



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –April 9, 2008

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Hoekstra Statement on House Intelligence Committee al-Qaeda Hearing

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich., the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, issued the following opening statement, as prepared for delivery, on today's House Intelligence Committee open hearing on al-Qaeda:*

“Thank you Chairman Reyes and thank you to the witnesses appearing before us today. This hearing today gives us a chance to discuss, before the American people, the continuing threat our nation faces from al-Qaeda and radical Jihadist terrorism.

“While I believe it is beneficial for the American people to hear more about the al-Qaeda threat, I also want to issue the following caution: As well informed as our witnesses may be, they may not know and they certainly cannot discuss in an open setting, what the intelligence community is doing today to pursue al-Qaeda. The record almost certainly will be incomplete and misleading without this information.

“More than six years after 9/11, our nation seems to be at a crossroads.

“On the one hand, it is clear that our homeland has not been attacked since that tragic, fateful day. This cannot be called anything other than a success, and it is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the men and women of our intelligence community and military.

“On the other hand, there is a clear tendency by some in America, and in this Congress, to look at our success over the past several years as a cause or excuse to let down our guard. They have confused al-Qaeda's failure to successfully carry out an attack on our homeland as a lack of intent or capability on the part of al-Qaeda.

“The reality is that al-Qaeda has well expressed its intent, and I believe has the capability to carry out an attack on our soil. What they have lacked over the past several years is the free reign to plot in the shadows, and to do so without fear of a U.S. response.

“With our nation and freedom under attack--the smoke and dust still billowing from the ruins of the World Trade Center--President Bush huddled with his national security team to discuss what needed to be done to protect our nation from another catastrophic attack. The president’s advisors told him the tools and methods U.S. intelligence agencies needed to track and combat radical Jihadist groups like al Qaeda.

“Thus were born many of the highly effective, anti-terrorist tools that have helped keep this nation: The Terrorist Surveillance Program, The Terrorist Finance and Tracking Program, The High Value Terrorist Detainee Program.

“These programs were all briefed to congressional leaders, including Speaker Pelosi, without objection. In fact, not a concern was raised until these programs were leaked to the press, unfortunately turning them into political fodder instead of the valuable, clandestine, counterterrorist tools they were designed to be.

“I have to mention the fact that as we are having this hearing today, our intelligence capability to protect the American people, our embassies, embassy personnel, troops overseas and our allies continues to erode. As Senate Intelligence Chairman Jay Rockefeller declared on the Senate floor in February, ‘the quality of the intelligence that we are going to be receiving is going to be degraded.’

“It’s not enough to discuss al-Qaeda and jihadist terrorism, and ignore the erosion in the tools that the intelligence community says it needs; the very same tools that have kept our homeland safe for more six years since 9/11. We need to strengthen our nation’s terrorist surveillance capabilities by fixing the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

“Some have asked, ‘Why does the United States need to employ tough counterterrorist programs?’ The answer is because the radical Jihadist threat did not end with the 9/11 attacks, nor did the responsibility of the President and Congress to protect this nation.

“If you listen to the statements of Osama bin Ladin and his deputy, Ayman Zawahiri, it is easy to understand the seriousness of this threat, its global implications, and the determination of radical Jihadists to strike our American homeland.

“Osama bin Laden declared ‘war’ against the United States with little fanfare in 1996 when he issued a ‘Fatwa’ titled ‘Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places.’ He acted on this so-called declaration of war with al Qaeda attacks against the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998 and the USS Cole in 2000.

“Bin Laden claims parallels between the American presence in Iraq and the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. For example, according to a strategy document posted to on a Jihadist website in 2003, ‘With guerilla warfare the Americans were defeated in Vietnam and the Soviets were defeated in Afghanistan. This is the method that expelled the direct Crusader colonialism from most of the Muslim lands.’

“The purpose of al Qaeda’s terrorist campaign is supposedly to establish Osama bin Laden’s brand of radical Islam over what he claims is ‘the Caliphate,’ a region that in bin Laden’s mind constitutes historical ‘Muslim lands’ extending from Morocco to Indonesia. He said in 1998 that ‘the pious caliphate will start from Afghanistan.’ Zawahiri made a similar statement in an October 2005 letter when he wrote ‘the goal in this age is the establishment of a caliphate in the manner of the Prophet.’ In 2006, Zawahiri said, ‘The reinstatement of Islamic rule ... is the individual duty of every Muslim ... with every land occupied by infidels.’

“Some have asserted, and I expect we will hear this a lot from the other side, that the radical Jihadist threat in Iraq is very limited or unreal and that the U.S. should withdraw to focus on the so-called ‘real’ war on terror, which some claim is confined to Afghanistan and the FATA in Pakistan. I can’t help but wonder if those who are so focused on forcing our withdrawal from Iraq would be more comfortable with us invading a sovereign, nuclear-armed nation? As challenging as our relationship with Pakistan has been at times, it is also true that Pakistan has helped us capture more al-Qaeda terrorists than any other nation.

“Others here today will say that the only reason al-Qaeda is in Iraq is because we are there, but this ignores the fact that al-Qaeda, like a moth drawn to a flame, will attack America and our people anywhere they can. I refer you again to the al-Qaeda led attacks against our embassies in Africa and the attack against the Cole in Yemen.

“This point of view also ignores Osama bin Laden’s unequivocal 2004 statement that, ‘Baghdad’ is ‘the capital of the Caliphate.’ In July 2005, Ayman Zawahiri gave this detailed four-stage plan for Iraq in a letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the now-deceased head of al Qaeda in Iraq:

‘The first stage: Expel the Americans from Iraq.

‘The second stage: Establish an Islamic authority or emirate, then develop it and support it until it achieves the level of a caliphate – over as much territory as you can to spread its power in Iraq ...

‘The third stage: Extend the jihad wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq.

‘The fourth stage: It may coincide with what came before: the clash with Israel, because Israel was established only to challenge any new Islamic entity.’

“We have seen the world over that the threat from radical Jihadists is a global threat. It also is a sophisticated threat that has spread its message, recruited followers, and planned terrorist attacks using the Internet, satellite television, and even computer games. Al Qaeda activity has been reported in dozens of countries including China, Canada, Sweden, India, the Philippines, Thailand, Serbia and Yemen.

“In the past month alone, al-Qaeda allegedly has attempted two unsuccessful mortar attacks against our embassy and embassy personnel in Yemen.

“Mr. Chairman, our nation indeed stands at a crossroads, and the choices we make in the days and months ahead are more than about this administration or even the next. They are about the future of our great nation and the security her people.”