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**The Current Situation in Iraq
and Afghanistan**

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INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, Senator Levin, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. The testimony I am about to present represents what we know and judge to be the state of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and is the product of the dedicated men and women of the Defense Intelligence Agency. These outstanding military and civilian intelligence professionals provide our war fighters, defense planners, and national security policy makers with information and knowledge essential to our efforts around the world, but especially to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of them are executing their missions in remote and dangerous areas of Iraq and Afghanistan. I thank them for their service and the exceptional work they are doing for our nation. I would also like to thank you for your continued support of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

IRAQ

We have seen some recent developments that give hope for progress. These include the verdict against Saddam Hussein, efforts to address problems associated with de-Ba'athification, increased cooperation between Sunni Arab tribes and the government in al Anbar Province, arrest warrants for Ministry of Interior personnel accused of abuses, and the expulsion of radicals from Muqtada al-Sadr's movement.

We note the continued development and increased capability of the Iraqi Security Forces and police. The ISF will meet manning, training, and equipment milestones, improving unit capabilities. Nevertheless, the ISF will remain dependent on Coalition support. It will also be essential that ISF leaders reject militia influence and instill discipline in their formations to gain legitimacy with the population.

The economy has seen moderate growth despite the security situation, with continued improvement in basic services, economic reforms and institution-building.

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The conflict is unquestionably complex and difficult. The fight to define post-Saddam Iraq has been primarily an intra-Arab struggle to determine how power and authority will be distributed. Iraqi nationalists, ex-Baathists, former military, angry Sunni, Jihadists, foreign fighters, and al Qaida provide an overlapping, complex and multi-polar Sunni insurgent and terrorist environment. Shia militias and Shia militants, some Kurdish Peshmerga, and extensive criminal activity further contribute to violence, instability, and insecurity.

The U.S. presence obscured the true nature of this fight between and among competing groups for power as observers focused on insurgent attacks and rhetoric directed at the United States. Today, DIA assesses the conditions for the further deterioration of security and instability exists within this ongoing, violent struggle for power. Although a significant breakdown of central authority has not occurred, Iraq has moved closer to this possibility primarily because of weak governance, increasing security challenges, and no agreement on a national compact.

The conflict has changed in character, scope, and dynamics and is increasingly a sectarian struggle for power and the right to define Iraq's future identity. Overall attacks averaged approximately 180 per day in October 2006, up from approximately 170 the previous month, and 70 in January 2006. Daily average of attacks against Iraqi Security Forces in October more than doubled the number reported in January, approximately 30 compared to 13. Daily average of attacks on civilians in October was four times higher than reported in January, approximately 40 compared to 10. The perception of unchecked violence is creating an atmosphere of fear and hardening sectarianism which is empowering militias and vigilante groups, hastening middle-class exodus, and shaking confidence in government and security forces. Sectarian violence, a weak central government, problems in basic services, and high unemployment are causing more Iraqis to turn to sectarian groups, militias, and insurgents for basic needs, imperiling Iraqi unity.

Despite ongoing Iraqi government and Coalition operations against terrorists, Sunni Arab insurgent groups, and Shia militias, violence in Iraq continues to increase in scope, complexity,

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and lethality. The Sunni Arab-based insurgency has gained strength and capacity despite political progress and security force developments. Nationwide, insurgents still conduct most attacks against the Coalition and ISF and retain the resources, capabilities, and support to sustain high levels of violence.

Attacks by terrorist groups account for only a fraction of insurgent violence throughout Iraq, yet the high-profile nature of these operations and the tactics they use have a disproportionate impact on the population and on perceptions of stability. Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI), formerly led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and currently headed by Abu Ayyub al-Masri, is the largest and most active of the Iraqi-based terrorist groups. AQI's targeting strategies have not changed significantly in the wake of al-Zarqawi's death on 7 June, and attacks against Iraqi government targets and Coalition forces continue apace. In addition, AQI is one of the most visible perpetrators of anti-Shia attacks in Iraq—a hallmark of its strategy since 2003—and has capitalized on the current cycle of sectarian violence by increasing perceptions that its operations are defending Sunni interests. AQI also poses a threat outside Iraq, as it is the only terrorist group in the country with known aspirations for external attacks, including possibly against targets in Europe and the U.S. homeland. Because of his involvement with al-Qaida-linked terrorists since the early 1980s, Abu Ayyub may have increased ties to al-Qaida senior leaders; these could enhance AQI's external attack capabilities. AQI operates with relative freedom in Iraq's Sunni-dominated territories, and as long as this remains true, the group will pose a threat to Iraq's internal stability and to Western interests abroad. Ansar al-Sunna, the second-most prominent terrorist group in Iraq, also poses a threat to Iraqi stability and has longstanding ties to AQI and external al-Qaida elements.

Baghdad remains the center of the conflict as Shia and Sunni Arabs fight for territorial control and political influence. Sectarian attacks constitute most of the violence in the mixed-ethnicity areas in and around the capital, while the Coalition remains the primary target in the Shia south and Sunni west.

