




Written by on November 15, 2008

CIA Director Hayden Says bin Laden Isolated

"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 [al-Qaeda] organization he nominally heads," Hayden was quoted as saying by Agence France Presse (AFP). 

Hayden insisted that capturing bin Laden remains a high priority for the Central Intelligence Agency, stating: "Although there has been press speculation to the contrary, I can assure you that the hunt for bin Laden is very much at the top of CIA's priority list." Hayden added that the capture or death of the terrorist leader would be a blow for his group: "Because of his iconic stature, his death or capture clearly would have a significant impact on the confidence of his followers, both core Al-Qaeda and these unaffiliated extremists ... throughout the world."

During his speech, Hayden identified the often lawless, tribal areas of Northwest Pakistan (officially called Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, or FATA) as a safe haven for terrorist organizations. He said:

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.

Hayden said that the al-Qaeda terrorists in FATA had exploited a peace settlement reached with the Pakistani government of General Pervez Musharraf. Hayden stated that "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."

Hayden, who was appointed to direct the CIA by President Bush in May 2006, may be replaced when the Obama administration begins on January 20.

The UK's *Times* of November 14 reported that within hours of Hayden's speech, a suspected U.S. missile attack against an area known as a stronghold of Pakistani Taliban commander Baitullah Mehsud (an al-Qaeda ally) killed 12 people, including five foreigners. The *Times* reported: "According to security sources, U.S. forces have intensified missile attacks by pilotless drones since early September, as they grow frustrated by fighters from Pakistan fuelling the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and there are fears of al-Qaeda regrouping."

The Pakistani government has objected to U.S. cross-border strikes into its territory and President Asif Ali Zardari complained to CBS News in an interview aired during the night of November 13-14: "It's undermining my sovereignty and it's not helping win the ... hearts and minds of people."

The *Times* reported that Hayden claimed that U.S. pressure in Pakistan's borderlands was succeeding in knocking al-Qaeda "off balance."

Voice of America news for November 14 reported Hayden's assessment that al-Qaeda "remains the single greatest threat to the United States" and his prediction that if a major strike on the United States should occur, it will bear the fingerprints of al-Qaeda.



Photo: CIA



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