



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –February 23, 2009

Contact: Courtney A. Littig: 202-225-7690

Vincent Perez: 202-225-4831

<http://intelligence.house.gov>

Opening Statement of Chairman Silvestre Reyes (D-TX) House Intelligence Committee Annual Threat Assessment Hearing

WASHINGTON – *Congressman Silvestre Reyes, D-TX, Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, delivered the following opening statement at today's open Annual Threat Assessment Hearing:*

“Today we convene the first public hearing of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence for the 111th Congress.

“Director Blair, welcome. We are happy to have you here.

“We congratulate you on your recent confirmation and wish you well as you go forward. As the nation's third Director of National Intelligence, you will be required to continue to refine the role of the DNI and advance the goals of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 while never losing sight of the threats to national security. As the saying goes, it's like building an aircraft in flight.

“I am going to make a few general remarks and then address some specific areas of concern for the nation.

“This is the third Annual Threat Assessment I have presided over as Chairman of this Committee, and we are in a unique position this year. Although the new Administration is just over a month old, we have seen major changes to some of the most controversial issues which impact the Intelligence Community. President Obama's Executive Orders on detention and interrogation policies and on Guantanamo Bay represent a significant departure from the previous Administration's policies. I know that many of us have strong opinions on what should be done in these areas. My intention, though, is to give the President and his new appointees some space to work through these issues and propose a way forward. We don't have an unlimited amount of time, however, so I hope that the executive branch will move quickly on these issues.

“One thing that will NOT change in the new Administration is the strong character and drive of the men and women of the Intelligence Community. Director Blair, I have traveled throughout the world to meet with our intelligence personnel, and I have consistently come away impressed by the level of their dedication, skill, and bravery. I hope that you will spend time traveling throughout the world to meet the men and women doing the work of the nation. I ask you to deliver to them our message of thanks and encouragement.

“With respect to the substance of the threats facing the United States, I’ll outline four very basic principles on which I hope we can all agree, and I will seek your comment on them. First, al-Qaeda remains a significant threat. Second, American security policy will, for years, continue to be driven by Iraq and Afghanistan. Third, while we will continue to focus on the hot spots around the globe, we cannot forget about growing threats from China, Russia and Iran, and about long-standing problems in Latin America and Africa. And fourth, our nation’s cyber infrastructure remains vulnerable to attack. Our Intelligence Community must be deeply engaged as we respond to these threats.

“On the subject of al-Qaeda, I think it is beyond dispute that the last few years have seen expansion of the influence of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. This simply cannot continue. With the freedom to recruit, train, and plot new attacks from the FATA, new safe havens across the globe continue to grow and emerge. Of particular concern are the expanding al-Qaeda network in the Sahel region of North Africa and the emerging and intensifying al-Qaeda presence in Yemen.

“With respect to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, our national interests will be tied to the outcome of these conflicts. Our children and grandchildren will pay the costs of these wars, and will either reap the benefits or suffer the consequences of what we do there. The past two years have seen some success in Iraq, thanks to the heroic efforts of our military, intelligence and diplomatic personnel.

“To make matters more challenging, while we maintain focus on al-Qaeda and on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we’ve also got the rest of the world to worry about. We must continue to focus on the threats posed by state actors such as Iran, North Korea, Russia, and China. Further, as I expressed in the last Congress, the Intelligence Community needs to focus on areas that had long been neglected in favor of other high priority issues: Latin America and Africa. We previously believed the threats from these regions to be less urgent, but they continue to have the potential to seriously threaten core U.S. national security interests and will continue to grow in scope and severity. The security of the United States is directly affected by events in these places.

“Finally, a word about cyber security: It is only in the past couple of years that we have really begun to appreciate the threat to our cyber infrastructure. This is a problem of enormous proportions, and I want to know how you intend to address it from an intelligence perspective.

“I look forward to a productive hearing and a productive Congress.”