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DNI MEETS WITH PAKISTANI-AMERICANS TO FOSTER DIALOGUE

Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair met on Tuesday with Pakistan's ambassador to the United States and nearly two dozen Pakistani-Americans as a part of his efforts to strengthen relationships with members of U.S. immigrant communities, increase cultural awareness and attract prospective employees from their ranks.

The roundtable discussion was the first of its kind under the umbrella of the IC Heritage Community Liaison Council, which is a sounding board for Director Blair and the Intelligence Community – especially on recruiting first- and second-generation Americans for employment in U.S. intelligence agencies, and then keeping them on board. Pakistan is an important U.S. ally in the fight against terrorists and violent extremists, Blair said. Still, understanding needs to be improved on both sides, he said, and Pakistani-Americans can help bridge the gaps. Additionally, their language skills and cultural expertise would make them extremely valuable professionals in the IC.

“We need you to help us build a better relationship between the United States and Pakistan,” Blair said, speaking from the headquarters of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Both nations face a “common threat.”

Participants included business leaders, college students and federal employees of Pakistani descent. Their candid, lively exchange touched on issues such as past problems of mistrust between the two nations, the media's role in both countries and the rise of religious extremism in Pakistan.

The outreach should continue, said Husain Haqqani, Pakistan's ambassador to the United States.

“It's really important that the Intelligence Community interact with the Pakistani-American community because the Pakistani-American community brings a wealth of knowledge, various perspectives; and the Intelligence Community will definitely be enriched by these perspectives,” Haqqani said in an interview after the meeting.

Directly engaging with IC leaders also helps to demystify the intelligence enterprise, said M. Osman Siddique, a participant and former U.S. ambassador. “These kinds of things really do take away the stigma,” he said in an interview.

Amina Khan, a Washington-area lawyer and member of the IC Heritage Community Liaison Council, applauded the effort. The council comprises more than 20 organizations that represent many U.S. immigrant groups.

“There is a viable Pakistani-American diaspora, which has an opinion, which does not represent the Pakistani government, but can add value to the U.S.-Pakistan relationship – and understanding,” she said after the meeting. “...The more inroads the U.S. Intelligence Community makes, and introduces itself to regular Pakistani-Americans, relationships and trust will be built.”

Having a diverse work force is a key part of Blair’s 2009 National Intelligence Strategy, which drives the Community’s priorities. To tackle national security challenges, the IC must employ men and women who reflect a wide range of cultures, ethnicities, perspectives, languages and races, the strategy emphasizes.

The ODNI oversees 16 federal organizations that make up the U.S. Intelligence Community.

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DNI Dennis C. Blair greets Amina Khan, a Washington-area lawyer and member of the IC Heritage Community Liaison Council.



DNI Dennis C. Blair meets with Husain Haqqani, Pakistan’s ambassador to the United States.