



Speeches & Testimony

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Transcript of Director's Remarks at the Atlantic Council

Transcript of Remarks by Central Intelligence Agency Director Michael Hayden at the Atlantic Council

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It's a real pleasure to be back here at the Atlantic Council. It's an organization that does so much to promote the right kind of leadership in international affairs. Last year, I had a wonderful conversation with the council's International Advisory Board. And when General Scowcroft invited me to come here today, I readily accepted it.

I'm going to be one of the first speakers -- Arnold and the general pointed out -- in a series devoted to intelligence issues. And I want to focus on the issue within my community that demands more energy and attention than any other. That's the threat of terrorism.

And before I do that, though, I need to point out that General Scowcroft made his first contact with CIA about today's speech in January of 2008. We firmed up the date in June of 2008. And here I am, giving an assessment of al-Qa'ida eight days after a national election and 10 weeks before a new president takes office.

When any of you think of CIA as a risk-averse agency, you need to think of today.

For more than seven years now, the United States, with our allies in Europe and around the world, we've waged an unprecedented fight against al-Qa'ida, its affiliates, and its sympathizers.

My agency, CIA, has been at the forefront of that fight, using all of our authorities and all of our capabilities. That's human and technical collection, all-source analysis, and covert action to protect the homeland from another devastating attack.

Now as our nation prepares for its first wartime presidential transition in 40 years, it's the responsibility of CIA -- frankly, it's the responsibility of the entire intelligence community -- to give the incoming administration as clear a picture as possible of the state of this conflict and of the shape of the enemy.

Now, I know I'm biased, but, frankly, I believe that CIA's understanding of al-Qa'ida is second to none. And so my remarks today will draw on the insights of officers who have tracked, studied and countered this threat for years.

Much of what we know about al-Qa'ida comes from this creative and aggressive set of clandestine operations that CIA conducts around the world, including in places of great danger.

Now, there will clearly be limits to what I can say in this kind of forum. But my goal here today is to give you as good an idea as I can of how my agency views this threat seven years after the attacks of September 11th.

Last May, I gave a reporter a bottom-line assessment of America's performance in the global war on terror. It wasn't all that technical. The actual quote was, "On balance, not bad. I think we're doing pretty well." That is, by the way, a view that I still hold.

Now, at the time when that comment was made public, it got a fair amount of attention, stirred some controversy, and, frankly, as can happen with some front-page stories, the headline seemed to overshadow both the content and the context of the longer article.

And so, as I discuss the state of al-Qa'ida today in 2008, I want to make sure that you take away both the headline and the underlying complexity.

Now, let me make three points. Number one, al-Qa'ida has suffered serious setbacks, but it remains a determined, adaptive enemy, unlike any our nation has ever faced.

This war -- and let me underscore that -- you should make no mistake that this is anything else but a war. This war is far from over.

Now, to be very clear, all of the elements of national power are going to be required in order to keep the republic and the homeland safe. That's the tools of law enforcement, diplomacy, and a variety of other methodologies that we have at our disposal. But at its core, I personally and my agency believe that we are in a state of war with al-Qa'ida.

Second, al-Qa'ida today is both resilient and vulnerable. Our job as intelligence professionals is to understand that complex picture so we can provide warning and opportunity to those who are making decisions on behalf of our country.

And, third, al-Qa'ida operating from its safe haven in Pakistan's tribal areas remains the most clear and present danger to the safety of the United States. If there is a major strike against this country, it will bear the fingerprints of al-Qa'ida.

To quickly review, al-Qa'ida has suffered serious setbacks, but it's a determined, adaptive enemy. Secondly, today, al-Qa'ida is resilient and vulnerable. And, third, it remains the most serious threat to the nation.

Now, from those three points flows an enduring responsibility, a responsibility that's deeply felt by every CIA officer, and that's to protect the homeland from attack.

Out at Langley, there's an office. It's one of the most operational offices we have in our campus, and it's absolutely crucial in the day-to-day fight against terrorism. And there's a sign in that office -- and I've said in other public fora, but it bears repeating. There's a sign in that office that captures the sense of duty and determination that exists inside my agency today.

It's simply this: It says, "Today's date is September 12, 2001." And when you walk in to that office, there's a divider there, a wall. You've got to go left or right. It is what you see. At first glance, it appears to be one of those signs of convenience, almost as if it was telling you the Julian date or the time of day. And only when you pay attention do you recognize that at all times it says, "Today's date is September 12th."

It has for me, every time I see it -- and I'm in that office a lot -- it has an emotional impact. More than a year ago, right around the anniversaries of the attack, about 14 months ago, I gave a speech in New York at the Council on Foreign Relations. I said to that audience at that time that, when I'm in that office, I get the sense that today really is September 12, 2001. And when I get in my car and go home and drive down Route 123 or the G.W. Parkway, the further I get away from the agency, the more of a sense I get that today's date is September 10th.

And I don't mean September 10th in the sense that an attack is imminent. I mean September 10th in the sense of a complacency inside the larger American population. And I don't mean to be critical about that. It's the seventh year since an attack. It has probably both normal and healthy that the largest part of our population is going about their business with a feeling of safety.

But the American people are right to expect that CIA does not feel that way and remains focused on that date, September 12th. They expect us to do all we can do to stop those with a clear intent to attack us. They're right to expect that we will do all we can to disrupt this most urgent and deadly threat. We have and we are doing that, and we're doing it, and we have done it with lawful tools, lawfully applied. And I'll talk a little bit about that today, as well.

Now, as you know, al-Qa'ida is an organization with ambitions that stretch across many regions. Any appraisal of its current state then requires a look at several points around the globe. So let me start with Iraq.

