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**Brian Michael Jenkins, Security Research Director for the Mineta Transportation Institute,  
Testifies before the Senate of Canada on al Qaeda-inspired Terrorism**

*The testimony, broadcast on C-SPAN, summarized al Qaeda's current situation, its strengths and weaknesses, and what the West can expect in the future.*

**San Jose, Calif., December 6, 2010** – Brian Michael Jenkins, Director of Transportation Security Research for the [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) (MTI), testified today before the Senate of Canada's Special Committee on Anti-Terrorism. His briefing covered the current state of the campaign against al Qaeda-inspired terrorism around the world. The testimony was also broadcast on C-SPAN. In addition to his role with MTI, Mr. Jenkins, an international expert on terrorism, also is a senior adviser to the president of the RAND Corporation.

He said that, nearly a decade after the September 11 attacks, analysts are still remarkably divided in their assessments of the global campaign against this type of terrorism – in part because it is difficult to calibrate the adversary's determination.

“Al Qaeda has become many things and must be assessed from different angles,” said Mr. Jenkins. “It is heir to a long tradition of jihad, the banner carrier and symbol of a radical expression of faith. It is author of an ideology and strategy of war, the center of a global network of like-minded fanatics, the instigator of a global terrorist campaign, and an active communications system augmented by an online army... It is a source of inspiration and a contributor to ongoing insurgencies, an ally of other extremist groups, a conveyer of societal and individual discontents, a magnet for the most violent jihadists, and a source of legitimacy for their violence.”

He went on to present an update on the changes in the organization since 2001. In order to survive as the center of this armed jihad, he said, al Qaeda had to protect its own leadership; relocate to a new secure base; reconfigure itself and find a new, more clandestine way of operating; develop a command system able to function in a more hostile environment. It had to be able to communicate with its field commanders, operatives, potential volunteers, and constituents; maintain its cash flow; and, above all, continue its terrorist campaign in order to continue its recruiting. Al Qaeda has managed to do most of these things, he said.

Rather than continue a centralized operation in the face of opposition, it has become more decentralized, with local affiliates and allies. It appears strongest when it attaches itself to local conflicts in weak states. Al Qaeda also benefits from its relationship with nearby like-minded groups not under its control and that have their own political and military agendas, such as Afghanistan's Taliban, the TTP, LeT, and others in Pakistan and India, Mr. Jenkins noted.

“Al Qaeda-inspired jihadists have not been able to carry out a successful, significant terrorist operation in the West since 2005, although numerous plots have been uncovered and thwarted,” he testified. “Al Qaeda's paramount objective remains building an army of believers to take up arms, provoking a worldwide armed movement... The volume and sophistication of al Qaeda's communications have increased. There are now thousands of websites devoted to exhortation and instruction in the means of violence.”

Al Qaeda's affiliates demonstrate a continuing capacity for violence, he said. The situation in Afghanistan, where a year ago, American and NATO forces were judged to be losing, has not yet convincingly turned around. Analysts now argue about the importance of the struggle in Afghanistan to al Qaeda's survival. Meanwhile, the growing role played by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula gives the global enterprise a new base of operations. Al Qaeda's campaign may morph, but it will likely continue for many years.

Mr. Jenkins also provided insight about how the situation may appear to Osama bin Laden. "Al Qaeda asserts that Islam is under assault, in mortal danger from the West," he said. "Its leaders portray events since 9/11 as confirmation of their warning that hostile infidels led by America are determined to conquer all of Islam and that this aggression will continue unless it is checked by armed resistance. Apostate and corrupt governments of Muslims, in al Qaeda's worldview, have ceased to be defenders of the faith. Instead, they have joined the oppressors."

Reward comes from participation, not the outcome of battles, he testified. The conflict is process-oriented, not progress-oriented as in the West. But triumph is inevitable [they believe] because God is on the side of the jihadists. Strategy does not drive operations. Operations *are* the strategy. To scatter and exhaust its enemies, al Qaeda must launch attacks on all fronts. The battlefield is everywhere. There are no front lines, no home fronts, no distinction between combatants and non-combatants.

To someone like bin Laden, the world's current economic crisis is further evidence that they are on the right path. It is God's punishment for the infidels' materialism and corruption, proof of their decline and eventual defeat.

Home-grown terrorism is a growing concern. Mr. Jenkins said, "Al Qaeda's recruiting was always global, but it has become more difficult to get its acolytes to training sites in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Recognizing this reality, the organization now places increased emphasis on do-it-yourself terrorism, urging local would-be warriors to do whatever they can, wherever they are."

Al Qaeda knows that homegrown attacks provoke greater alarm than engagements on distant battlefronts, he said. They can count on the news media, partisan politics, and public anxiety to exaggerate the threat. People in the West have unrealistically come to expect 100 percent security, viewing any terrorist attempt as a failure on the part of those charged with their protection. Even foiled terrorism attempts and deliberate hoaxes have utility. They require little investment, which al Qaeda now brags about, but they bring high returns in creating psychological terror.

For its recruits, al Qaeda promises masculine glory and a sensual afterlife to frustrated young men. But martyrdom is not a political program, and re-establishment of a caliphate offers little to those seeking political freedom, equality under the law, employment, education, a better life on earth for themselves and their children, which may be why most of al Qaeda's intended audience has ignored its summons. The greatest long-term threat to al Qaeda is irrelevance.

"Nonetheless, al Qaeda will continue to be a tenacious and resilient foe," Mr. Jenkins concluded. "Its campaign, now in its third decade, will almost certainly go on. Successfully countering it must be viewed as a very long-term effort—not a finite war with a clear beginning and end, or a permanent war without end, but not the peace we would all prefer."

## **ABOUT BRIAN MICHAEL JENKINS**

Mr. Jenkins is an international authority on terrorism and sophisticated crime. He directs MTI's research on protecting surface transportation against terrorist attacks. He is also a senior advisor to the

president of RAND. From 1989-98, Mr. Jenkins was deputy chairman of Kroll Associates, an international investigative and consulting firm. Before that, he was chairman of RAND's Political Science Department, where he also directed research on political violence.

He holds a BA in fine arts and a Masters Degree in history, both from UCLA. He studied in Mexico and Guatemala, where he was a Fulbright Fellow and received a fellowship from the Organization of American States. Mr. Jenkins was a paratrooper and a captain in the Green Berets, serving in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. He returned to Vietnam as a member of the Long Range Planning Task Group, receiving the Department of the Army's highest award for his service. He authored several articles, reports and books, including *International Terrorism: A New Mode of Conflict* and *Will Terrorists Go Nuclear?*

## **ABOUT THE MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE**

The [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) (MTI) was established by Congress in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and was reauthorized under TEA-21 and again under SAFETEA-LU. The institute is funded by Congress through the US Department of Transportation's (DOT) Research and Innovative Technology Administration, by the California Legislature through the Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and by other public and private grants and donations, including grants from the US Department of Homeland Security. DOT selected MTI as a National Center of Excellence following competitions in 2002 and 2006. The internationally respected members of the MTI Board of Trustees represent all major surface transportation modes. MTI's focus on policy and management resulted from the Board's assessment of the transportation industry's unmet needs. That led directly to choosing the San José State University College of Business as the Institute's home. MTI conducts research, education, and information and technology transfer, focusing on multimodal surface transportation policy and management issues. Visit [www.transweb.sjsu.edu](http://www.transweb.sjsu.edu)

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