

**STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL ERIC T. OLSON
TO
THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TERRORISM AND UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS
REGARDING THE THREATS POSED BY AL QAIDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA
AND OTHER REGIONS AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND'S EFFORTS
AGAINST THIS ENDURING THREAT**

20 January 2010

Good afternoon. Chairman Smith, Congressman Miller, distinguished members of the Committee...

Thank you for the invitation to appear before this committee to highlight the enduring terrorist threats posed by al-Qaida and its affiliate violent extremist organizations. Thanks to the foresight, advocacy and strong support of this body, we remain well positioned to meet the Nation's expectations of its Special Operations Forces.

First, I will highlight that USSOCOM is responsible for organizing, equipping, training, and providing fully capable special operations forces to serve under the operational control of Geographic Combatant Commanders. In this role

USSOCOM headquarters shares many of the responsibilities, authorities, and characteristics of a Military Department or Defense Agency including a separate Major Force Program Budget established by Congress for the purpose of funding equipment, material, supplies, services, training and operational activities that are peculiar to special operation forces.

USSOCOM is also responsible for synchronizing Department of Defense planning against terrorists and terrorist networks globally. In this role, we receive, analyze and prioritize the Geographic Combatant Commanders' regional plans, and make recommendations to the joint staff on force and resource allocations. We also serve as an extension of the Joint Staff in the cooperation with our interagency partners. We have an effective collaborative venue to do this, collectively known as the global synchronization process. Because USSOCOM does not normally have operational authority over deployed forces, the plans and operations themselves are conducted by the Geographic Combatant Commanders.

Additionally, we are the Department of Defense proponent for Security Force Assistance. This collaborative effort is nested within our existing global synchronization process. In this role, we help foster the long-term partnerships

with other nations that will shape a more secure global environment in the face of global challenges such as transnational crime, migration, and extremism.

On December 25th of the past year, a terrorist trained and equipped by al-Qaida in Yemen conducted an attack on the United States homeland. This attack was not planned or directed by al-Qaida's core leadership located in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, as was expected. This attack was inspired, planned and conducted by one of al-Qaida's affiliate groups from the Arabian Peninsula.

Usama bin Laden's vision of a global movement and his ideological messages aimed at polarizing this conflict are now manifesting in the actions of his followers. Regional extremist groups affiliated or aligned with al-Qaida are becoming increasingly important to the greater al-Qaida network and provide its core leaders with an ability to simultaneously conduct violent acts in North Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iraq, India, Southeast Asia, and again in the United States. These affiliate groups are working together more closely than ever and are becoming the new base of al-Qaida's regeneration, a process by which individuals are recruited, trained and promoted to the top of al-Qaida's leadership hierarchy. Increasing recidivism rates are contributing to al-Qaida's resilience; former detainees are rejoining the ranks of

the violent extremist and un-rehabilitated extremists are completing their prison sentences in various countries and returning to the battlegrounds. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is a rising affiliate group that is benefiting from this process and whose leadership ranks are made up in part from Saudi and Yemeni extremists who have been released from detention or escaped from Yemeni jails. As these al-Qaida affiliate groups improve their operational capabilities and expand their regional influence, core al-Qaida leaders will have the ability to establish redundant command and control nodes and broaden their reach.

Al-Qaida relies on a global network that extends into every Geographic Combatant Command's theater of operation. The network sustains its operations mainly through individual relationships that are rooted in the 1980's Afghanistan jihad against the former Soviet Union. The strength and tenacity of this network is due to the environment in which it functions. It is woven in the fabric of multi-ethnic communities, working with legitimate companies and charities while simultaneously exploiting the criminal networks to move people, money, and supplies around the world. Al-Qaida thrives on sources of friction created by a growing nexus between extremism, crime, and migration. This confluence of relationships creates a dangerous convergence of nation states and non-state

actors who are influencing and shaping the choices of populations as nation states fail to adequately address their needs and grievances. These factors are why al-Qaida continues to present the most significant and enduring terrorism threat to global security, international law, and our own way of life.

Today, USSOCOM is a strategic-level organization that addresses global threats to our national interests. USSOCOM observes trans-regional dynamics from a uniquely cross-organizational perspective. This perspective provides us with a comprehensive appreciation of the strategic environment that suggests the type, scope, and scale of the security challenges facing our nation have evolved significantly in recent years. In light of this knowledge, our approach to the security environment must be increasingly agile and adaptive.

While the high, long-term demand for SOF in Iraq and Afghanistan has led to 86% of the overseas force currently being deployed in the US Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility, SOF maintains a global presence. In FY 2009, SOF conducted operations and training in 106 countries around the globe, including Yemen. Throughout these operations, SOF have taken a long-term approach to engagement, designed to forge enduring partnerships that

contribute to regional stability. This balance of effective direct and indirect actions, the combination of high-end tactical skills and an understanding of the operational context of their application, is the core of special operations. From support to major combat operations to the conduct of irregular warfare in remote areas, SOF normally accomplish their missions with small, highly capable and agile forces.

The problems we must be prepared to address include the inability of nation states to deal with increasingly complex challenges and to meet the needs and expectations of their populations. These challenges are exacerbated by the growing number of non-state actors who have strategic effect in a networked and interconnected world. In the vacuum created by weak or failed governments, non-state actors have achieved greater influence over benign populations by addressing their basic needs and grievances, and by intimidating and sometimes brutalizing them into submission. When governments fail to address the needs of the population, they become irrelevant and the people will make choices that are shaped by their own immediate needs for survival.

One such choice is to leave their current situation in the hope of finding greater opportunity. As a result, uncontrolled migration is occurring across the world and the challenges associated with this dynamic are manifesting themselves in numerous ways. We are witness to accelerating urbanization that is overwhelming many under-developed cities and the burgeoning diasporas that are becoming increasingly difficult to assimilate into host nation societies.

USSOCOM headquarters will continue to lead and to manage the development and sustainment of the world's most precise and lethal counterterrorism force. We will provide the world's most effective special operations trainers, advisors and combat partners. We will provide advice and comment on issues of national security. This great Nation's special operations forces will continue to find and kill or capture our irreconcilable enemies, to partner with our global friends and allies, and to pursue the tactics, techniques, procedures and technologies that will keep us ahead of dynamic threats.

We believe that SOF must simultaneously focus on the environmental dynamics and root causes that create today's and tomorrow's threats and adversaries. This belief requires an approach that is integrated with our interagency partners to

foster US credibility and influence among relevant populations. We clearly recognize that deterring, disrupting and defeating terrorist will require a whole-of-government and international approach.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address this committee, I stand ready for your questions.