Three years ago, in a letter to the leader of al-Qa'ida in Iraq, Osama bin Ladin's deputy declared that that country, Iraq, was the central front in the global jihad. Foreign fighters, money, weapons streamed into Iraq fueling a fierce insurgency that aimed to advance al-Qa'ida's goal of an Islamic caliphate from Morocco to Indonesia. Indeed, bin Ladin had previously stated that Baghdad would be the capital of the caliphate.

Even today, al-Qa'ida in Iraq remains that organization's -- al-Qa'ida's -- largest regional affiliate. It still can and does inflict damage. No matter what residual tactical strength it retains in Iraq, though, the most important point is that al-Qa'ida in Iraq is on the verge of strategic defeat.

The U.S. military fought and the Iraqi people rejected the AQI- led insurgency. al-Qa'ida lost its power when Iraqis came to see it for what it was: a terrorist organization waging war on the Iraqi people.

Today, that flow of money, weapons, and foreign fighters I talked about? That flow is greatly diminished. And we don't often hear al-Qa'ida's senior leadership pointing to Iraq as the central front in their global battle. In fact, bleed out from Iraq, the export or frequently what we see, the diversion of terrorists and their deadly capabilities, is as much a concern now as the ongoing threat of AQI attacks inside the country of Iraq itself.

Many of the foreign fighters who have left Iraq over the past three years have, frankly, been frustrated by their lack of success or disillusioned with al-Qa'ida's ideas and tactics. Some have likely abandoned the fight altogether, and they've simply gone home to resume their lives.

Others leave Iraq with hopes of building al-Qa'ida capacity elsewhere. And that might be Afghanistan or Lebanon, on the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, just to name a few examples. We even see some Iraq veterans involved in planning attacks in the West, in Europe and in the United States.

Now, this bleed-out problem is one we have always known we would have to deal with, but I frankly take a great deal of personal consolation in knowing that that shift, that shift we're seeing is further evidence that al-Qa'ida in Iraq has failed.

In Saudi Arabia, a place where bin Ladin lived for many years and home of Islam's holiest sites, al-Qa'ida's operational arm is also largely defeated. Aggressive efforts by the Saudi security forces between 2003 and 2006 led to the death or capture of most al-Qa'ida leaders and operatives within the kingdom. Financing networks were disrupted. The Saudi interior ministry undertook what is perhaps the world's most effective counter-radicalization program.

One of the real delights in my job is I get to meet the liaison partners of CIA. And I have to tell you, among the most fascinating dialogues I have is sitting and talking with our Islamic partners, including the kingdom, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I learn such a great deal in those dialogues.

And I'm struck, maybe even surprised, although, looking backward on it, I shouldn't have been surprised, but I'm certainly struck by the degree of emotion in my Islamic counterpart's voice when he is talking about al-Qa'ida and how un-Islamic al-Qa'ida really is.

The kingdom remains an al-Qa'ida target, but today much of that threat comes from outside its borders, which is a vastly different scenario than we saw only a few years ago.

The situation in Southeast Asia has also changed dramatically. I'm sure you recall the series of deadly attacks on Western interests in the years just after 9/11, the Bali bombing in 2000, followed in fairly quick succession by attacks on the Marriott Hotel and the Australian embassy in Jakarta, and then simultaneous suicide attacks again in Bali in 2005.

Hundreds were killed in those plots, all executed by Jemaah Islamiyah, an organization that was al-Qa'ida's Southeast Asian affiliate. While J.I. still exists today, its once-robust relationship with al-Qa'ida is gone. Its plots are increasingly detected and disrupted. Hundreds of its leaders and operatives have been captured or killed by the Indonesian national police.

The group's capabilities and its confidence are simply not what they were three years ago thanks to aggressive action by one of our most effective counterterrorism partners. This past week, I'm sure many of you have read that three of the perpetrators of the Bali bombing were actually executed, a very dramatic step that underscores the determination of the Jakarta government in this global war.

The terrorist ambitions of J.I.'s Philippine-based ally, the Abu Sayyaf group, have been similarly degraded by persistent pressure from our Filipino allies.

I also want to highlight one other area of significant progress, and it's not geographically focused. It's an area of progress that I'd simply call the ideological front. In the military we're very accustomed to thinking in terms of the close battle and the deep battle. This fight, this ideological fight, is the deep fight. That's the battle for hearts and minds, and it has a very deep time horizon.

But over the past year or so, there is clear and mounting evidence that we have real cause for optimism. Some hard-line religious leaders are speaking out against al-Qa'ida's tactics and its ideology. And polling has shown that support for al-Qa'ida and bin Ladin is falling in many predominantly Muslim countries.

In fact, more and more Muslims are pushing back against the senseless violence and flawed worldview of al-Qa'ida. Credible, influential voices are refuting al-Qa'ida's twisted justification for murdering innocents. These voices are tapping into doubts about al-Qa'ida that have always been there. People understand that most victims of terrorism are Muslim, and they ask a simple question: What justifies this?

The answer from al-Qa'ida is one that a vast majority of people in the Islamic world simply now don't espouse. They don't support bin Ladin's caliphate. They don't want to be governed as the Afghan people were governed by the Taliban.

Even today, as we speak, in New York City, one of the most prominent voices in Islam, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, the keeper of the two holy places, is right now sponsoring and attending an international symposium on religious tolerance. I've always said that the civilized world will win this fight when we win the war of ideas. And so these developments are very, very promising.

And I should underscore, this conflict of ideas requires authentic voices. And in the world as we find it, in this conflict as we find it, authentic voices are Islamic voices. And what I've just referred to are Islamic voices speaking out against al-Qa'ida.

