



**Media Conference Call with the Director of National Intelligence
Mr. Dennis C. Blair**

2009 National Intelligence Strategy

September 15, 2009

DIRECTOR BLAIR: Good morning. I'm in San Francisco now at the – visiting one of our national laboratories, visiting one of our important contractors, who does work for the Intelligence Community. And I'm giving a talk to the Commonwealth Club here in San Francisco later this evening. Sorry I can't be with you in person.

But what I'd like to talk about today is this document, which we've now made available to you in unclassified form – the National Intelligence Strategy. And the reason we are publishing an unclassified version is we really think the American people deserve to know about their intelligence enterprise and understand more of what we're doing to protect the country and to help the government do its job.

I know most of the time I talk to you about the events of the day – what's going on in North Korea or Iran or Afghanistan and Pakistan – but this morning, we're talking about the very important business of a blueprint to run this 200,000-person, \$75 billion national enterprise in intelligence, whose job is to help our policymakers, to support our troops and diplomats in the field and to build better tools and a better workforce so that we can do the job even better in the future than we can in the day. This is really the blueprint order of our efforts to get the job done now and in the future.

The document itself, which you all have copies of, was formed by a months-long effort within the Intelligence Community involving our deputies committee – the deputy leaders of the 16 organizations that comprise the Intelligence Community – and then finally approved by the executive committee – the heads of those agencies. It was also reviewed and approved by the National Security Council principals themselves, and I talked about it with the intelligence oversight committees in Congress. So we've used it, also, as a vehicle for forming our contract with those that we work with, both in the executive branch and in the legislative branch.

It's out in front of – this – of other important, similar administration documents like a national security strategy, which will be published in due course. But we felt it was important to write down this blueprint and roadmap of what we do, and it's fully consistent with the emerging principles of national security, which this administration is developing at the same time that it deals with these many pressing problems that it inherited and that have come up in this eight months since we've been in office.

Let me point out the significance of a few items in the strategy itself for you. You'll notice that there's a section on the international environment and you may notice that this is the first time that the international environment doesn't have the first name of "post." For long years after the Cold War ended, we were in a "post-Cold War" world; for years after 9/11, we were in the "post-9/11 world." It seemed that we were always looking backwards and being run by the events of the past.

If you look at this document, I think for the first time, we have a good understanding of the sort of world that we're in and the complexity and the dynamic nature of the world. There is, of course, the fabric of nation-states jostling against each other as they pursue their interests, but there are also powerful groups that are not organized as nations – international groups using terror or criminal syndicates that operate around the world, and also networks of organizations, joined by technology in many cases, that don't respect borders and have international goals and objectives.

Cutting across all of this are significant trends – technological trends, like the continuing development of the information technology revolution, which is not slackening. In fact, if anything, it's becoming stronger and stronger and has a great effect on both events and how we perceive events – other mega-trends that have cut across the world, from climate change through pandemics. And all of these nation-states, non-nation-states, worldwide trends flow together, react in different ways and form the international environment in which the United States pursues its interests.

And it's our job in the Intelligence Community to understand what they're doing, to warn policymakers of threats coming up and to alert them to opportunities coming from them and to be able to inform them in a very tactical, granular sense when our military units, diplomats, and others go out to carry out the nation's policies in places like Afghanistan and Pakistan or Iraq and elsewhere.

A couple of other things to mention in this strategy that you might not notice unless you've been following it: This document is not set up on the traditional fault line of the Intelligence Community between military intelligence and national intelligence. For years, that was thought to be the primary theme that it was necessary to work across. You'll see that these divisions of intelligence are set up across the support of policy and to support operations in the field, and that military – units in the Department of Defense, like the National Security Agency, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency work to help us form policy, whether the customers are wearing uniforms and work in the Pentagon or whether they work in the White House or Foggy Bottom or elsewhere.

By the same token, when the United States decides to take action and we deploy into countries, you'll find that there are military units there and there are non-military units there – provincial reconstruction teams, strong diplomatic groups. And the military units – we'll support them with information in the field. And you'll find that the Central Intelligence Agency, with its deployed units, are working with and supporting military units there. So this old distinction between military and non-military intelligence is no longer relevant. The problems that we face in the

world have strong military, diplomatic, economic and other aspects that all work together and need to be supported by an interlocked and interweaving set of intelligence activities.

