

**Statement of Chair Jane Harman (D-CA), as prepared
Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing & Terrorism Risk
Assessment
Committee on Homeland Security**

“Reassessing the Evolving al-Qa`ida Threat to the Homeland.”

10:00 a.m., Thursday, November 19, 2009

Just over a year ago, this Subcommittee held a hearing at which I noted that al-Qa`ida’s desire and intent to attack us remained undiminished.

Peter Bergen and Lawrence Wright – both renowned terrorism experts – testified at that hearing.

Bergen asserted that al-Qa`ida is losing the long-term battle for hearts and minds, but yet has rebuilt its capacity along the Af/Pak border and remains capable of launching large-scale attacks in the West. He predicted that the next terror attack in the US will probably be committed by someone holding a European passport.

Wright said that al-Qa`ida attacks will continue; the only real question is scale. He described the organization as adaptive, flexible and evolutionary – and a long way from extinction.

We return to the topic today, because I for one believe al-Qa`ida is more dangerous now than ever.

I’m just back from Afghanistan and Pakistan, where meetings with foreign and American intelligence officials confirmed that al-Qa`ida is spreading from its safe haven along the Af/Pak border into Yemen, Somalia and the Maghreb.

And into the United States of America.

Since 9/11, al-Qa`ida has morphed from a top-down, vertically integrated entity into a loosely affiliated, horizontal structure. Despite considerable success by the US and allies in taking out many high-value targets, Westerners are now training in al-Qa`ida camps in the FATA. Peter Bergen, a witness again today, puts the number at 25 American citizens or residents who have been charged with travelling to such camps since 9/11.

Al-Qa`ida is also inspiring copy-cat-type attacks, which may be what the Hasan case is about. The “new terrorist template,” as TIME magazine calls it, will prove an even more difficult threat to mitigate than that posed by the original al-Qa`ida.

I’ve been focused on this threat for 8 years – first as the Ranking Member on the House Intelligence Committee and now as the chair of this Subcommittee.

There is much unfinished business. The homeland remains vulnerable.

Recent indictments in the US against Najibullah Zazi and David Headley are of huge concern. I am concerned. These indictments are important; I applaud the excellent work of the law enforcement and intelligence agencies involved.

Since 9/11, we have successfully tried and convicted more than 200 individuals with a history of or nexus to international terrorism – in the US.

Consistent with this strong record, I support Attorney General Holder's decision to refer Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and 4 other Gitmo detainees for trial in the Southern District of New York.

I believe Holder's decision was carefully considered, that our prosecutions will be successful, that all five will be convicted, and we will demonstrate to the world that we live by our values – principal among them the rule of law. Today's hearing will update the Subcommittee on the al-Qa'ida threat and we welcome back Mr. Bergen, as well as terrorism experts Paul Pillar, Dr. Martha Crenshaw and retired General David Barno.

Our witnesses seem to agree that al-Qa'ida is still potent – although less capable of pulling off an attack of the same magnitude as 9/11.

It is Mr. Bergen's assessment that al-Qa'ida now poses a "second order threat in which the worst case scenario would be an al-Qa'ida-trained or inspired attack."

Mr. Pillar cites the importance of placing the threat from al-Qa'ida within a larger context – one that includes other radical Islamist cells and individuals that may be motivated by grievances and sentiments al-Qa'ida seeks to exploit. General Barno agrees.

Finally, Dr. Crenshaw asserts that sponsoring terrorist attacks in the West is an ideological imperative essential to the al-Qa'ida identity and "brand."

I hope that President Obama's emerging Pak/Af policy – and the emphasis on Pak is deliberate – will include a broad strategy for targeting al-Qa'ida and any other terror group with worldwide reach – and mitigating their threat to the US.