This is very promising, but, remember, point number one earlier was that al-Qa'ida is determined and adaptive. In the face of setbacks, their senior leadership recalibrates. They constantly look for ways to make up for losses, extend their reach, take advantage of opportunities, and we're seeing that.

We see it clearly today in places like North Africa, or Somalia, or Yemen. The presence of extremist sympathizers, the raw availability of weapons and ungoverned space, the lack of effective security make these areas attractive locations for al-Qa'ida recruitment and training, as well as attacks. In addition, one of those, North Africa, provides an easy transit point for those destined to facilitate or carry out attacks in Europe.

The level of focus and activity we're seeing in these areas is troubling. In fact, the recent attacks and threats from al-Qa'ida in the land of the Islamic Maghreb are greater in scope and severity than any since the group merged with al-Qa'ida about two years ago.

Suicide attacks against an Algerian military barracks and nearby cafe in June, along with several recent attacks on French tourists and workers, they underscore not only the group's intent to strike Western targets, but its ability, its ability to plot and operate even under the tightened security regime that we now see in Algeria.

In East Africa, al-Qa'ida's engaging Somali extremists to revitalize operations. And while there clearly has not yet been an official merger, the leader of the al-Shabaab terrorist group is closely tied to al-Qa'ida. And the recent bombings in Somalia may have meant, at least in part, may have been meant to strengthen the bona fides of this group with al-Qa'ida's senior leaders. A merger between al-Shabaab and al-Qa'ida could give Somali extremists much needed funding while al-Qa'ida could then claim to be re-establishing its operations based in East Africa. That's a base that was severely disrupted about two years ago when Ethiopia moved into Somalia.

Yemen is another country of concern, a place where al-Qa'ida is strengthening. We've seen an unprecedented number of attacks this year, 2008, including two on our embassy. Plots are increasing not only in number, but in sophistication, and the range of targets is broadening. Al-Qa'ida cells are operating from remote tribal areas where the government has traditionally had very little authority, and they're being led or reinforced by veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

I mentioned earlier that the threat to Saudi Arabia was probably more external than internal. And these developments in Yemen are the primary reason for that reality.

North Africa, East Africa, Yemen serve as kind of a counterweight to the good news out of Iraq, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, but make no mistake: What I've just mentioned, East Africa, North Africa, Yemen, these are not problems on the same scale as Iraq or Saudi Arabia. But al-Qa'ida's strength in these areas demonstrates not only its adaptability and determination, but that characteristic I've mentioned several times now: resilience.

Now, let me turn to that part of the globe that's most important to al-Qa'ida, most important to al-Qa'ida's continuing operations. Al-Qa'ida's sanctuary along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, in those tribal areas, has allowed it to recover some of the capacity lost when it was expelled from Afghanistan almost seven years ago now.

The group has reconstituted some training and operational capabilities. It's increased its recruitment and its propaganda efforts. It's established a more durable leadership structure. It's built redundancies into its plotting, and it's developed a bench of skilled operatives to carry plans forward when other plans are disrupted.

All of that activity is enabled by a fairly recent development, and that's al-Qa'ida's ties to local tribes. The terrorist group -- here I'm talking about al-Qa'ida -- has developed a close codependent relationship with Pashtun extremists and separatist groups. Al-Qa'ida, foreigners in a land that's long been suspicious of foreigners, has been able to curry favor with locals by supporting their causes, training their fighters, funding their operations, and, importantly, showing sufficient deference to tribal leaders.

Bin Ladin's lieutenants work in concert with Pakistani militant groups as long as the operational goals of those groups don't conflict with al-Qa'ida's own strategic objectives. And increasingly, ties to the tribes are being made a bit more permanent through intermarriage.

Now, the safe haven in the tribal region, in the FATA, that safe haven is not comparable to what al-Qa'ida had in Afghanistan. It's not comparable in terms of either security or scale, but it is more worrisome today than it was two or three years ago. Cross-border attacks in Afghanistan are more violent and aggressive, as are al-Qa'ida's efforts to destabilize Pakistan itself. Furthermore, we're seeing a disturbing emphasis on the recruitment, training, and deployment of Western operatives.

What do I mean by Western operatives? Those are people who may not elicit any notice whatsoever from you if they were standing next to you in the airport line.

The cross-over point for al-Qa'ida's foothold in the tribal areas was probably in September of 2006 when the governor of North-West Frontier Province signed a peace agreement with local militants in North Waziristan. That truce set in motion a whole series of events and decisions that gave al-Qa'ida a lot more breathing space than it had had previously.

Let me be very clear: Today, virtually every major terrorist threat that my agency is aware of

has threads back to the tribal areas. Whether it's command and control, training, direction, money, capabilities, there is a connection to the FATA.

It is no overstatement to say that al-Qa'ida's base in Pakistan is the single most important factor today in the group's resilience and its ability to threaten the West. So it may surprise some of you to hear me say that it also represents a key vulnerability.

The truth is, it's not all that easy to build a worldwide terrorist network and manage a global fight from an isolated outpost in northwestern Pakistan. And to the extent that the United States and its allies deepen that isolation, disturb the safe haven, target terrorist leaders there, we keep al-Qa'ida off-balance.

The Pakistani government and military deserves great credit for its current campaign against extremists in Bajaur Agency. The Pakistani army has been fighting there forcefully and with considerable success since early August. This is a major commitment. This is a multi-brigade operation. It is a very hard fighting. They are suffering significant casualties, but they are also imposing significant casualties on our common enemy.