And that really brings me to the emphasis on mission management in the document. You'll find it's the first of the enterprise objectives that's in the book. And you'll find constantly the themes of integration and collaboration and working together, team play are through the document. I find that this approach is absolutely essential if the Intelligence Community is to be able to do its job.

The old industrial way of doing intelligence where some operating unit sent in a requirement to a system that was sent off to some individual collector – a HUMINT collector, a SIGINT collector, and IMINT collector – intelligence is collected; report was written, redistributed. Those days are gone. Now we do our best work when we form teams of collectors in the various disciplines – signals intelligence, human intelligence and geospatial intelligence.

We have analysts who are embedded right in those teams. These teams move very flexibly across the full range of government, talking from Cabinet officials all the way down to troops in the field. And they bring together all of their various pieces of information that they can bring to bear on the problems, process them quickly through analysts are very aware of what the troops in the field and policy officers need and interact with them very quickly.

This is how we do our best work, whether we're going after leadership intentions of countries that we're dealing with, whether we're going after some very technical information – weapons systems that may be used against us – and this approach to our job – and it's really my job as the DNI to foster more and more of this – is the way of the future.

Let me finish up with one final point and tell you what the effect of this National Intelligence Strategy is, besides keeping the dust off an 8.5-by-11 section of various coffee tables around Washington, because this really is a document which is not just put out for education or explaining what we do. But the classified form of this document is the foundation of the contracts, the performance assessments reports of those of us who have senior jobs in the Intelligence Community.

I have a performance appraisal report, which I give to the President. My direct reports, both those within the ODNI and the other 16 heads of the Intelligence Community, have performance appraisal reports, which is a contract with me and which I review with them to ensure completion. And it is this National Intelligence Strategy which really forms the basis of those reports, forms the individual objectives, and it is this document, which moves the community through its leadership and the primary staff doing it. So it's a big deal for us in the Intelligence Community. It's how we can do our job in the future and ensure we can do it in the present – and we can also do it a lot better in the future.

Well, with that, let me stop.

QUESTION: Director Blair, thank you very much for doing this. I was struck in the strategy about the very forthright language about China and its military expansion, its resource-based

diplomacy, about the need to increase counterintelligence and penetrate foreign espionage services, the U.S. cyber-architecture. It seems to me that this is a – is this intended as a muscular response to the U.S.’ external threats? I mean, in the broad picture, how would you sum up the posture that this report adds up to?

DIRECTOR BLAIR: I would say that it is a muscular intelligence response to the nation’s responsibilities so that we can provide good advice to the policymakers and in the field. We do have to be very aggressive in the areas that you cited in cyber, both protecting our own secrets and stealing those of others, because not only in the developed countries but through the world information is moving to networks. And that’s where you have to go to learn what other countries and other groups are up to. And that’s what you have to be able to protect in order to be able to do your own work without it. And yes, China is very aggressive in the cyber-world, so too is Russia and others.

So absolutely right that it’s a muscular intelligence strategy; but it is to inform a nuanced, intelligent, agile, overall national security strategy.

QUESTION: So although there may not be war on terror anymore, you would say the U.S. is no softer than it’s been before?

DIRECTOR BLAIR: Quite the contrary. We are as aggressive in the intelligence world as we were before. And in fact, in the particular area of working against groups – the violent extremist groups, which you notice is the first of our mission objectives – we can be more aggressive because we are gaining more and more knowledge.

That’s an important point to make in this area because – (inaudible) – on this business of, well, what did various interrogation techniques gather for us five years ago. What has really made all the nations safer has been the accumulation of knowledge about al-Qaida and its affiliate groups, which enables us to be more aggressive in expanding that knowledge and stopping things before they happen. And so, I’d say we are more aggressive. And the ability to be more aggressive is founded upon the much larger and more sophisticated understanding of the adversary that we have gained across various administrations in recent years.

QUESTION: Admiral, this is down in the weeds, but one of the things that caught my attention was to look at insurgents around the world and the other thing about ungoverned territories within sovereign states. How do you decide which insurgents are dangerous to us and which are a natural reaction to perhaps a harsh administration? And how do you decide, are there any limits to ungoverned areas in which we are going to have an interest?

