

Chairman McCaul Opening Remarks
OIM Hearing, June 3, 2011
As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning. Welcome to this Oversight, Investigations and Management Subcommittee hearing titled "Denying Terrorist Safe Havens: Homeland Security's Efforts to Counter Threats From Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia".

Although Osama Bin Laden is dead, Al Qaeda and its affiliates are not. They are hiding in safe havens - areas of relative security that are exploited by terrorists to recruit, train, raise funds and plan operations. The Department of State has identified 13 countries acting as safe havens. Today we examine three that we believe pose the most serious threat to the United States-Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia-and what the US Government is doing to deny these places as a refuge for terrorists.

Osama Bin Laden was a hunted man, yet he lived comfortably in Abbottabad, Pakistan, a town that serves as the headquarters for Frontier Force and Infantry regiments only 31 miles from Islamabad. He was not hiding in a cave. He was not in the mountains. His compound was less than one mile - or about half the distance from here to the Washington Monument - from the Pakistan Military Academy where over 2,000 cadets are trained, 600 instructors teach and approximately 2,000 representatives from other countries visit and receive training each year.

CNN recently reported that Osama Bin Laden sought a deal with Pakistan in which he would not attack Pakistan in exchange for protection. At this point we do not know who in the Pakistani Government was aware of Osama Bin Laden's presence, but I am convinced some Pakistani officials knew that he was living in plain sight. Not exactly the average house in an ordinary neighborhood. It stuck out like a sore thumb.

It is difficult to determine how many terrorist groups operate out of Pakistan. But we do know Al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban and other groups use this country as a staging ground for attacks on US troops, to kill American citizens, and terrorize countries throughout the world. For example, Mullah Omar, the spiritual leader of the Taliban, is believed to be in Pakistan.

Anwar al Awalaki is hiding in Yemen. He is the Bin Laden of the internet because he provides spiritual guidance and recruits terrorists via YouTube and Facebook. He has inspired more than two dozen terror plots against the United States over the past two years. The Fort Hood shooter, Nidal Hasan emailed al Awalaki on numerous occasions before killing 13 people and wounding 30 others. Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalab, the Christmas bomber, was in contact with al Awalaki before attempting to set off an explosive on-board Northwest Flight 254, an international flight on approach to Detroit.

With the death of Bin Laden, many experts believe Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, based in Yemen, will attempt to become the successor to al-Qaeda.

Because there is no central authority in Somalia, Al Qaeda and other associated terrorist groups will use it as a base of operations to attack Western targets. According to the 2009 Report on Terrorism issued by the National Counterterrorism Center, Al Shabaab is considered by US officials as one of the most deadly terrorists groups in the world.

Not only is Somalia a base for terrorists, but pirates operating off its coast are a threat to international shipping. This has contributed to an increase in shipping costs and impeded the delivery of food aid shipments. Ninety percent of the World Food Program's shipments into Somalia arrive by sea, and ships into this area now require a military escort.

Numerous documents have addressed the problem of terrorist safe havens.

- The 9/11 Commission's report to Congress concluded the safe haven of Afghanistan allowed al Qaeda operational space to gather recruits and build logistical networks to conduct attacks against the United States.
- The Obama Administration National Security Strategy (NSS) states we will "Deny Safe Havens and Strengthen At-Risk States." The NSS points out a whole of government approach (interagency collaboration) is needed including information-sharing, law enforcement cooperation, and establishing new practices to counter terrorists. The document also requires the United States to help countries build capacities for responsible governance and security.
- Existing US law (the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 and the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010) requires the Administration to produce a list of what each agency is doing to deny terrorists safe havens.
- The Government Accountability Office (GAO) examined the US Government approach and concluded 1) safe havens are a threat to the United States and 2) a more comprehensive list of agency efforts is needed so Congress can adequately oversee and assess how the United States is denying safe havens to terrorists.

We currently have an incomplete picture of what each of these countries is doing to eliminate safe havens, what they are doing to prevent the proliferation and tracking of weapons of mass destruction, and what they are doing to cooperate with US counter-terrorism officials. This knowledge is vital to Congress's ability to craft foreign policy that holds countries accountable for aiding terrorists by looking the other way.

I applaud our government's efforts but more has to be done.

Eliminating the terrorists' base of operations where they have the ability to recruit, train and plan their operations is the key to preventing attacks on American soil. Osama Bin Laden orchestrated the 9/11 attacks from a safe haven in Afghanistan.

Anwar al Awlaki has been able to inspire more than two-dozen plots against the United States over just the past two years including the Fort Hood shootings and Christmas bomber. This hearing will assess the role of the US government in denying the terrorists the ability to reconstitute.

Before I yield my time I would like to thank the brave men and women of our armed services, the civilians in the Departments of State and Homeland Security and all those from other US government agencies who serve overseas. They constitute our best defense against the terrorist who want to kill us.

Also I want to thank our witnesses today and look forward to hearing their testimonies.

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