Throughout the FATA, al-Qa'ida and its allies are feeling less secure today than they did two, three or six months ago. It has become difficult for them to ignore significant losses in their ranks. Midlevel operatives have been killed.

And in the past year alone, a number of senior al-Qa'ida leaders who have sought refuge in the tribal areas have died, either by violence or natural causes. These include a chief of external operations, a senior commander who plotted attacks against the coalition in Afghanistan, a seasoned explosives expert and trainer, a veteran combat leader, and a senior operational planner.

Those losses are significant. These men were decision-makers, commanders, experienced and committed fighters at the center of planning attacks, not only in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but against Europe and the United States. When we and our allies take terrorists like this off the battlefield, there's a real psychological effect, as well. Those that remain are feeling some heat, and they're not happy about it.

By making a safe haven feel less safe, we keep al-Qa'ida guessing. We make them doubt their allies, question their methods, their plans, even their priorities. Most importantly, we force them to spend more time and resources on self-preservation. And that distracts them, at least partially and at least for a time, from laying the groundwork for the next attack.

What I have just described is the fundamental difference between the approach to fighting terrorism before 9/11 and our approach today. We and our allies weren't playing offense before; we were in perpetual defense.

I make this point to a variety of audiences. When I make it to an audience in North America -- or, actually, when I make it globally, the metaphor I usually use is football. And when I make it to a North American audience, it's American football. Prior to 9/11, it was as if al-Qa'ida was first and goal on the three. They ran off-tackle, got stuffed. The referee picked the ball up, put it back down on three, and said, "First and goal." If you're a European audience -- I see my good friends from the German embassy here -- and we talk about what the rest of the world calls football, it was perpetual penalty kicks, OK?

After September 11th attacks, we said, "No more." Of all the things that have been done to help protect the homeland, the single most important one in my view is that America and its friends

have taken the fight to the enemy.

A comment like that, any discussion of American successes against al-Qa'ida, typically leads to another question: What about bin Ladin? Why haven't we killed or captured him?

Anyone familiar with the Afghan-Pakistan border area knows how rugged and inaccessible it is. You know, in preparation for this, I sat down and read and re-read my speech this morning and over lunch. And four times I came across language in the speech that in one way or another stressed the importance of isolation and ungoverned territory to the survival of al-Qa'ida.

Think about it. That may be the most damning thing we can say about this organization, that it can only subsist beyond the reach of civilization, beyond the reach of the rule of law. It survives only in the absence of law. And we see that in those other areas that I've mentioned, the more remote areas of Somalia or Yemen or along the Afghan-Pakistan border area.

Beyond that remoteness -- remember, I'm talking about the hunt for bin Ladin -- beyond that remoteness, the sheer challenge of surveying every square mile of that inhospitable and dangerous region, part of the explanation for his survival lies in the fact that he has worked to avoid detection. He is putting a lot of energy into his own survival, a lot of energy into his own security. In fact, he appears to be largely isolated from the day-to-day operations of the organization he nominally heads.

I can assure you, although there has been press speculation to the contrary, I can assure you that the hunt for bin Ladin is very much at the top of CIA's priority list. Because of his iconic stature, his death or capture clearly would have a significant impact on the confidence of his followers, both core al-Qa'ida and these unaffiliated extremists, unaffiliated extremists throughout the world.

This is an organization that has never been through a change at the top. For 20 years, bin Ladin has been the visionary, the inspirational and harmonizing force behind al-Qa'ida. Whether his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, could maintain unity in the ranks is a genuinely legitimate question. The truth is, we simply don't know what would happen if bin Ladin is killed or captured, but I'm willing to bet that, whatever happens, it would work in our favor.

Killing, capturing, disrupting al-Qa'ida's senior leaders, wherever they may find or seek sanctuary, is absolutely essential in thwarting attacks on the West. That's the key lesson from 9/11. Our understanding of this enemy and what it will take to defeat him changed on that day.

Never before have we faced an enemy so completely committed to our destruction and so completely irresponsible with human life. Al-Qa'ida is willing to sacrifice both its own operatives and the Muslims for whom it professes to fight.

This enemy, unprecedented in our history, requires a response that also has no model in our past. Let me remind you, one of the defining objectives of al-Qa'ida's theory of war is to erase the distinction between combatant and non-combatant, for themselves and for their victims alike. And that distinction between combatant and non-combatant has been an inviolate distinction in the laws and morals of the civilized world.

And so this war presents us with operational, ethical, and legal challenges that we as a nation have not faced before. And at CIA, we have been at the center of this nation's response to that challenge, using our full authorities and our most advanced capabilities, always within law, always with executive and congressional oversight. Doing anything less than playing to the full extent of our authorities and our capabilities would be a failure to live up to the oath we took,

which is to defend the nation.

I'm extremely proud that our efforts, together with those of the military, law enforcement, and our foreign partners, have yielded results, results in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Indonesia, and even in the world of ideas. I'm encouraged by the progress that's being made in South Asia today. And I'm grateful for the talent and dedication of the thousands of CIA officers involved in this fight.

Their work has helped us to disrupt many attacks, including one that would have rivaled the destruction of 9/11. But I'm also acutely aware that al-Qa'ida remains the most dangerous threat we face.

The men and women of CIA live with that awareness every hour of every day. They're working around the clock and in every part of the world to defeat al-Qa'ida, to win this war, and to keep America and our allies safe.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here. Now I'll be quite happy to take your questions.

FRED KEMPE, PRESIDENT OF THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL: Thank you, General Hayden. And let me just say, on behalf of the Atlantic Council, I'm Fred Kempe, the president of the Atlantic Council, that was worth waiting for. Thank you for giving us a rich insight into the state of al-Qa'ida, I think, with a lot of new information, as well.