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Recent Coalition and ISF operations in Baghdad have achieved limited success. In August, levels of violence temporarily decreased, primarily in Sunni Arab neighborhoods. However, as armed groups adapted to the Coalition presence, and the ISF was unable to exert authority once Coalition forces moved on, attacks returned to and even surpassed preoperational levels. Among a range of factors, the government's reluctance to conduct operations in Shia militia strongholds also decreased the effectiveness and potential for success of the Baghdad efforts.

The Iraqi government of Prime Minister Maliki is making progress but is likely to remain fragile owing to very difficult challenges, lack of experience and capacity, mistrust, and constitutional constraints. Iraqi government officials continue attempts to achieve national reconciliation, but attacks against civilians, a key driver of ethno-sectarian conflict, continue to increase. Political leaders' inability to resolve key issues such as federalism, de-Baathfication, amnesty for insurgents, and militia integration also contribute to continued Sunni Arab discontent, fueling support for terrorist and insurgent groups. Sectarian difference limit the effectiveness of government as groups maintain a hardline stance on contentious issues.

Shia militias are a growing impediment to stability. The Ministry of Interior and the police are heavily infiltrated by members of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq or SCIRI's Badr Corps and Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi. The Jaysh al-Mahdi often operates under the protection or approval of Iraqi police to detain, torture, and kill suspected Sunni insurgents and innocent Sunni civilians. Sadr continues to refuse any discussion of disbanding his militia. Some clandestine Jaysh al-Mahdi cells likely operate outside Sadr's direct guidance and conduct operations against the Coalition.

The Iraqi economy has experienced moderate growth despite the security situation, which continues to impede and increase overall costs of reconstruction. However, the inability to realize significant improvements in the oil and fuels sector and in electricity production and distribution creates drag on the economy while undermining the average Iraqi citizens' support for the central government and the Coalition.

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DIA judges the continued Coalition presence as the primary counter to a break down in central authority, which would have grave consequences for the people of Iraq, stability in the region, and U.S. strategic interests. No major political figure in Iraq has endorsed the notion of civil war or partition, and most political and religious leaders continue to restrain their communities. Moreover, DIA judges that Iraqi Arabs retain a strong sense of national identity and that most Iraqis recall a past in which sectarian identity did not have the significance it does today. Although leaders across the political spectrum who are participating in the government continue to talk and search for a positive way forward, the challenges to bringing stability and security with a cohesive, unified, and effective government remain significant.

AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan the Taliban-led insurgency, aided by al-Qaida, is incapable of directly threatening the central government and expanding its resilient support networks and areas of influence beyond strongholds in the Pashtun south and east as long as international force levels are sustained at current levels. Nonetheless, DIA judges that, despite having absorbed heavy combat losses in 2006, the insurgency has strengthened its capabilities and influence with its core base of Pashtun communities. Violence this year is likely to be twice as high as the violence level seen in 2005. Insurgents have significantly increased their use of suicide operations. If a sustained international military and Afghan security presence throughout the volatile Pashtun south and east is not established alongside credible civil administrations, central government control over these areas will be substantially restricted. In 2007, insurgents are likely to sustain their use of more visible, aggressive, and lethal tactics in their continued effort to undermine the willingness of the international community to support military and reconstruction operations in Afghanistan and to highlight the weakness of the central government.

Al-Qaida remains committed to reestablishing a fundamentalist Islamic government in Afghanistan and has become increasingly successful in defining Afghanistan as a critical battleground against the West and its regional allies. In 2006, although the Taliban continues to drive the insurgency, al-Qaida once again appears to be attempting to reinvigorate its operations

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in the country from safe-havens in the Afghan-Pakistan border region. These efforts are characterized by an evolution in al-Qaida's increasingly cooperative relationship with insurgent networks. Without a fundamental, comprehensive change in the permissiveness of the border region, al-Qaida will remain a dangerous threat to security in Afghanistan and to U.S. interests around the globe.

Since 2001, the Afghan government has successfully established national-level political institutions by drafting a new constitution, holding a legitimate presidential election, and creating a democratically elected National Assembly. However, local government institutions receive limited resources from Kabul and struggle to provide effective governance. The Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police are also struggling to promote security, particularly in the volatile south and east. They remain hindered by a shortage of skilled personnel, tribal and ethnic rivalries, and corruption. Nearly five years after the Taliban's fall, many Afghans expected the situation to be better by now and are beginning to blame President Karzai. These unrealized expectations are likely contributing to an erosion of support for his administration. Nevertheless, President Karzai remains the most powerful political figure in Afghanistan and retains the widest body of support. He will need concrete successes in the months ahead to convince Afghans his administration still has momentum and to provide an effective counter to Taliban advances.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, Senator Levin, members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to discuss with you our assessment of the current security situations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our nation is engaged in a long war against terrorism and violent extremism. Providing support to our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines engaged in insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Global War on Terrorism is our first priority. And thank you for your continuing support for the men and women of the Defense Intelligence Agency.