



## **U.S. Faces Broad Spectrum of Threats, Intel Leaders Say**

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 16, 2012 – The United States and its allies face a broad spectrum of national security threats from terrorism, nuclear proliferation and cyber attacks, intelligence leaders told Congress members today.

Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper and Defense Intelligence Agency Director Army Lt. Gen. Ronald L. Burgess Jr. provided their worldwide threat assessments to the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Clapper listed countering terrorism, nuclear proliferation and cyber threats, as well as counterintelligence, as being at the forefront of national security concerns. But, he added, “it is virtually impossible to rank – in terms of long-term importance – the numerous potential threats to U.S. national security.”

Unlike in the Cold War days of having a single, large adversary, Clapper said, “it is the multiplicity and interconnectedness of potential threats – and the actors behind them – that constitute our biggest challenge.”

Burgess cited a “broad spectrum of dissimilar threats,” including rising regional powers and highly adaptive and resilient transnational terrorist networks.

Intelligence shows the next three years will be a critical transition time in counterterrorism, as groups like al-Qaida diminish in importance and terrorist groups become more decentralized, Clapper said.

U.S. counterterrorism has caused al-Qaida to lose so many top lieutenants since 2008 “that a new group of leaders, even if they could be found, would have difficulty integrating into the organization and compensating for mounting losses,” the director said. Al-Qaida’s regional affiliates in Iraq, the Arabian peninsula and North Africa are expected to “surpass the remnants of core al-Qaida in Pakistan,” he said.

With continued, robust counterterrorism efforts and cooperation from international partners, Clapper said, “there is a better-than-even chance that decentralization will lead to fragmentation of the movement within a few years,” although he added that terrorist groups will continue to be a dangerous transnational force.

Intense counterterrorism pressure has made it unlikely that a terrorist group would launch a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear mass attack against the United States in the next year, Clapper said, but groups such as al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula continue to show interest in such an attack. Most

terrorist groups, however, remain locally focused, Clapper said, noting that al-Qaida in Iraq remains focused on overthrowing the Shia-led government in Baghdad in favor of a Sunni-led government.

In Africa, the al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and al-Shabaab organizations struggle with internal divisions and outside support, and have been diminished by government and military pressure in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia, he said.

Clapper also said that extremist "lone actors," including criminals and homegrown terrorists, continue to be a concern inside the United States. The intelligence community, he added, will stay alert to events that might precipitate an attack, such as a perceived anti-Islamic bias, military involvement in another Muslim country, or unrest overseas.

In Afghanistan, Clapper noted that the transition of security is successful so far in the first two phases. His assessment, he told the committee, is that the government in Kabul will continue to make "incremental, fragile progress" this year in governance, security and development that is dependent on the support of international partners.

The Taliban still are resilient, and NATO's International Security Assistance Force will remain essential at least through the end of this year, Clapper said. Enduring stability depends heavily on support from neighboring states such as Pakistan, he added, especially since many European governments harbor doubts about extending financial help past 2014.

The Taliban have lost influence in the past year, mostly where ISAF forces are concentrated, but its senior leaders continue to enjoy safe havens in Pakistan, the director said.

Al-Qaida's impact on the Afghan insurgency "is limited," he said, and it most often works with other insurgent groups that don't depend on foreign fighters.

Clapper cited incremental improvements with governments operating in most provinces of Afghanistan. However, he said, provinces still struggle to provide essential services, and access to official governance mostly is limited to urban areas, leaving much of the rural areas isolated.

The director acknowledged the intelligence view is somewhat more pessimistic than that of U.S. military leaders in Afghanistan, but he said that is not unusual. "I don't find it a bad thing," he said. "In fact, I think it's healthy that there is a contrast between what the operational commanders believe and what the intelligence community assesses."

Burgess cited "endemic corruption and inefficiencies" in the Afghan army and police that he said are undermining security efforts. Afghan forces rely on ISAF for logistics, intelligence and transportation and will need sustained mentoring and support, he said.

In Iraq, Burgess said, Iraqi security forces have maintained security since U.S. troops left the country in December and probably will sustain that through the next year. But, he said, Iraqi forces still need training in a number of areas, including logistics, intelligence, and on new equipment purchased from the United States.

The Iraqi forces have demonstrated their ability to "put forces on the street, conduct static security of high-profile sites, operate checkpoints and conduct intelligence-driven targeting," Burgess said. But, he added, numerous security vulnerabilities remain due to manning shortages, logistical shortfalls and overly centralized command and control.

Weapons proliferation continues to be a concern, an increasingly among non-nation states, Clapper said. "Biological and chemical materials and technologies, almost always dual-use, move easily in our globalized economy, as do the personnel with scientific expertise to design and use them," he said. "The latest discoveries in life sciences diffuse globally and rapidly."

Still, intelligence shows no nation states have provided weapons of mass destruction assistance to terrorist groups, and no nonstate actors are targeting WMD sites in countries with unrest, the director said. But that could change as governments become more unstable, he added.

Middle East security largely will depend on how things work out for countries where governments were toppled in the Arab Spring, such as Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, Clapper said. The possible collapse of the Syrian government would have broad implications throughout the Middle East, both intelligence leaders told the senators.

The two also outlined threats from nations such as Iran and North Korea.

The pair told the committee they could not say whether Iran is developing nuclear weapons --, only that it "is keeping open the option" by developing nuclear capabilities that better position it to do so. Also, they said, Iran is expanding its uranium enrichment capabilities, which can be used either for civil or weapons purposes, but the amount enriched so far does not appear to be weapons grade.

Intelligence shows that Iran is capable of producing nuclear weapons as well as the ballistic missiles to carry them, "making the central issue its political will to do so," Clapper said.

For now, Burgess said, "We assess that Tehran is not close to agreeing to abandon its nuclear program."

Iran increasingly has shown a willingness to conduct attacks outside its borders, and any future attacks probably will be shaped by Tehran's cost-benefit analysis of an attack, as well as their perceptions of U.S. threats against the regime, Clapper said. Because of that, he said, the international community still can influence Iran's decisions, noting that increasingly tough economic sanctions seem to be working.

"Iran can close the Strait of Hormuz, at least temporarily," and may launch nuclear weapons against U.S. forces in the area if attacked, Burgess said. He added, though, that the agency believes Iran is unlikely to initiate an attack.

In North Korea, the government views its nuclear capabilities as intended for deterrence, international prestige, and coercive diplomacy, Clapper said. Its nuclear weapons and missile programs pose a serious threat in East Asia, and leaders in Pyongyang have shown in the past their willingness to export them to places such as Iran and Syria, he said.

Still, Clapper said, intelligence analysts assessed that North Korea would consider using nuclear weapons only under narrow circumstances, including a military defeat or loss of control.

Meanwhile, Clapper and Burgess said cyber attacks, while largely invisible to the public, are growing in scale and sophistication, and largely come from China and Russia against U.S. corporations and government sites.