

**Statement for the Record
of
Michael Leiter
Director (Acting), the National Counterterrorism Center
Before the
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's
May 6, 2008**

Chairman Rockefeller, Vice Chairman Bond, members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on the occasion of my nomination to serve as the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). It has been my distinct privilege to serve as the Center's Principal Deputy Director since February 2007, to serve as its Acting Director for the past six months, and most recently to be nominated by the President to serve as the Center's Director. I am further honored to appear before this Committee today to discuss my credentials to be confirmed as NCTC's Director, as well as my vision for NCTC in the coming years.

Before turning to these issues, however, I think it critical to reflect briefly on why NCTC was created by the Congress and President less than four years ago. On September 11, 2001, our nation experienced the single most traumatic terrorist attack in its history. NCTC was created to organize the U.S. Government's intelligence and strategic planning response to the threat of terrorism in a manner that was not, for a variety of reasons, possible before the tragedy of 9/11. And we were created to do so in a manner that not only provides our citizens with greater security, but also simultaneously protects the civil liberties that are the very essence of our nation.

I begin here because it is these foundational principles—providing greater security while protecting fundamental American values—that will, if I have the honor of being confirmed by the Senate, motivate all of my actions. And I would seek to lead NCTC in a manner that fully honors all of those who have been touched by the scourge of terrorism.

In many ways I believe that my credentials speak very much to these guiding principles and, moreover, to the type of work that is required of NCTC. I am not, as this Committee is well aware, a product of a lifetime of service in a single department or agency. Rather my career includes service in the United States Navy, the Department of Justice, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and in the Judicial Branch as a law clerk to two federal judges. And I believe I would be remiss if I did not also note my seven-plus years of experience working for local governments as a first responder. I would proffer that such experience—the military, law enforcement, intelligence, legal, and local first responder communities—are many of the same key elements that NCTC, and we as a nation, must bring together to address terrorism effectively.

From my perspective my legal training and experience as a law clerk to Associate Justice Stephen Breyer and then as an Assistant United States Attorney is especially relevant to the NCTC's work. As 9/11 so vividly illustrated, a substantial portion of counterterrorism intelligence and the U.S. Government's response to terrorism must occur within our borders. Having led interagency investigative teams as a prosecutor, I believe I have a healthy appreciation of the issues faced by law enforcement agents in the United States. Moreover, having served for two federal judges of the highest caliber, I have developed an unshakeable and profound respect for the importance of the rule of law and respect for civil liberties.

These experiences have, I believe, prepared me well to lead an organization that must not only analyze information that is collected within the United States, but also advise the Director of National Intelligence on operations relating to counterterrorism in the United States and assist the President's National and Homeland Security advisors in devising forward-looking strategic plans to counter the potential spread of violent extremism here at home.

I believe that my experience studying the Intelligence Community from the outside further qualifies me to lead the interagency element that is NCTC. As a lead investigator and report drafter for the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Concerning Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD Commission) I had the distinct honor of working intimately with nine preeminent Commissioners, to include Senator Chuck Robb who was kind enough to introduce me to the Committee today. Equally important, I had the luxury of devoting more than a year to an in-depth, Intelligence Community-wide study of where we performed well and where reform was necessary.

In this role I spent countless hours examining intelligence collection, analysis, dissemination, and structural characteristics and, much more significantly, formulating recommendations to improve the Intelligence Community's performance. Much of my time at the Commission was devoted to the issues I have faced since arriving at NCTC—integrating counterterrorism information, confronting the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and ensuring that policy makers receive timely, accurate, and unbiased assessments of complex national security challenges. My subsequent service to then-Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte and then-Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence Michael Hayden provided the even more illuminating experience of turning the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004* and the Commission's freshly-authored recommendations into real action and tangible results across the Intelligence Community.

Ultimately, however, I believe that my strongest credential to serve as Director of NCTC cannot be distilled from a list of educational or professional accomplishments. Rather, I consider my proven leadership of NCTC to be the truest testament to my qualifications. During my time at NCTC—and in my leadership elsewhere, to include the U.S. Navy and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence—I have strived to gain the trust and confidence of my subordinates, peers, and superiors. My approach has been

straightforward: listen to those around you and lead with vision, tenacity, judgment, and integrity.