To simplify, in terms of asking my first question -- and then we'll go to the audience -- Pakistan, you're saying that al-Qa'ida is still the most dangerous threat and essentially you're saying Pakistan is the most dangerous place. And I suppose one would have said that about Afghanistan ahead of 9/11, if one had thought about it then.

Is that right? And if that's right, what happened with our relationship with our strategic ally in the war on terror, General Musharraf? What happened during that period of time? And what do we have to do different now that we didn't do then?

HAYDEN: Well, what we did then and what we are doing now, number one, is working with our Pakistani partners.

The first thing I need to point out, as challenging as the current circumstances are -- and I think broadly we and our Pakistani allies agree on the challenges -- as challenging as the current situation is, we have killed or captured more members of al-Qa'ida, more of the al-Qa'ida senior leadership in partnership with our Pakistani allies than we have with any other partner around the world. And so that needs to be stated upfront and very clearly.

The tribal region of Pakistan looks simple from about 9,000 miles away. The closer you get to it, the more complex the questions become. And I think what happened in 2006, that the government in Islamabad made a decision that we, absent the imminence of the threat, absent the development of al-Qa'ida, would have viewed to be as wise and far-reaching, which was, in essence, to invest in a long-term strategy of development and gradual incorporation of the tribal regions into Pakistan.

You have to understand, historically, the reach of the central government into these areas has been weak at best. And so the Pakistani government in 2006 began to pull back a bit, the peace agreement that I mentioned in my remarks being one element of it. And, again, we would have viewed it to be as patient and wise and far-seeing, absent the immediate threat.

But our enemies -- and the antecedent of "our" is the United States and Pakistan and Afghanistan -- but our enemies took advantage of that respite, took advantage of that breathing space to build up the kind of safe haven that I described in my remarks.

And now the question becomes, how do we deal with that? And you've got the Pakistanis -- again, I need to point out very strongly, I mean, multi-brigade operations in Bajaur, tough fighting against hardened militants, and they're staying there fighting, and fighting against -- against people by any definition are our common enemies.

KEMPE: And relatively newly doing that on that scale?

HAYDEN: That's -- absolutely. Absolutely.

KEMPE: One question before going to the audience. And when you do ask your questions, identify yourselves and put a question mark at the end of what you say. Just to save people a little bit of trouble who are here from the media, you and the Director of National Intelligence, McConnell, have offered to stay on. What have you heard from the people who would have to answer you.

HAYDEN: OK, three minutes into the Q&A period, and...

KEMPE: Well, we'll get this part done and then we'll be able to focus on what I would say is the news. I think what you've said about Pakistan is quite important.

HAYDEN: No, very frankly, I mean, I'll let Admiral McConnell speak for himself, but I think he shares my view. We clearly serve at the pleasure of the president. Admiral McConnell is a senior intelligence adviser to the president. There has to be a personal relationship between the president and that person. And I think that perhaps for the Director of CIA, as well. So we fully understand that this is a decision for the president.

I think what Admiral McConnell has said that -- and as Arnold suggested in his earlier comments -- we think we're doing some things well. If asked to stay, I think both of us would seriously consider it. But this is truly something -- this is the business of the transition team, the business of the president-elect. And I would leave it there for now.

KEMPE: OK, thank you very much.

QUESTION: Could you discuss two other aspects of the al-Qa'ida situation, number one, the al-Qa'ida-Taliban relationship as it currently stands -- we're talking apparently with some factions of Taliban about an agreement in which they might even come into a coalition government in Afghanistan -- and, secondly, the role of the opium and heroin trade in the financing of the insurgency and what are some of the things that you could say about what's being done about that and other financial disruptions?

HAYDEN: Let me talk about the second question first.

Clearly, one of the most disruptive elements in the situation in Afghanistan today is the drug trade. I mean, you've got two countries, Iraq and Afghanistan, many parallels between the two, about the same size physically, about the same size geographically. Both of them have one major export. The one's legal, it's oil. The other one's not, and it's a product of the -- of the opium fields.

And I think all of us agree that there are several things that are preconditions to success in Afghanistan, and one of them is what you just raised, getting a grip on the growth of opium, the trade of opium, which feeds a whole bunch of things, all of them bad. It feeds a global drug issue. It feeds instability and corruption inside the Afghan government. And it actually does, as you suggest, fund the Taliban.

Your first question has been an interesting development. It's something that we saw coming that was probably crystallized about a year ago. And that is the merger -- and I try to suggest it in my prepared remarks -- the merger of Pashtun separatists and Pashtun extremists into a functioning operational alliance with the foreigners in the FATA represented by al-Qa'ida.

The proximate cause for that was probably the activity a summer ago, when the Pakistani government moved against the Red Mosque. And if you'll recall, a month or two after that action, bin Ladin called for warfare, open warfare against the Pakistani government. At that point -- and, look, there are no right angles in the real world here, all right, and there are no absolutes -- but at that point, it began to get increasingly clear to us that in addition to this being a threat from Pakistan, this was now a threat to Pakistan. And that Pakistan, rather than being a base of operations for al-Qa'ida, Pakistan writ large had become a target for al-Qa'ida.

And when you see the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, for example, the best intelligence we have is, is that effort was a blend of al-Qa'ida and Baitullah Mahsud. And Baitullah Mahsud is a Pashtun separatist, native of Pakistan, not a foreign fighter. That's been the new development. And that, I think, is the issue that's been most troubling. And what we have to do is, in essence, deconstruct that merger, deconstruct that alliance.

