeptical that they will make much headway in this regard, but they will, at a minimum, continue to carry out spectacular bombings against military and civilian targets. A few may try to carry their violence to the West, and the possibility that one of the doctors involved in the recent car bomb conspiracy in the United Kingdom was an Iraqi jihadist, is an ominous hint of that fact. But if U.S. forces depart, the more direct threat will be offshore to American interests abroad – especially in the Muslim world.

Indeed, the Muslim world itself, already roiled by the effects of Iraq, looks to be the region most threatened in the coming years. Those who have honed their skills in Iraq will want to continue to employ them. A reasonable conclusion about their likely targets would point to U.S. and other Western interests in the Middle East and Persian Gulf regions and the regimes of Muslim world, which the militants continue to view as "apostate" and deserving of overthrow. I have mentioned those fighters who appear to have made their way to Lebanon. Others may return to Saudi Arabia, which is widely believed to be the number one exporter of radicals to Iraq – and the work of the Israeli scholar Reuven Paz and the Saudi analyst Nawaf Obeid has supported this contention. It is difficult to judge the extent to which radicalism is on the rise in Saudi Arabia at the moment. But the fact that Saudi authorities recently announced the arrest of 172 militants was a striking event. Terrorism is game of small numbers, and 172 is a large one. We don't know much about the offenses that these individuals were involved in, but if they were serious –and not merely the voicing of "deviant" beliefs – their arrests should be seen a significant event. The return of only a couple of hundred jihadists to Saudi Arabia could prove a challenge for the Interior Ministry and its forces. Those who return, it should be remembered, will return as victors, and that will give them an aura that will help them as they seek to promote their cause.

Other countries that face serious domestic terrorist problems include Jordan and Syria, the two major recipients of refugees from Iraq's turmoil. Refugee populations are

notorious incubators of extremism, and within them, radicals from within Iraq could find useful operatives and logistical support. Both countries have highly capable domestic security, but, of course, no security service is perfect. Particularly Jordan, which has a produced a number of key figures in the jihadist movement from one of its founding fathers, Abdullah Azzam, to Zarqawi, gives reason to worry. This subcommittee needs no reminder of how critical Jordan is to the stability of Middle East.

What is true in terms of a rising threat level for those directly on the Iraqi border will also hold for other Muslim countries or areas at a greater remove. I have mentioned the recent events in Lebanon, a country whose political fragility makes even a small influx of fighters from Iraq enormously worrying. Several countries in the Maghreb are also concerned about returning fighters. The possibility of al Qaeda infiltration in Gaza or even the West Bank as a result of the spillover effect from Iraq could have grave consequences. Thus far, all the parties – Israel, Fatah and Hamas – have worked to keep out al Qaeda because of the likely disastrous consequences of a catastrophic attack. But no intelligence operation is omnipotent. Let me emphasize as well that the spillover has already begun and is likely to continue – though possibly in smaller measure – even if U.S. forces remain in Iraq.

Farther away still is one of the most active areas of jihadist activity: Europe. The number of Muslims who traveled from Europe to Iraq appears to be relatively small, and many of those will have been killed in action. It is also true that Zarqawi was building a network in Europe. But a consideration of the European dimension of the problem we are considering points to one crucial point. Against all the problems we may face by departing Iraq, we need to balance the gains we would make by reducing the ability of AQI members to galvanize others around the world. In Western Europe and even the United States, the ability of AQI to broadcast its heroic deeds in the form of videos and communiques has had a powerful effect on those liable to be radicalized. Without U.S. forces to attack, the militants in Iraq would soon be of reduced interest to outsiders. Some European experts contend that the end of the conflict in Iraq would significantly reduce terrorist activity on their continent. At a minimum, it would cap the radicals' ability to argue that the United States is a predatory power that is occupying an Islamic nation. That, in turn, should over time diminish radicalization and with it, the threat to the United States. The radicals who are most likely to attack the U.S. homeland today are not going to come directly from Iraq but rather will be individuals at home in Western societies who have been moved to violence by their anger at events in Iraq.

Some will argue that the perception of a U.S. defeat in Iraq will outweigh any gains we might make by removing this obvious irritant to Muslim sensibilities. Since it appears that the jihadists already believe that they have won, and there are real doubts about our ability to achieve a "total victory," this may seem somewhat beside the point. We are stuck on the horns of dilemma: One jihadist myth says the United States is a paper tiger; another says we are a vicious, anti-Muslim power. There is a growing consensus among counterterrorism analysts that undermining that latter argument would be truly beneficial now, and that argues for departing from Iraq.

**The Danger of Afghanistan II**

At least one other development should concern us about the trajectory of the terrorist threat, and that is the possibility of the development of a full-blown proxy war in Iraq. Like many others, I view the possibility of a wider regional war because of the fighting in Iraq as being unlikely. Iraq's Sunni neighbors – with the exception of Turkey – have limited military capabilities and are not geared for offensive operations. Iran may seek to exercise sway over Iraqi events, but its extensive ties to various groups in Iraq obviate the need for a significant military presence.

That said, the possibility of a proxy war is considerable. There have been a number of rumors regarding Saudi efforts to establish relations with Sunni tribes in Iraq in return for money and perhaps arms. I take recent reporting in The New York Times about the discomfiture of the Bush Administration regarding Saudi lack of support for the Maliki government in Baghdad to provide further evidence of this. The antipathy between the Saudis and Shia Iran needs no retelling here, and Iranian advances in terms of influence in Iraq, influence through Hezbollah in Lebanon and through Tehran's nuclear program constitutes the basis for considerable Saudi anxiety. The United States, of course, is not out of Iraq yet, and so it appears that a proxy war could well happen whether we are there or not; it stands to reason that our departure might accelerate the process of "buying up" support in Iraq.

Such a development could herald the appearance of a pernicious dynamic in the region. In much the same way that support from the Sunni Arabs – primarily Saudi Arabia – and the United States fueled the fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s and catalyzed a new radicalism, the fight against the Shia could have a similar effect. A proxy war backed by Gulf money against the Iranian-backed forces could draw in radical Islamists from the region. (It would certainly give regimes worried about extremists a direction to point them to.) Anti-Shia sentiment could become a powerful mobilizing force in the region, and we need only recall the rather remarkable comments of leaders such as President Mubarak of Egypt and King Abdullah of Jordan to get a sense of the explosive potential here. One would like to think that the regional actors have seen the dangers of riding this tiger in the past. But we should not believe that they necessarily would not avoid courting such dangers if the alternative is Iranian hegemony.

Avoiding such a proxy war and the radicalization it might yield ought to be a primary goal of U.S. diplomacy today. Unfortunately, we have few levers at our disposal, especially because our options for limiting Iranian influence are scant. We may not be able to make Saudis and Iranians trust each other. We should, at a minimum, seek to illustrate to them the dangers of an Afghanistan-like conflict as part of an effort to forestall a cataclysm.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear here today.