I am proud of the relationships that I have developed since arriving at NCTC, both within our walls and with key partners in the U.S. Government, among state and local leaders, and our foreign allies. I have undoubtedly made mistakes during this period, but I have done all that I can to learn from those mistakes and improve my—and NCTC’s—performance. And I believe that overall, and in spite of the fact that I have served as both the Acting Director and Principal Deputy Director for the past six months, I have helped NCTC become more effective during this time.

These are, from my perspective, the principal reasons that I am qualified to serve as the Director of NCTC. I would now like to provide you with my vision for the future of NCTC and, by extension, what the future holds for the U.S. Government’s fight against terrorism. More specifically, I will address five broad topics: (1) improving NCTC’s intelligence support to “non traditional” partners; (2) institutionalizing cross-Government strategic operational planning; (3) advancing the U.S. Government’s global ideological engagement; (4) leadership and programmatic oversight of the Intelligence Community’s counterterrorism efforts on behalf of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI); and (5) ensuring that NCTC has the people to fulfill all of its responsibilities.

My first priority, and the first responsibility given to the Center by the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004* (IRTPA), is to ensure that NCTC is truly the primary organization for analyzing and integrating terrorism information, ensuring counterterrorism information sharing among federal agencies, and supporting other agencies’ sharing of counterterrorism information with non-federal partners. In all of these roles I report to the DNI, Michael McConnell, and serve as his Mission Manager for counterterrorism. On several occasions prior and subsequent to the President’s decision to nominate me to serve as Director, Director McConnell and I have spoken to discuss my potential leadership of NCTC and I am confident that we share a common vision for the Center’s future.

I believe that NCTC has, since its inception, made enormous progress toward fulfilling this primary responsibility. Today NCTC authors the majority of terrorism analysis that goes to senior policy makers and it ensures that all such products are appropriately coordinated among Intelligence Community components. But whereas this progress has been significant, we have moved more slowly in our support to “non traditional” partners such as FBI Joint Terrorism Task Forces; state, local, and tribal homeland security officials; and military commanders in the field. NCTC has not—and will not if I am confirmed—seek to displace the FBI, DHS, and DIA as they serve these respective customers, but we can and must do a better job of crafting our analytic product to support these diverse consumers.

In addition, we must continue to strengthen our focused information sharing efforts to these customers, as best embodied by our Defense Intelligence Unit (co-staffed by personnel from DIA’s Joint Intelligence Task Force for Combating Terrorism and U.S.

Northern Command) and the Interagency Threat Assessment and Coordination Group (ITACG, staffed by state and local law enforcement officers). These targeted information sharing components not only push information to these customers with unique counterterrorism needs, they also help to educate the rest of NCTC's staff on how our products can be shaped to speak more effectively to those combating terrorism outside of Washington.

Second, NCTC must further institutionalize U.S. Government-wide strategic operational planning (SOP). In its essence, SOP bridges the gap between coordinated interagency policy and strategy, and operations by Departments and Agencies to implement that strategy. From my experience working within the interagency system I am more convinced than ever that success against terrorism will *only* come through such coordinated and synchronized efforts—to include the full weight of our diplomatic, financial, military, intelligence, homeland security and law enforcement activities.

Since the President's approval of the first-ever National Implementation Plan in 2006, SOP has matured and evolved very significantly. Although we continue to pursue broad strategic plans that meaningfully guide department and agency programs and budgets, we have also initiated far more granular, targeted efforts to ensure department and agency implementation of plans on key topics (*e.g.*, terrorists' acquisition of weapons of mass destruction). I strongly believe that this combination of "deliberate" and "dynamic" planning, with forceful support from the National and Homeland Security Councils, will ultimately lead to cohesive government planning and execution against terrorism.

