

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER JACKIE SPEIER (D-CA)
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence
Committee on Homeland Security

The Threat to the U.S. Homeland Emanating from Pakistan

May 3, 2011 at 2:00 PM
311 Cannon House Office Building

On Sunday night, this hearing took on a completely new dynamic, as the world learned that the mastermind of 9/11 and the inspirational leader for numerous others terrorist plots was killed in a firefight with U.S. special forces.

The death of Bin Laden, as many have stated, marks a monumental achievement in our nation's effort to defeat Al Qaeda.

So many people deserve recognition for their steadfast efforts and sacrifices over the last ten years, three Presidents, our military, and homeland and intelligence community, but we must not rest on our laurels either.

While Al Qaeda may be symbolized by Bin Laden, the terrorist network is now much bigger than just him, so we must remain vigilant as affiliated groups and radicalized individuals pursue attacks against us.

With Bin Laden's death, we are left asking what's next for Al Qaeda? How real is the threat of retaliation? How will our relationship with Pakistan be impacted?

Pakistan has been a key ally in our counterterrorism efforts against Al Qaeda and other extremist groups in the region.

Scores of Pakistani soldiers have lost their lives fighting against the Taliban and Al Qaeda and the Pakistani government has helped us disrupt and dismantle terror networks since 9/11.

But, what did they know or what should they have known about Bin Laden's whereabouts and the massive compound about 30 miles outside of Islamabad where he was living?

Bin Laden was not found in a cave; his compound was less than two miles away from an elite Pakistani Army training academy, and we have to question how he was able to hide "in plain sight" for such a long period of time.

We have also heard several disturbing reports, including a recent statement by Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, indicating that some in Pakistan's intelligence services have ties with certain terrorist groups.

We must attempt to answer these critical questions because our relationship with the Pakistani government is dependent on what we discover.

Pakistan appears to have become a breeding ground for a variety of terrorist organizations, including Al Qaeda.

While Bin Laden's compound demonstrates that extremist elements are spread throughout the country, much of the terrorist threat is concentrated in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas on the western border with Afghanistan.

This fiercely autonomous area has been home to numerous terrorist organizations since 9/11 and is so perilous that Western aid workers can't provide effective services there.

What social forces make these areas ripe for terrorists, and how can we change this dynamic?

Although we have had some success in targeting key militants in this area since 9/11, the terrorist networks have proven resilient, simply relocating to other parts of the country.

Now, we must determine how to snuff-out Bin Laden's legacy and to what extent Al Qaeda will continue or speed-up plotting attacks against the West.

Throughout the FATA and beyond, new groups have sprouted up, and have rivaled Al Qaeda for their deadliness and willingness to attack the U.S., both in the region and here at home.

TTP, the Pakistani Taliban, has been gaining momentum for the past several years and displayed a reach that shocked many American officials, when a TTP-trained Pakistani-American (Faisal Shahzad), attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square, New York.

TTP and many other groups, including the Haqqani Network, operate hand-in-hand with Al Qaeda in Pakistan, making the region a hot-bed of extremism.

It has become widely apparent that existing groups in Pakistan have embraced the ideological cancer of Al Qaeda and while we once believed they posed little threat to America, we must now be gravely concerned.

At the top of this list is L-e-T, a group that signaled its evolution to a global jihadist organization by carrying out the Mumbai attacks of 2008.

Various media reports have speculated that L-e-T, like the Pakistani Taliban, may have grown closer to Al Qaeda, both ideologically and operationally.

Will the death of Bin Laden bring these loosely associated groups closer together and raise the threat to the U.S. homeland?

We certainly know that the radicalism preached by these groups presents a serious danger to religious minorities, such as the Ahmadis, women, and political opposition leaders in Pakistan, and seems to be gaining support, weakening the will of the Pakistani government to work with us.

When the Pakistani government has mustered the political will, however, the Army has been effective in launching devastating attacks against the militants. How do we ensure that they are working with us to combat all terrorists groups in the region?

Shouldn't we also proactively attack the source of the extremism by investing more in economic and social opportunities in Pakistan, so youths do not turn to terrorism?

I look forward to hearing our witnesses' testimony today, because finding solutions to these questions requires a better understanding of an extremely complex threat environment.

Again, I'd like to commend the President for his courage and all the brave men and women that put their lives on the line for our security, and thank them for the sacrifices they make for all of us here at home.