KEMPE: You spoke also of Western operatives. Can you say more about that?

HAYDEN: I can. I mean, without getting into too much detail, al-Qa'ida puts a great premium on bringing people into the FATA for orientation, indoctrination, and training, a great premium especially on people who are Western, you know, Western in their upbringing, Western in their outlook, Western in their appearance. And it's clear to us the reason for that is to make use of them against targets in the West.

KEMPE: Thank you.

QUESTION: Right at the end of your speech, you said something that intrigued me. I think we all know what the legal challenges have been, because we've spent a great deal of time reporting on them, but I'm wondering, looking back on the time that you've spent there, what have been a couple examples of an operational challenge and an ethical challenge that you've struggled with?

HAYDEN: I think the ethical challenges are tucked into the legal structure, you know, most, I think most clearly.

And the operational challenges -- and bear with me. It's going to be a bit of a long answer. But when we think about, where's our space? Where do we work, all right? And it's kind of in the space of what's technologically possible, what's operationally relevant -- I mean, is it useful to do -- and then what's legal, what's within our authorities. So the legal question actually has a controlling authority, so to speak, over the range of operational possibilities that we can use. And that's what I was trying to suggest.

And, frankly, the legal structures under which we are working in the West present great challenges to us because there's a body of thought that wants to describe this as a law

enforcement issue and a body of thought that wants to describe it as a war. And focusing exclusively on either one of those lenses doesn't work. It becomes a blend. But our legal structures aren't really accustomed to working inside that blend.

I'll give you maybe a too stark example. And here it's more international than it is within the United States. I said we are a nation at war. I said we strongly believe that. I try to emphasize in that in my remarks. There are two or three other sentences I usually say. We are a nation at war. This war is global in its scope. We can only fulfill our duty in that war -- that is, defeat the enemy and defend our citizens and the citizens of allied nations - - by taking that fight, taking that war to our enemy wherever he may be.

Three sentences. It's a war; it's global in scope; we have to take the fight to the enemy wherever he may be. I would offer you the view that there are very few governments in the world that would agree with all three of those sentences. I believe them to be absolutely correct. I believe them to be ethically and legally sound. But we are working with an international legal structure that I think would have even our best friends, even people who are mostly like-minded, they're willing to discuss each of those three sentences with us and the legitimacy of each.

Those are the kinds of challenges we're working under. And I think what I try to stress is it's an agency like CIA that's out there on the cutting edge of those kinds of questions all of the time because that's the space in which a nation's secret intelligence service works.

QUESTION: Could you give us your assessment of al-Qa'ida's current capabilities in bio-warfare? And could you comment on whether you consider the 2001 anthrax mailings as a serious possibility that they were the work of al-Qa'ida?

HAYDEN: I'll have to defer on the second question to what the Bureau has said. I know Bob Mueller has talked about this, but just particularly since they were, you know, moving to resolution of that case.

It is clear to us that -- and, again, I'm limited somewhat by classification, but what I can share is it is clear to us that the intent for weapons of mass destruction -- and it's across bio, chem, and nuclear -- is unarguable. We see that in multiple strands of reporting. The good news is that in some of those higher-end weapons, that that's hard to achieve. The bad news is that there are some lower-end weapons that are not, and that represents a great danger to us. And our belief is -- and, you know, a lot of this is reporting, and some of it's assessment, but it all comes wrapped with a high- confidence level. If al-Qa'ida could do it, they would. And so it's something we pay great attention to.

QUESTION: The president has recently spoken about the transition as being a time of particular vulnerability. The president-elect has spoken about the possibility of an early test of the new administration. In my country, Lord West has spoken about a new threat bubbling up. I wonder if you could just explain some of the context of those remarks and tell us whether we've really got something to be worried about at the moment.

HAYDEN: Sure. We had a chat earlier right before we came in here, myself and another gentleman, about this very thing. And he pointed out two data points, the attacks in 2001 and the attacks in 1993. I would add that, for some people, two data points create a trend line. For others, there may be a bit more hesitation to call that a trend line.

I guess I'd introduce another factor into this, as well. I tried to give you an accurate picture of al-Qa'ida. This is not an omnipotent enemy. This is an enemy whose actions we can affect by the actions that we take. And I tried to give you a picture that, in many ways, we've been taking

those actions and keeping them off balance, so that even if al-Qa'ida had this strong wish to do something between Date X and Date Y, it's another thing to do it, beyond just the wish.

So I think we need to keep those kinds of things in mind. That said, I mean, there's a clear historical pattern that, during a transition, as governments are forming, people are becoming accustomed to what they're doing and who else is doing it, decision-making may theoretically be slower than it is one, two or three years later. That's why we've received very clear direction that we're going to make this the smoothest transition in recorded history, so that we can get the new team, whomever they might be, as they're named, up to speed as quickly as possible so that there's no diminution in the ability of the republic to defend itself.

QUESTION: General, I've heard recently some put forward the proposition, to follow up on your comment that al-Qa'ida is not monolithic here, that, in fact, it might be possible to separate the Taliban and al-Qa'ida, and turn them against al-Qa'ida with some sort of diplomatic approach.

And another element of this is that we're perhaps making a mistake by paying much attention to that Pakistan-Afghanistan border, which isn't real on the ground in any event, and that we might be pushing the war into Pakistan rather than keeping the war out of Afghanistan, and that a different approach to the al-Qa'ida-Taliban thing might offer a solution to both of those problems.

HAYDEN: Great question. And, actually, it follows up on a question asked earlier, and I didn't completely answer it.