Third, NCTC must—through both its intelligence and strategic operational planning components—increase our efforts to combat violent extremism through ideological engagement. Despite our successful kinetic actions against the enemy, it must be emphasized that the fight against terrorism will not be won solely with bullets and bombs in the central battlefields of Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. Rather, we must have an equally robust effort in what many term the "War of Ideas."

This global ideological engagement constitutes a key center of gravity in the battle against al-Qa'ida, its associates, and those that take inspiration from the group. Terrorist leaders aggressively employ messages related to current events, leverage mass media technologies, and use the Internet to engage in a communications war against all who oppose their oppressive and murderous vision of the world. We must engage them on this front with equal vehemence—and we can do so in a way that makes quite clear how bankrupt their extremist ideology is. If confirmed as the Director of NCTC, I will expend significant time and energy to make sure that the Center's analysts address this issue from all perspectives, and I will spend equal time working to bring together all elements of national power—from the Departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security, Justice, and elsewhere—to tackle this long-term effort.

Fourth, NCTC must provide leadership and programmatic oversight of the Intelligence Community's counterterrorism efforts on behalf of the DNI. As IRTPA clearly recognized and as the WMD Commission further noted, there is a dire need for

interagency coordination on key mission areas such as terrorism. Ultimately NCTC is only one part of a much larger counterterrorism effort within the larger Intelligence Community. In this regard NCTC must help to lead that community to ensure that we function as more than the sum of our parts. If confirmed, I intend to continue working closely with Director McConnell as well as the leadership of the Intelligence Community to coordinate counterterrorism efforts and provide budgetary advice to the Director as he formulates future National Intelligence Program budget requests.

Fifth, NCTC must continue to attract highly motivated and qualified personnel to allow us to successfully meet all of the preceding challenges. Doing so will require us to hire officers directly to NCTC as well as working extremely closely with our partner agencies to obtain qualified detailees. NCTC has experienced substantial growth since its inception and I believe that this growth must continue through Fiscal Year 2009 in order to provide the analytic and strategic planning support mandated by IRTPA. As the Center grows we must provide our workforce—both permanent and those detailed from elsewhere in the interagency—the resources, opportunities, and incentives necessary for success. As a leader I know that NCTC's ultimate fate will be based far more on my ability to enable NCTC's extraordinary workforce than on any personal efforts.

In doing all of this, little is more important than ensuring that this Committee and others are appropriately informed of NCTC's activities. One way the Center does so is through the daily provision of intelligence directly to the Congress. Already this year NCTC has provided more than 223 separate analytic terrorism products over CAPNET, a secure internet link between the Intelligence Community and the Congress. These products include *Intelligence Community Terrorist Threat Assessments*, NCTC's *Terrorism Dispatch*, and the NCTC's *Spotlight*. I am completely committed to ensuring that this Committee has the information it needs to perform its constitutional oversight duties. The principle of checks and balances is one of the fundamental tenets of our form of government and it is one that I fully appreciate and look forward to supporting through open and honest communication with the Congress.

Moreover, while the legal requirements for oversight are clearly paramount, I also heartily welcome your invaluable insights on how NCTC and the counterterrorism community should go about its business. Your many years of experience in intelligence and elsewhere are a strength that I intend to benefit from in leading NCTC if confirmed. No single department, agency or branch of government has a monopoly on wisdom when it comes to fighting terrorism. If confirmed, I look forward to the benefit of the Committee's views and will seek its advice on how NCTC should proceed in its vitally important missions.

In closing, I would like to take a note from my predecessor, Vice Admiral Scott Redd's confirmation hearing. Almost three years ago Admiral Redd noted that although he was entering the realm of being a "political appointee," there was nothing political about the job of Director of NCTC. I could not agree more strongly. Every day that I have served at NCTC I have been guided by the foundational principles that I noted when I opened—providing Americans and our allies with greater security while simultaneously protecting

fundamental American values. In my view NCTC's mission has not been and should not be driven by political calculations, for whatever differences we may have on approach or emphasis, they pale in comparison with our common goals.

Thank you again for this opportunity for which I am truly honored. I look forward to answering your questions and, if the Senate chooses to confirm me, to working very closely with you in the future to ensure that I carry out my responsibilities wisely.