

**Interview of Ambassador John D. Negroponte
Director of National Intelligence**

With Mr. Gary Thomas of Voice of America

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Transcript – As Aired**

Part I

MR. THOMAS: The United States' top intelligence official says that although the Islamic-based terrorist movement is growing, counter-terrorism efforts have kept the threat in check. Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte says the recently revealed National Intelligence Estimate has been misunderstood. VOA correspondent Gary Thomas talked with the intelligence chief and has this report.

In a rare interview, Director John Negroponte said the recently revealed National Intelligence Estimate has been mischaracterized.

AMB. NEGROPONTE: I think it's important to bear in mind that this is not a net assessment of how we're doing in the war on terror. I think some people have mistaken our description of the current state of the al-Qaida movement in the world with how we're doing against it, although we point out right in the first line of the report that they have suffered some serious setbacks in recent years.

MR. THOMAS: But, he adds, the estimate does conclude the jihadist movement, as it has come to be known, continues to grow.

AMB. NEGROPONTE: The judgment is that it is spreading. And the report talks about some of the factors that fuel the jihadist movement: grievances, poor governance, the situation in Iraq – those are among the factors that are cited, and the fact that a movement that was concentrated perhaps in certain parts of the world before, like in Afghanistan, has now manifested itself in a number of different locations, in South Asia, in Southeast Asia, and in the Middle East.

MR. THOMAS: A National Intelligence Estimate, or N.I.E., is the highest collective judgment of the 16 agencies that make up the intelligence community on a given subject or area.

News of the latest terrorism estimate was first leaked to some leading U.S. news organizations last month. Most stories zeroed in on the point that the war in Iraq has worsened the terrorist threat by giving al-Qaida a recruiting motive and an operational training ground. The estimate has become a political issue in a mid-term election year. After it appeared, President Bush ordered portions of it declassified.

Director Negroponte said that was necessary to clear up what he said were misperceptions about it.

AMB. NEGROPONTE: Once parts of the report have been selectively leaked, for whatever purpose, political or otherwise, there are times, then, when we feel obliged in order to set the record straight for the American public to declassify more of the report for the benefit of the American people to judge for themselves.

MR. THOMAS: Progress in Iraq – where Director Negroponte served as U.S. ambassador – is mixed, the intelligence chief says.

AMB. NEGROPONTE: Certainly Iraq faces a very challenging and difficult situation. I think that there are probably areas of improvement and then there are areas of great difficulty.

MR. THOMAS: He acknowledges the alarming growth in sectarian violence between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslim militias as a significant threat to the fledgling Iraqi government.

AMB. NEGROPONTE: There has certainly been a rise in sectarian violence, of which we're all painfully aware, and that's been true since earlier this year. And I think it was sparked in part, certainly, by the bombing of a Shia mosque in Samarra, Iraq, on the 22nd of February.

MR. THOMAS: The spy chief says the success or failure of efforts to curb the violence in Baghdad will be key.

AMB. NEGROPONTE: But I think great efforts are being made to improve the situation. And the focus of that effort is in the city of Baghdad, where a large measure of the violence does occur. And significant efforts are being undertaken by both the Iraqi government and its forces, as well as United States forces. And I think a lot hinges on the effectiveness of those efforts in the weeks and months ahead.

MR. THOMAS: He says work has begun on a separate National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq because there has been no N.I.E. on Iraq in about four years, which, if correct, would date back to before the 2003 U.S. invasion and the toppling of Saddam Hussein. Director Negroponte said the Iraq N.I.E. will not be finished for "some time," as he put it, but gave no timetable for its completion.