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Statement for the Record

CIA Director David P. Petraeus

SSCI-HPSCI Joint Hearing on Ten-Year Anniversary of 9/11 Attacks

September 13, 2011

Chairman Feinstein, Chairman Rogers, Vice Chairman Chambliss, and Ranking Member Ruppertsberger. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this joint session of our intelligence oversight committees. And, on behalf of my Agency and my predecessor, thank you for the strong bipartisan backing and effective oversight. In significant part because of your support, today's Central Intelligence Agency is better able to protect our country and our citizens from al-Qa'ida and other terrorist groups. Simply put, the Agency is a stronger, more agile institution than it was before 9/11, and your assistance over the last decade has been critical in making us better and our nation more secure. I thank you for that.

And, here let me recognize the enormous contributions of Leon Panetta, my predecessor at the CIA. As you know, he is a principled, passionate leader who oversaw the accomplishment of some great tasks at the helm of the Agency. And Secretary Panetta will be a close and invaluable partner for us at the Department of Defense.

I want to note, as well, that I am committed to continuing along the path on which Director Panetta embarked with the committees' Members. The CIA's relationship with Congress has been strengthened over the past several years, and I will endeavor, as I emphasized during my confirmation process and in meetings with many of you since then, to strengthen it further.

And it's a pleasure to be here with the Director of National Intelligence, my good friend Jim Clapper. Jim is a true intelligence professional and a great public servant. He and I have worked together closely over the years in a variety of different posts, and I look forward to helping him forge an ever more collaborative, more effective Intelligence Community.

I welcome the opportunity today to present the Central Intelligence Agency's view of the terrorist threat a decade after the 9/11 attacks. One week into the job, but with over a decade of work in close coordination with the Agency in the fight against terror, I have,

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as I expected, found the CIA to be a true national asset, comprised of selfless, committed, highly intelligent Americans who demonstrate impressive knowledge, skill, ingenuity, and initiative. I am proud to lead the Agency and honored to represent its truly outstanding workforce. I should note humbly, given eight days as the CIA director, that the testimony I am presenting represents the analysis of that outstanding, professional workforce. Indeed, it is a pleasure to be able to rely on the analysis of such exceptional officers in testifying on matters of such fundamental importance to our country.

As a bottom line up front: The CIA assesses that, ten years after the 9/11 attacks, the United States continues to face a serious threat from al-Qa'ida and its worldwide network of affiliates and sympathizers. Although heavy losses to al-Qa'ida's senior leadership appear to have created an important window of vulnerability for the core al-Qa'ida organization in Pakistan and Afghanistan, exploiting that window will require a sustained, focused effort. Moreover, as al-Qa'ida's core has been weakened, we must recognize that the initiative has been shifting somewhat to al-Qa'ida's affiliates and sympathizers outside South Asia. Much work remains to be done. Our nation faces a serious threat from these groups, particularly from those based in Yemen, home to Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, and there are other al-Qa'ida affiliates that present significant threats as well.

In the remainder of my statement, I will first describe the pressure on the core al-Qa'ida organization, then discuss the danger that al-Qa'ida and its affiliates still pose, and then outline the keys to further progress against this enemy, including some of the steps we are taking with our partners throughout the US Government and with our friends overseas.

Core al-Qa'ida Under Growing Strain...

For more than a decade, al-Qa'ida's senior leadership and core organization in Pakistan and Afghanistan have been capable of planning and executing dangerous plots targeting the West. Today, as a result of sustained counterterrorism efforts, a substantial number with our partners in Pakistan and Afghanistan, that core part of al-Qa'ida's organization is much weaker and less capable than when it attacked us on 9/11.

Usama Bin Ladin's death in May dealt a stunning blow to al-Qa'ida. Bin Ladin was, of course, an iconic figure, the group's only leader since its founding. We know now that he was deeply involved until the end in directing al-Qa'ida's operations and strategy—

more deeply involved than many assessed before we were able to exploit the materials found with him.

Bin Ladin's longtime deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, succeeded him in June, but much of al-Qa'ida's support base finds Zawahiri less compelling as a leader. We thus assess that he will have more difficulty than did Usama Bin Ladin in maintaining the group's cohesion and its collective motivation in the face of continued pressure.

The layer of top lieutenants under Bin Ladin and Zawahiri—the group responsible for day-to-day management of al-Qa'ida and its operations—has sustained significant losses in recent years as well. Those losses have been especially severe among terrorist plotters, paramilitary commanders, trainers, and bombmakers. Just last week, Pakistan announced the capture with US assistance of Younis al-Mauritani, a senior al-Qa'ida operative who was involved in planning attacks against the interests of the United States and many other countries. Last month, al-Qa'ida lost its second-in-command and senior operational coordinator, Atiyah Abd al-Rahman. That followed the death in June of Ilyas Kashmiri, a senior operational commander. And the organization is struggling to find qualified replacements.

