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**STATEMENT OF DASD GARRY REID**

**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**

**20 January 2010**

Mister Chairman, Congressman Miller and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the threat of al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and other regions of the world. The Department of Defense appreciates the enduring efforts of this committee to provide our special operations forces with the tools they need to defeat al-Qaida, to protect themselves from improvised explosive devices, and to operate at the leading edge of technology in today's extremely complex global security environment.

Although the attempted terrorist attack of December 25, 2009 appropriately brought increased attention to the current threat emanating from Yemen, it is vitally important that we always view al-Qaida in a global context. The enemy certainly has a global agenda - - Osama Bin Laden himself declared in his 1996 fatwa, it was the duty of all Muslims to fight "in every part of the world." His speeches, declarations, and video messages since 2001 have consistently appealed to a core constituency of Arab supporters in the Arabian Peninsula, Southwest Asia, and North Africa. At the same time, however, he has paid special attention to non-Arab Muslims, especially those in Southeast Asia, Central Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa. Bin Laden's exploitation of ungoverned or poorly governed regions

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such as Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the Trans-Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the remote islands of the south Pacific, as sanctuary for his movement reflect his aspirations to establish a new "caliphate" that would extend from Mauritania to Indonesia.

### **Al-Qaida Core (Afghanistan and Pakistan)**

Al-Qaida's core – namely its senior leadership, training camps, logistics infrastructure, and financial support network – has been significantly weakened by the operations and activities of many nations against them since 2001. Driven from Afghanistan by the advance of U.S. forces in 2001-2002, the al-Qaida core has relocated to the remote mountainous regions on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Through a complex web of local tribal alliances, often intertwined with both Pakistan and Afghan Taliban militias, al-Qaida retains its safehaven in Pakistan... but not without a price. In the past 18 months, al-Qaida has suffered significant loss of senior leaders. Among those believed to be killed are Khalid Habib, a veteran combat leader and operations chief; Abu Khabab al-Masri, an expert on explosives and chemical and biological weapons; and Baitullah Mehsud, leader of the Pakistani Taliban affiliated with al-Qaida. Through the resources and authorities provided by the Pakistan Counterinsurgency Fund, the Department of Defense will continue to provide equipment, training, and assistance to Pakistan security forces to help improve their capabilities to defeat al-Qaida and its extremist allies in their country.

Beyond its core, al-Qaida has fostered development of a trans-regional conglomerate of affiliates and supporters. In some cases they have merged with long-standing terrorist groups, in others they have built or inspired new groups from the ground up. Al-Qaida continues to pursue its goals of conducting spectacular terrorist attacks against the United States, exploiting weakly governed lands to sustain and support its operations, and inciting instability in countries along the arc that extends from northwest

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Africa to the south Pacific. Although our efforts to counter the al-Qaida agenda must be tailored to each specific region, they all rely on the concurrent execution of training and equipping local security forces, increased intelligence collection, and counterterrorism operations.

### **AQ in the Islamic Maghreb**

In north-central Africa, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, is engaged in a region-wide kidnapping campaign to terrorize U.S. and European travelers and members of the diplomatic community. AQIM is an Algeria-based Sunni Muslim jihadist group that officially joined al-Qaida in September 2006. AQIM operates primarily in northern coastal areas of Algeria and in parts of the desert regions of southern Algeria and northern Mali. Its principal sources of funding include extortion, kidnapping, donations, and narcotics trafficking. Following its formal alliance with al-Qaida, AQIM expanded its aims and declared its intention to attack Western targets. In May 2009, they executed a kidnapped British citizen in northern Mali. In June, a private U.S. citizen was shot and killed in Nouakchott in an apparent kidnapping attempt by individuals associated with AQIM. In August, an AQIM suicide bombing attack near the French Embassy in Mauritania injured two French guards and one local citizen. In November, heavily armed AQIM terrorists attempted to kidnap U.S. embassy employees in Niger, and later the same month three Spanish NGO workers were kidnapped from their vehicle while driving outside the Mauritanian capital.

The centerpiece of our efforts to counter AQIM is the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), which is a multi-year U.S. interagency program aimed at defeating terrorist organizations by strengthening regional counterterrorism capabilities, enhancing and institutionalizing cooperation among the region's security forces, promoting democratic governance, discrediting terrorist ideology, and reinforcing bilateral military ties with the United States. The Department of Defense conducts bilateral

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training events with partners in the region, designed to improve counterterrorism capabilities, and provides CT-related equipment through Section 1206 authorities. Political instability hinders these efforts - the 2008 coup in Mauritania caused a one-year interruption in our CT assistance programs. The ongoing constitutional crisis in Niger has significantly reduced our activities there, and could lead to significant disruption of CT cooperation depending upon the outcome.