DIRECTOR BLAIR: Well, that’s a key set of judgments. The primary way we try to distinguish them is to penetrate them and learn whether they’re taking about making attacks against the United States or our forces and allies or whether they are directing their attacks against others. If they’re in the first category, of course, they are of the greatest concern to us. And the ones like al-Qaida, its affiliates in the Arabian Peninsula, al-Qaida in the Maghreb, al-Qaida in Iraq or in that category.

We are against terrorists everywhere. The wanton killing of innocents is something that we oppose throughout the world, but it really is those who go against United States that we want to learn about and disrupt and defeat.

There is also – some of them sometimes change their ideas. A primary example is, right now, in Western Pakistan, al-Qaida, of course, has an avowed goal of conducting attacks on the United States; it is seeking safe haven with various Taliban groups that are there in Western Pakistan/Eastern Afghanistan.

And these groups have more recently also said that they are in favor of attacks in the West. So it's a shifting calculus, but it's fundamentally based on the harm that they would do to the United States' troops and allies.

QUESTION: You mention in your book the DNI's mission regarding violent extremism. And disruption of plans is one of the tenets that come underneath that. And in there is mentioned the nexus between terrorism and criminal activities.

One of the emerging and pretty well-documented problems the U.S. is facing – at least based on information from current and former intelligence officials and drug officials – is that the nexus between terrorism, drug traffickers and weapons dealers to slip operatives and weapons into the U.S. over the southern border using the, quote, unquote, “gateways,” or, “beams of light,” as one official referred to it.

How important is that in your strategy, dealing with that, and what tools do you have to deal with that because it's very clear: A large part of the problem emanates from Mexico.

DIRECTOR BLAIR: That nexus is a toxic mixture. If you look at places like Afghanistan, the Taliban gets a large portion of its revenue from the opium trade in that country. If you look at Colombia, the gangs there are – we don't even know what to call them – narco gangs, terrorist gangs and insurgency; they do it all in order to try to further their gains.

So that also really relates to that – to the ungoverned territories which we mentioned. It's really in parts of the world in which governance is weak or the authority of governments does not go. They seem to be magnets for drug dealers, money launderers, terrorist camps. It's where they can hide in the swamps and then come out and attack us.

So that nexus that you point out is very, very important. I would point out, in Mexico, that I think that the efforts that the Mexican government has been making recently under President Calderon have been extremely courageous and are having effect. And the United States is cooperating with Mexico in an unprecedented way across the border, the Mérida Initiative, the tremendous law enforcement/military/homeland protection. And I think that we are making that southern area of the United States safer by the day by these efforts.

QUESTION: On the question of integration, you – I know that you were advocating a policy that would allow you to designate non-CIA officers as your representatives overseas. And I was

just wondering where that stands and to get your thoughts on sort of why this issue is taking a while to resolve and how it's likely to be resolved.

DIRECTOR BLAIR: That whole process is still going on. And I would tell you that the policy is not being made on pieces of paper, but it's being made in the field, in action, which is where I think we do our best work. We are putting together teams of representatives from the different agencies. We designate someone to be in charge of these teams because you have to have someone in charge of a team to be effective.

But what strikes me is the smooth teamwork of these young and effective intelligence officers when confronted with real problems. I can picture one – I have one picture in my mind: a darkened room with a flickering computer screen. That computer screen is tied into the server of a half-a-world away in a part of the world that is thinking not good things about the United States.

There is a young female Army sergeant who is at the keys; there is a kid with a New York Yankees baseball cap sideways on his head who was whispering in one ear; there is an old gray-haired, bearded guy who has been working on this target for 40 years in the other ear; and in back is a group of officers from different agencies. And they are in real time both extracting intelligence from and making life difficult for one of our adversaries using the computer around the world.

That kind of magnificent work is what we mean by mission management. And I find that people in the agency who are focused on the mission, any agency, who get together with a team with other pros blend together into this kind of mission management and they don't spend their time sitting around arguing who is in charge; they get the job done and that's what we're really striving for and that's what we're seeing.

QUESTION: So why is it so hard to resolve this issue in Washington if they seem to be handling it in the field fairly well?

DIRECTOR BLAIR: The closer you are to the fire, the more you focus on the mission.

Good to talk to all of you all and I look forward to talking with you in the future.

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