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U.S. Senator for Indiana

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Opening Statement for Hearing on Yemen

U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Dick Lugar made the following statement at today's hearing.

I thank Chairman Kerry for holding this timely hearing, and I join him in welcoming our distinguished witnesses. Last year, I was pleased to co-sponsor with Senator Cardin, S. Res. 341, which passed by unanimous consent in early December. The purpose of the resolution was to raise awareness about the problems Yemen faces, including the threat from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Among other points, the resolution called on the President to “give sufficient weight to the situation in Yemen in efforts to prevent terrorist attacks on the United States, United States allies, and Yemeni civilians.”

The resolution also emphasized the need to address Yemen's severe under-development and to promote good governance, without which stability in that country will be elusive. The appeal of Islamic extremism in Yemen is heightened by the country's staggering unemployment rate. With half the population under the age of 15, an enormous generation is coming of age without economic opportunity. As one thoughtful Yemeni official said recently, “Either we give our young people hope, or someone else will give them an illusion.”

The United States must work urgently and creatively to meet the potential terrorist threat from Yemen. But, we can't do it alone. First and foremost, we need the unequivocal commitment of Yemen's government to combat al-Qaeda. Our long-term strategy must account for the reality that pursuing al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is neither logistically easy, nor politically popular with the Yemeni people. We need to communicate to Yemen's people that our battle is not with them. We should demonstrate our common interests in promoting economic prosperity, supporting good governance, and fighting violence and extremism. We should not be shy about advocating political reform and decentralization, goals that will both resonate with the Yemeni people and promote greater stability. To this end, we should develop common cause with reform-oriented officials in the government and with like-minded donors. We should help empower civil society organizations in Yemen that want to be part of the solution.

Last Fall, I asked the Foreign Relations Committee minority staff to study the situation in Yemen. I am circulating the staff report (available at http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_senate_committee_prints&docid=f:54245.pdf), so that its findings may help inform our deliberations. Indeed, in my view, the debate about Yemen needs to be refocused. In the days since the foiled December 25th attempt to blow up Northwest Airlines Flight 253 en route to Detroit, the media has focused much attention on after-action analysis of the series of human and systemic errors that allowed the would-be bomber to board his flight. Much of this analysis is connected to fixing blame for the event. This reaction is inevitable, and perhaps necessary to correct security flaws, but it does not address the more difficult problem of the terrorist threat emanating from Yemen. If we are to have any hope of neutralizing this threat and helping that country move away from the brink of state failure, our nation's policymakers need to comprehend the intricate social, economic, and historic forces at play. That is why we are here today. I hope our witnesses will help inform the policy debate and generate options.

To that end, I would ask our witnesses to offer their observations on the appeal of violent extremism in Yemen. What factors have allowed al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to regroup in Yemen? Has AQAP taken advantage of the Yemeni government's preoccupation with the rebellion in the north and a secessionist

movement in the south? The existence of swaths of ungoverned spaces are inviting to this terrorist organization, but what kind of support network does AQAP enjoy in Yemen? What are AQAP's key vulnerabilities, and how can they be exploited?

We also need to better understand Yemen's other conflicts. What are the dynamics of the war in the north, and the underpinnings of the secessionist aspirations of the south? What are the prospects that these conflicts can be resolved peacefully? Yemen also faces a multitude of socio-economic challenges, including depleting oil reserves, rapidly diminishing water resources, and widespread poverty and unemployment. To what degree is stability in Yemen dependent on addressing these problems?

To the extent that Saudi Arabia exercises the greatest leverage over its neighbor, how can the United States most effectively partner with Riyadh to help address Yemen's challenges? Are there opportunities to work more effectively with the Gulf Cooperation Council? What creative ideas is the Administration bringing to the Friends of Yemen meeting in London this week?

Finally, we need a comprehensive view of the humanitarian crises in Yemen. What are the obstacles to the provision of humanitarian relief to those who have been displaced? What is the status of Somali and Ethiopian refugees, and what more can be done to address their plight? Is there a nexus, as some have suggested, between AQAP and Somalia?

I appreciate the depth of experience that our witnesses possess on these issues, and I look forward to their insights.

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