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As prepared for delivery:

Statement of Rep. Anna G. Eshoo, Chair
House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
Subcommittee on Intelligence Community Management,
Hearing on Classification of National Security Information
July 12, 2007

I would like to begin by noting how rare it is for this Committee to hold an open hearing. Much of our work must be held in closed session to protect national security. However, where we can, we strive to have open hearings so that the American people can see their government at work.

The subject of today's hearing is the classification of national security information.

One of the lessons of the 9/11 attacks was that our government did not effectively share information about the terrorists who were plotting the attacks against us.

Information-sharing was – and, in some ways, remains – a major weakness of our nation's national security apparatus.

Over-classification, improper classification, the inability to share information across agencies, excessive compartmenting of information – these practices all contribute to a culture that says, “I can't share with you. It's my information, not yours.”

Our intelligence community was established during the Cold War when compartmenting of information was deemed necessary to stop Soviet espionage activities. We no longer face the Soviet Bear. We face a networked adversary that uses information to its strategic advantage ... and exposes the seams in our system to attack us.

We need to close those seams by reducing the barriers to information sharing. And although we must always protect our sources and methods, we need to balance this with “the need to share.”

As the 9/11 Commission recommended, the government must develop “incentives for sharing to restore a better balance between security and shared knowledge.”

Even today, information may be so highly compartmented that analysts and senior policymakers may not have access to it. For example, the most recent Iraq National

Intelligence Estimate was compartmented so that policymakers without those clearances were unable to read it, including many congressional staff.

Today's hearing will focus on several issues: (1) the consequences of and proposals to reduce over-classification; (2) changes to the executive order governing classification over the past decade and the government's compliance with it; and (3) potential changes to the executive order.

The system for safeguarding classified national security information is governed by Executive Order 12958. Over the years, this Executive Order has been modified, shifting the balance between secrecy and openness. Our witnesses have been acute observers of these changes over the years, and will be able to enlighten the committee on how the order has evolved.

As part of the DNI's 100-day plan, the White House and OMB are reviewing the DNI's authorities with regard to the declassification process and considering modifications to Executive Order 12958. I hope they will keep in mind that increased secrecy makes it more difficult to achieve an environment where critical information is shared freely among policymakers. Such compartmentation would be the opposite of the recommendations made by the 9/11 commissioners and could well hobble our nation's attempts to prevent another attack.

I think it is unfortunate that the Director of National Intelligence declined to provide a witness to appear at this hearing. Many of the issues we discuss today have important implications for the intelligence community. I hope the witnesses will be able to propose solutions to encourage broader dissemination of national security information to policymakers. And I hope Mr. Issa will join me in inviting the DNI to respond for the record.

I look forward to the testimony from our witnesses, and now recognize Mr. Issa for any remarks he wishes to make.

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