

Statement for Chair Jane Harman – As Prepared
Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing & Terrorism Risk
Assessment

“Reassessing the Threat: The Future of Al Qaeda and Its Implications for
Homeland Security”

10:00 A.M., Wednesday, July 30, 2008
311 Cannon House Office Building

Al Qaeda is in many respects a different organization than the one that attacked New York and Washington in 2001.

It has been driven from its base in Afghanistan, and many of its leaders are either dead or in custody. Reports continue to surface (including those from the witnesses before us today) that Al Qaeda may be suffering from internal discord and may no longer enjoy an effective top-down command structure.

We are therefore left with a more disaggregated, horizontal organization that I fear may be even more difficult to fight than the one we faced on 9/11.

The desire and intent of Islamic terrorists to attack us – especially al Qaeda – remains undiminished. Last year, the Director of National Intelligence released a National Intelligence Estimate regarding the threat of terrorism to our homeland. It argued that the capabilities of these groups continue to improve. And derivatives or copy-cat organizations are surging in places like North Africa, India, and the UK.

We know that al Qaeda uses Pakistan’s FATA, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas as its new base of operations. Each year, up to 400,000 British citizens of Pakistani descent travel to that country each year, while 1,000 return to the UK every day. The sheer number of travelers makes counter-terrorism efforts incredibly difficult – although I have received briefings regarding new initiatives to manage this problem.

And it is becoming more difficult for us to define “victory” in this conflict.

This is important, because our definition of success will drive our strategy for defeating al Qaeda and will shape what US counterterrorism policy must look like in the future.

So, our assessments of risk must be in tune with the latest threat developments. We must understand the motivations and capabilities of our enemies, which constantly evolve. And we must never forget that al Qaeda is patient.

Our witnesses recently published two fascinating articles that may provide insight into the threat posed by al Qaeda today and in the future.

I would like to note that Mr. Bergen taught a course last semester at Harvard’s Kennedy School on this very issue. I want to thank you for encouraging Americans to think critically about how to go about defeating the threat of al Qaeda – we need the nation’s best minds focused on tackling this issue.

A new Administration will take office in less than six months, and the next President will need a clear understanding of the threat we face in order to prevent and prepare for attacks.