### **AQ in East Africa**

On the other side of the African continent, al-Qaida continues to use the Somalia safehaven as a training and recruitment base, while concurrently fanning the flames of an already combustible situation that shows few signs of abating. Al-Qaida has provided training to al-Shabaab, which although predominantly an internal Somali movement has shown signs of expanding its operations across Africa, into Yemen, and further into Europe. Department of Defense counterterrorism engagements in the region are designed to deal with both near term threats and long term development challenges. We work closely with our international and interagency partners to address al-Qaida and other terrorist threats emanating from the Horn of Africa. Our long term strategy is led by Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, which employs an "indirect approach" to counter violent extremism, conducting operations to strengthen partner nation security capacity to enable long-term regional stability, prevent conflict and protect U.S. and Coalition interests.

### **AQ in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)**

Just across the Gulf of Aden from the northern Somali coastline, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is the AQ affiliate that poses the greatest threat to the U.S. Al-Qaeda in Yemen was responsible for the September 2008 attack on U.S. Embassy Sana'a, and subsequently in January 2009

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the Saudi and Yemeni al-Qaeda branches merged to form al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). AQAP is responsible for killing South Korean tourists in Yemen in March 2009, the attempted assassination of Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Nayef in August 2009, and the attempted December 25, 2009 attack on a U.S. commercial airliner. Like most al-Qaida operations, the attempted bombing of Northwest flight 253 near Detroit, Michigan was relatively simple in design. What is most concerning about this attack is the manner in which al-Qaida sought out, recruited, trained, and successfully dispatched their operative under the close scrutiny of U.S. intelligence. We should expect them to continue pursuing operatives that fit this description – particularly those they believe will have the highest chance of getting past U.S. security screening procedures.

To defeat AQAP, the Department of Defense cooperates closely with Yemeni security forces. Since 2006, we have provided over \$98 million in CT assistance to increase their capabilities to prevent cross border arms trafficking and regional foreign-fighter flows, develop competent counterterrorism forces, and mitigate the threat of improvised explosive devices. We anticipate continuing a high level of commitment to developing Yemen's military and counterterrorism capacity in the future. In addition to counterterrorism cooperation, the Department will continue security assistance and training exercises to expand the capacity of the Yemeni Coast Guard and Navy to counter regional maritime security challenges, including smuggling, trafficking-in-persons, and piracy. Through a broad array of bilateral and multilateral initiatives, the Department supports U.S. government efforts to address Yemen's political, economic, and humanitarian concerns.

### **AQ in Iraq (AQI)**

Although still capable of dramatic suicide bombings, al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) has been declining since the June 2006 U.S. operation that led to the death of former AQI leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

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Despite spectacular attacks in Baghdad late in 2009, overall deaths from terrorism for the year were only about 1/10<sup>th</sup> of their 2006-2007 peak. AQI is largely isolated around Mosul, and still receives some support from external sources across the Syria border. Their once-powerful foreign fighter pipeline is greatly diminished, and their focus is on disrupting the transition to Iraqi control, the withdrawal of U.S. forces, and the resurrection of Sunni-Shia violence. The U.S. military continues to provide training and assistance to Iraqi counterterrorism forces, facilitating the creation of a Second Iraqi SOF Brigade headquarters in August 2009. This will allow the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade to focus on security around Baghdad, and the new 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade to focus on the rest of Iraq. We will continue to provide CT assistance to Iraq until US forces are withdrawn at the end of 2011.

### **AQ in Southeast Asia**

Al-Qaida has always been attracted to the large population of Muslims in Southeast Asia. Long before the attacks of 9/11, al-Qaida sought to exploit Jemmah Islamiyah (JI), an organization led by Indonesian extremists with cells scattered across Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and with links to the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines. JI's hotel bombings in Bali and Jakarta 2005-2003 killed hundreds. Despite these attacks, Indonesian security forces have had significant successes. Most recently, in September 2009, they killed Nordin Mohammed Top, the most wanted JI member.

The U.S. military counterterrorism commitment in the region is anchored by the Joint Special Operations Task Force - Philippines (JSOTF-P) and is supported by other training and assistance engagements throughout Southeast Asia. JSOTF-P is comprised of between 500 and 600 personnel from all four military series, including Army Special Operations Forces, Navy Seals, air Force special operators and a host of support personnel from all four U.S. military services. The mission of JSOTF-P

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is to support the comprehensive approach of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in their fight against terrorism -- especially JI and ASG – in the southern Philippines. JSOTF-P does not engage in combat, but at the request of the Government of the Philippines, provides support for the AFT to defeat terrorists and create the conditions necessary for peace, stability and prosperity.

Although I have not covered every aspect of al-Qaida, this short review of the core element and numerous affiliates illustrates their persistent pursuit of a trans-regional enterprise intent on attacking the United States, its allies, and our interests abroad. They are at war with us globally, and we must continue to counter them in every region. Thank you again for inviting me today, and I will gladly address your questions.

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