

HOUSE PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
111TH CONGRESS, 2ND SESSION

Opening Statement
of
Chairman Silvestre Reyes

Annual Threat Assessment Hearing

Wednesday, February 3, 2010

HVC-210

Today marks the Fourth Annual Threat Assessment Hearing that I have chaired. It is one of the rare opportunities for the Committee to receive open, unclassified testimony on the threats the Intelligence Community is working to address throughout the world.

Our purpose here today is to address the threats we will face in the future; it is not to Monday-morning quarterback. What has happened in the last year is not irrelevant. The challenges we have faced are in some ways indications of what we will face in the future.

We've seen in recent months, the tragedy of "self-radicalization" and home-grown threats, in the attack on the soldiers and civilians at Fort Hood. We've seen, of course, the continued efforts of al-Qa'ida to strike at us, in the attempted bombing on Christmas Day and in the conspiracy of Najibullah Zazi in New York.

In the Christmas Day attempt, we saw that we still have far to go in improving our defenses against terrorism. In the Zazi case, frankly, we saw that sometimes we get it right. Finally, on December 30 in Khost, Afghanistan, we saw the grave risks faced by the men and women of the Intelligence Community. They paid the ultimate price and made a sacrifice we will never forget.

The central lesson of all of these things is clear. Today, more than eight years after September 11, 2001, our principal challenge is the same: Identify terrorist plots and stop them before they harm American interests.

Al-Qa'ida and its affiliates are as determined as ever to harm the United States. Addressing that threat, I think, involves attacking the problem on three fronts: at home, in the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and finally, in emerging terrorist safe havens.

On the home front, we have to address the threat of terrorism within the United States and the problem of self-radicalization. The shootings at Fort Hood were a devastating reminder of the threat posed by self-radicalized extremists inside the United States.

Director Blair, what steps will you take to identify and address terrorist threats within the United States? How will we strike the proper balance between law enforcement and

intelligence? I know this issue has been hotly debated lately; I want to know what you'll do going forward.

In the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, our efforts to fight extremists are greatly dependent on cooperation from both governments. Those governments struggle with the challenges of both internal threats and corruption.

Despite the best intentions of our allies, the Afghan Taliban is gaining strength. This presents one of our biggest challenges: fighting extremism in a nation that continues to struggle to provide basic services to its citizens. What are our plans for turning back the Taliban and building stability in Afghanistan?

Over the past seven years, the war in Iraq placed a huge burden on the Intelligence Community's resources. While the Intelligence Community continues to support our war-fighting operations in Iraq, I am particularly interested to hear how you are supporting the President's strategy of increased operations in Afghanistan as the United States continues to draw down its troops in Iraq.

In Pakistan, the government recently claimed that, due to strain on its military, Pakistan could not launch any new offensives against extremists in North Waziristan for at least six months. What effects do Pakistan's limitations have on the Intelligence Community's ability to counter extremism in the region?

A comprehensive approach to terrorism has to deal with emerging terrorist safe havens. We only have to remember the bombing of the *USS Cole* in October 2000 to know that the threat from terrorist activities in Yemen is not new. However, Yemen is not the only area of the world that affords terrorists relative safety to plan, train, and launch attacks against the United States and its allies.

In past years, this Committee has taken particular interest in Somalia and areas of North Africa that have a weak central government or experience a degree of instability that might allow these safe havens to develop. My primary concern in raising this issue is one of sufficient resources: Does the Intelligence Community have sufficient collection and analytic resources directed at understanding the political, economic, military, and leadership dynamics of these nations?

Terrorism, sadly, is not the only threat we face. Iran and North Korea still pose significant threats to U.S. interests and to international security. I remain extremely concerned about Iran's nuclear weapons program, especially in light of the revelation of a second nuclear enrichment facility near Qom. It seems that the prospects for diplomatic dialogue are diminishing as the Iranian government's crackdown on its people becomes more violent.

I am also quite concerned about North Korea's nuclear and missile program. In January, North Korea issued two statements proposing peace treaty talks and sanctions removal before it returns to nuclear talks. However, just last week, North Korea exchanged fire with South Korea, raising regional tensions. What is the Intelligence Community's current assessment of this program? And have we seen any willingness from North Korea to dismantle the program as a precondition to negotiations?

UNCLASSIFIED

China still clearly poses a threat to our national interests. Although the President has promised a more conciliatory era in U.S.-China relations, we cannot ignore Chinese-originated cyber attacks and the continued and significant build-up of the Chinese Navy. Despite reports to the contrary, I hope that China remains a top intelligence priority.

The United States continues to be the victim of a disturbing increase in the scope, virulence, and potency of cyber attacks. Whether the perpetrator is a terrorist organization or a state actor, the threat to our energy, financial, communications, and security infrastructures remains the same. The Intelligence Community has a critical role to play in understanding the threat, securing our classified information technology systems, and working with the business community to secure its critical infrastructure.

In the last year, we have stepped back from the brink of financial ruin, and even of a global financial depression. Times are still hard, yes, but the greatest threat has passed. But I fear that one cyber attack could put us right back where we were a year ago – on the brink of economic disaster.

Finally, I'm interested to hear your assessment of a situation that I continue to monitor closely: the rampant violence in Mexico related to drug trafficking organizations and criminal gangs.

While Mexico has seen a number of encouraging successes this year, including the arrests of Teodoro Eduardo Garcia Simental and Carlos Beltrán Leyva, and the death of Arturo Beltrán Leyva, I remain very concerned.

Right across the border from my district, Ciudad Juarez has seen a staggering number of murders, kidnappings, and other violent crimes. Just last Saturday, several gunmen brazenly murdered 16 people, most of them below the age of 20. The brutality of this attack was shocking, even to the people of Juarez who have witnessed mass shootings and an unbelievable level of violence for more than two years.

This is not just a matter of Mexico's national security. Those of us who live on the border know that our futures are linked and that narco-related criminal activity is just as much our problem as Mexico's. To that end, I'm interested to hear how the Intelligence Community is coordinating with the Government of Mexico in the continued fight against narco-traffickers.

Director Blair, again, I thank you for being here. I know I've given you a lot to respond to; I wish it were a simpler world.

I will close by noting that I have great respect for the men and women of the Intelligence Community who are working under your guidance throughout the world. I take great pride in working on their behalf in the Congress, and I am committed to making sure that they have the resources they need to protect our nation from the many threats that face us.

UNCLASSIFIED