First, the Taliban. If we were parsing Taliban as a part of speech, I think we'd have an honest debate as to whether it was a singular noun, a collective noun, or a plural noun. And depending on how you do that might shape your policy approach. I think we might, certainly in our common discourse, I hope not so much in our professional discourse, but in our common discourse might be a bit too facile in spreading a Taliban label across a whole variety of populations.

And so I think what's implied in your question is certainly true and worth exploring, that you can hive off some of these groups and that some are more or less dangerous than others. Some are more or less committed, some are more or less your friends or more or less your enemies, and a realistic appreciation of that is an important tool in the toolbox of a nation like ourselves or Pakistan going forward.

I'd also underscore -- and, of course, the model that's brought up in Anbar, where we did something similar, and there are similarities and there are differences between Anbar province in Iraq and what goes on in the tribal region. But in Anbar, we did accept the premise that we could talk to people who had recently been shooting at us as long as we could arrange something in the future that was quite different from what was going on in the past. So that does offer us opportunities.

What you had in Anbar, though, was security. You were able to provide these groups with sufficient security to make decisions based on their own self-interest that more comported with your vision for the future. Until we can provide security in the tribal region, that effort is much, much more difficult there. But it remains a distinct possibility. We'd be foolish not to include that in our approach to the region. And to be very candid, doing it from Washington or doing it with an American lens is probably not going to be all that successful. Here's an element where our Pakistani allies are far more sensitive to experience with the realities on the ground.

QUESTION: General, I wanted to talk about the air strikes in specific. And are they having a measurable impact on al-Qa'ida that make it worth the diplomatic backlash and the political backlash within Pakistan? And then, secondly, did Pakistan's response to the ground raid in September have an impact such that that sort of tactic would unlikely to be repeated?

HAYDEN: There are a lot of things that I can't comment on in any way. I would share with you, though, that General Pasha, who is essentially my counterpart inside the Pakistani government, head of ISI, visited us a few weeks ago for three days. We had long, productive discussions, friendly discussions with General Pasha. I think it's fair to say that we've got a common view of the threat. And I think there's a lot more commonality on how the threat should be dealt with than many people seem to assume. And that, over the long term, success here is going to be defined by the success of Pakistani sovereignty over these regions. And that's something that a strong, powerful common interest for the two of us and that we would work to support.

KEMPE: There's been some talk about reliability of the ISI. Do the Pakistanis consider it reliable that you're talking about, or do they have some concerns about it, as well?

HAYDEN: I would never venture to try to judge anything like that. Again, I'd just simply repeat, we meet with ISI routinely. We have worked with them for some of the most significant successes in the war of terror, and we'll continue to work with them.

QUESTION: You said that AQI in Iraq is on the verge of strategic defeat, and I'm wondering if you can just expand a little bit more on the situation in Iraq. You have some of these foreign fighters that are still there, loosely under the al-Qa'ida in Iraq banner, some of them seeking sanctuary across the borders. I'm just wondering, you know, what -- sort of in a transition mindset...

HAYDEN: Sure. And, again, I'm afraid I can't give you that crisp, definitive answer, because there's probably not one available. But I can talk about some factors bearing.

Number one, the flow of foreign fighters is down, significantly down. You just don't see the number of people wanting to cross one or another border and go into Iraq and fight. I think there are a lot of reasons for that. I think it's the -- I'll say the fight in Iraq has lost its aura for a lot of al-Qa'ida adherents. And then there's just the, you know, pure, raw, physical security environment that we've been able to create with our Iraqi allies. I think both of those are very important things.

Now, that said, when you look -- and we asked our analysts to do this-- when you look at the history of these kinds of things, and you have an insurgency -- and, again, words escape us to accurately describe in one label exactly what is it, but I'll use the word "insurgency" for al-Qa'ida. When you look at the history of such movements, take the Malay rebellion, take the Huks in the Philippines, when you look at it over the long term, these things don't go out overnight. There is a long period in which there is considerable smoldering and the occasional shooting out of flames. And I suspect that that's probably what we'll see for al-Qa'ida in Iraq for a long period of time.

And in each of those cases, with the Huks and with the Malay rebellion, it's just not the security services, but the growth of governance, the growth of providing services to the population that ultimately lead to their demise. So I don't want you to get the -- strategic defeat I believe in. I'm not backing away from that at all. But this is going to go for a long time before it's just out all together.

QUESTION: Going back to your statement that al-Qa'ida operating out of Pakistan is the greatest danger to the United States, and then you said that, if there is a major strike in this country, it will bear al-Qa'ida's fingerprints. Just to clarify that, are you saying Al-Qa'ida in Pakistan -- it would bear the fingerprints of al-Qa'ida in Pakistan as opposed to the Islamic Maghreb? And what does that say about sort of the non-al-Qa'ida Jihadi movements around the world. You're really, it sounds like you're really narrowing it down to al-Qa'ida and Pakistan.

HAYDEN: And I have to preface my answer with, you don't know what you don't know. But dealing with what I do know, all the threats we have to the West have a thread that takes them back to the tribal region along the Af-Pak border. And it may be training; it may be command and control; it may be financing. But there is at least one, and in some cases many threads that take them back to there, and that's why I chose to focus on it as much as I did in my remarks.

QUESTION: General, I wanted to ask you to say a few more words about how you would characterize the Pashtun. I understand that they're the dominant cultural influence in the region, particularly in FATA. But at one time, if I understand correctly, back in the late '80s, we were able to align their interests with our interests. Is that still possible to do that in that region? And sort of a subpart of that, has al-Qa'ida been able to subjugate or to incorporate Pashtuns' objectives with theirs in that region?