These setbacks have shaken al-Qa'ida's sense of security in Pakistan's tribal areas, driving the remaining leaders underground to varying degrees and shifting a good bit of their attention from terrorist plotting to security and survival. In fact, some mid-level leaders and rank-and-file al-Qa'ida members may increasingly seek safehaven across the border in Afghanistan or decide to leave South Asia. Senior leaders will find it riskier to move and may remain in Pakistan's tribal areas, where trusted local facilitators offer limited freedom of movement, but where their security is threatened. The upshot is that it will, of course, be more difficult to attract and accommodate would-be jihadists wanting to travel to the tribal areas of Pakistan.

All of this amounts, again, to a window of vulnerability for core al-Qa'ida—and a window of opportunity for us and our allies. We must maintain the pressure. We must exploit the opportunity.

. . . But Remains a Serious Threat

Even in decline, with its core leadership having sustained significant losses, al-Qa'ida and its affiliates still pose a very real threat that will require our energy, focus, creativity, and dedication for quite a while. Al-Qa'ida's operatives remain committed to attacks against US citizens at home and overseas, both to demonstrate strength in the wake of Bin Ladin's death and to continue pursuit of one of al-Qa'ida's principal goals—forcing the United States and a number of our allies to retreat from the world stage. Al-Qa'ida's

leaders continue to believe this would clear the way for overthrowing governments in the Islamic world and for the destruction of Israel.

Moreover, despite being less able to conduct large-scale attacks, al-Qa'ida and its sympathizers do continue to train and deploy operatives in small numbers for overseas plots. Many of these operatives have nationalities and backgrounds that make them well suited for targeting the United States and Europe. Increasingly, in fact, we see signs of al-Qa'ida's efforts to carry out relatively small attacks that would, nonetheless, generate fear and create the need for costly security improvements. Indeed, we should not forget that one of al-Qa'ida's goals is to force the US and our allies to adopt additional, expensive security safeguards that would further burden our economies. Though we have made very real progress in the campaign to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qa'ida, we are in this for the long haul.

Initiative Shifting to Affiliates

As I mentioned earlier, the extremist initiative is, to some degree, shifting to al-Qa'ida's affiliates outside South Asia. While linked to al-Qa'ida central, these groups have their own command structures, resource bases, and operational agendas, and they largely operate autonomously. Working with our local partners to cooperate against these affiliates will continue to be crucial to the success of our overall efforts to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qa'ida's global network.

Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP, has emerged as the most dangerous regional node in the global jihad. Since December 2009, the group has attempted two attacks on the United States: a plot to blow up a US airliner as it approached Detroit in 2009, and an effort to send bombs hidden in computer printers on two cargo aircraft in 2010. AQAP continues to plot strikes against our nation, US interests worldwide, and our allies.

Since May, moreover, AQAP has launched an offensive against the Yemeni Government in parts of southern Yemen, expelling many government forces from that region and increasing AQAP's freedom of movement. Political unrest in Yemen has helped AQAP co-opt local tribes and extend its influence. Despite all of this, counterterrorism cooperation with Yemen has, in fact, improved in the past few months. That is very important, as we clearly have to intensify our collaboration and deny AQAP the safehaven that it seeks to establish.

State failure and the expansion of extremist networks over the past two decades have made southern Somalia one of the world's most significant havens for terrorists. Al-Qa'ida's affiliate there—al-Shabaab—is large and well-funded relative to most extremist

groups, and it has attracted and trained hundreds of foreign fighters, including scores of Americans and dozens from other Western countries. Al-Shabaab suicide bombings in Uganda last year demonstrated the group's ability to operate beyond Somalia.

Sustained pressure on the relatively small circle of leaders and foreign fighters driving al-Shabaab's terrorist plotting and outreach to al-Qa'ida could persuade the organization to turn away from global jihad. Indeed, both the top al-Qa'ida operative in East Africa, Harun Fazul, and the al-Shabaab mastermind behind the Uganda bombings were killed this past June. And Fazul's protégé was killed two years earlier, and al-Shabaab fighters recently left Mogadishu under pressure from African Union troops. Nonetheless, we must continue our work to reduce al-Shabaab's capabilities.

Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM, has targeted Western interests throughout Northern and Western Africa while continuing to battle the security forces of Algeria, Mali, and Mauritania. Indeed, AQIM staged a deadly double-suicide bombing late last month against the Algerian military. We are working with our regional partners and France to counter AQIM, and those efforts have helped to prevent a significant attack by AQIM against Western interests since late 2007.

In Nigeria, the extremist group Boko Haram conducted a suicide car-bombing in late August against the UN building in Abuja, marking Boko Haram's first known lethal operation against Westerners. Our regional counterparts have stepped up their efforts against this target in the last several months. We work closely with our partners on this threat, and we will seek to intensify our support.

Al-Qa'ida in Iraq, or AQI, has sustained significant losses since the surge in 2007, and it is much farther than it was in 2007 from realizing its goal of overthrowing the government in Baghdad or controlling some portion of Iraq. Nonetheless, AQI remains capable of carrying out sensational attacks, as it showed in mid-August, and the Agency believes that AQI will remain capable of inflicting casualties on government forces and civilians at least through the next few years. Its core members share al-Qa'ida's desire to expand the global jihad, and that could lead AQI to attempt attacks outside Iraq.

Finally, the number of al-Qa'ida-affiliated operatives in Southeast Asia has been significantly reduced over the last decade, thanks to aggressive counterterrorism measures by regional governments. Jemaah Islamiyah—the group responsible for the Bali attacks in 2002 and 2005—has, for example, suffered major losses and is largely focused on rebuilding. Additionally, many terrorist leaders in Southeast Asia are now dead—such as Noordin Top, who planned the July 2009 hotel bombings in Jakarta—or in jail, such as Abu Bakar Bashir, the spiritual leader of extremism in Southeast Asia.

Keys to Future Success

The CIA's global campaign against al-Qa'ida and its affiliates requires both offensive and defensive measures, and they will need to be sustained over a long period to be effective. We target terrorist leaders, for example, to deny them the resources and breathing space needed to plot operations against us and our allies. We cooperate with our foreign partners wherever possible; it is often better to help them than to carry out operations ourselves. Nonetheless, we do act unilaterally when we must.

Our officers work hard to identify and intercept operatives before they can execute attacks, as they did by thwarting al-Qa'ida's plot to smuggle liquid explosives onto transatlantic flights in 2006 and the plot to attack the New York subway in 2009. In a similar fashion, we worked closely with friendly services in the Middle East to help stop AQAP's printer bombs before they could detonate.

We owe these successes to improved tradecraft resulting from the fusion of intelligence disciplines, tight integration with other agencies and the military, the sharing of intelligence with foreign partners, and to the Committees' support. We assess that the Agency and its elements are better at each of these actions now than we were before 9/11. But al-Qa'ida and its affiliates have proven resilient. Clearly, we must never underestimate our enemies. And, we at CIA must continue to refine our tactics, techniques, and procedures.

Over the past decade, intelligence collectors, analysts, and technical experts have forged closer, more effective relationships, leading to new flows of vital information and, more importantly, new insights into how and where terrorists operate. That integration of analysis and operations, each feeding the other, has been at the heart of our most important successes.

In fact, our relationships with others in the Intelligence Community and with law enforcement agencies are closer and more cooperative than ever. Improvements in the Watchlisting program and other interagency reporting methods allow us, for example, to quickly disseminate actionable intelligence to federal, state, and local agencies at the lowest possible classification level. We continue to work with the DNI and National Counterterrorism Center to enhance this process and to improve the application of Community resources.

The CIA's close collaboration with the military and with our Intelligence Community partners in taking down Usama Bin Ladin reflected the advances our government has made toward achieving a unified counterterrorism effort. That was, indeed, a success born of interagency collaboration and cooperation.

Our counterterrorism cooperation with governments in Europe, the Mideast, South Asia, and elsewhere around the world is also very strong. Working with our allies and partners, we have disrupted dozens of terrorist plots, and we have arrested hundreds of key operatives and facilitators.

All of this must—and will—continue. Indeed, the Intelligence Community has to continue to be a learning organization, and the CIA will do all that it can to contribute to that effort.

Conclusion

In sum, the structures and processes put in place since the 9/11 attacks have made our government more capable and more effective in carrying out our critical counterterrorism mission—and in protecting our fellow citizens. The key in the Central Intelligence Agency has, of course, been its people—the individuals who, at our Headquarters and in our Stations and Bases around the world, have quietly, selflessly, and expertly gone about the hard work of defending Americans from the constant threat of terrorism. They have been the key. In so doing, they and their families have made great sacrifices. We can never thank them enough for that. It is my great privilege to serve with them, to be their Director, and, indeed, to be their advocate.

Thank you very much.