HAYDEN: In answer to the first question, can we envisage a future in which Pashtun objectives comport with our own? And I think the answer is absolutely yes. I mean, there's nothing intrinsic in our worldview or their worldview, even our strategic needs, their perceived strategic needs, that would preclude that. So that's one.

This merging of al-Qa'ida and Pashtun extremism or Pashtun separatism has been building for a while. It is very complex. It's not something that's easily understood from a distance. I almost liken it, and I don't mean to trivialize this, but, you know, any of you who've grown up in a big city and know that there are certain unofficial organizations called gangs that have sway here, have sway there, have sway over here, and the relationships and alliances among those are very difficult to understand by an outsider, even if the outsider there is defined as the local police force, you know, someone who's accustomed to living in the area, can actually read the street signs and speak the language. So there are a lot of subtleties to this that we and our Pakistani and Afghan allies have to master. But there's nothing that precludes that.

Al Qaeda has been, as I tried to point out in my remarks, has been successful. They've been there for a while. The Arabs in Al Qaeda have been very respectful of local custom. And we have the custom of Pashtunwali, which is hospitality for guests, that is very strong. And the Arabs in Al Qaeda have been respectful of that. And so we're now seeing intermarriage and a whole linkage of folks who, you know, perhaps, don't know or don't care what Al Qaeda's strategic objectives are, just know that they are their guests and that their culture requires certain norms of behavior.

Other foreigners in the tribal region, Uzbeks, Chechens, and others, have not nearly been as respectful of local custom. And they are not nearly as welcome. So, again, the more of learn about the complexity of the situation, the more you learn about angles and advantages that you can exploit. But, ultimately, there's nothing that precludes success here.

Someone talked earlier, I think it was Jan talking about, you know, we talk about the Pashtuns, and they're divided by what some was suggest is the artificial line or the Duran Line. I can only tell you, it didn't seem artificial when I talk to our Afghan friends or our Pakistani friends. That seems to be quite a significant line that they've drawn there. And that simply makes it more

complex because the local identity doesn't view that line in the same way that mapmakers in Kabul or Islamabad or in Washington might view it.

KEMPE: General Hayden, let me ask you a last question as we're running out of time.

What's the most important single thing that you've learned in this job that you would want to pass on to your successor or should not have a successor, pass on to yourself? And maybe part of that could be you fixed a lot in a lot of places. You fixed a lot at the NSA when you were there, and it came out a better place. I think people are saying that about you very clearly of the CIA as well. What's one thing you were unable to fix that you would say should be fixed in the next administration?

HAYDEN: Actually, you asked me two questions. And I want to take my freedom and answer the first one because I don't want to answer the second. And the first was simply what's the raw advice.

KEMPE: Yes.

HAYDEN: OK. Intelligence is very, very hard. And when you hold it up to an absolute scale, it always fails. I had one group much smaller than this once ask me on a scale of zero to ten, how would you rate CIA's analytic capacity? And I answered that the first thing I have to tell you is seven, eight, nine, and ten are not on our scale. Because if you're at seven, eight, nine, or ten, they aren't asking us the question. We get the different kind of question. The one with a lot more ambiguity. The one that is a cross between a secret and a mystery. OK? And so that's the challenge we work under. So, one, you need to know that.

Two, I actually believe that the wealth the American taxpayer has given us, the guidance we've gotten from our political leadership, and the White House and in the Congress, has created a pretty good organization. I don't mean just CIA. I mean the entire intelligence community. And one of the things we're flogged about fairly routinely is sharing of information. And so I've taken a little parlor game when I get that kind of homily from people. I said, OK, I've got it. We have to share information better. Now, help me with this. Fill in the blank. Finish this sentence for me. You guys don't share information well enough. You should be more like the...

And there is no name, no country that fits that blank and makes that sentence true.

So my point is if we were marking on the curve, I'd really feel good about life. But life doesn't mark us on the curve. Life marks us on an absolute scale, particularly, for an intelligence community. With all that in mind, I would pass on to those coming in that this community has been inspected, investigated, reviewed and commissioned to death for the last six or seven years. The metaphor I use is they wonder how we're growing so come in, grab us, pull us up by the roots, and say well they're not growing fast enough and put us back down with the effect that would be obvious.

I would say this. The structure we current have is fine. It's good enough. Good people can make it work. Is it perfect? No. Nothing's perfect. But this can work. So I would simply offer the advice pick people to head these structures who have the competence to govern complex organizations and who have the confidence of the political leadership. And then just let them go and go do things. Modifications, changes in size of the staff here, little change in responsibilities there, fine. But another major look, another major restructuring, I think, would be catastrophic for the community.

So if you're asking one piece of advice, pick good people to lead this, people you trust, people

you think have the talent to do it, give them their mission, and let them work, broadly speaking, within the current structure.

KEMPE: And don't pull up the roots. Before I thank you, General Hayden, I just want to thank a couple of other people. First of all, I do want to thank General Punaro, who's a member of our board and also SAIC for supporting our work on global intelligence where we're really trying to understand what's going on across the Atlantic and also help understanding where we can. And I think you've really helped us tonight, General Hayden.

The second thing is I'd like to thank General Scowcroft. I want to tell my staff, I did not write his opening comments where he praised the Atlantic Council and our work. But, as our chairman of the international advisory board, it's a great compliment coming from you. And thank you so much. Finally, I want to tip the hat to the vice president of the Atlanta Council, Jim Townsend, and his action officer for this series, Magnus Nordenman, who really put all this together.

And then, finally, General Hayden, this was really a rich conversation. It was a wonderful presentation on your part. I think we're all going home with a lot to digest and a lot of new insights. Thank you for taking the time, sir.

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