

CIA Adds Economy To Threat Updates

White House Given First Daily Briefing

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The daily White House intelligence report that catalogs the top security threats to the nation has a grim new addition, reflecting the realities of the age: a daily update on the global financial crisis and its cascading effects on the stability of countries through the world.

The first Economic Intelligence Briefing report was presented to the White House yesterday by the CIA, the agency's new director, Leon Panetta, revealed at a news conference. The addition of economic news to the daily roundup of terrorist attacks and surveillance reports appears to reflect a growing belief among intelligence officials that the economic meltdown is now preeminent among security threats facing the United States.

"We've seen the impact of a worldwide recession occur throughout the world," said Panetta, who described the agency's newest product at his first news briefing since his confirmation. Instigated at the request of the White House, the daily report will ensure that U.S. policymakers are "not surprised" by the aftershocks from bank failures and rising unemployment, he said.

The spy agency is following worrisome trends in many corners of the globe, from East Asia to Latin America. In private meetings yesterday, Latin American intelligence officials warned their U.S. counterparts of a crisis spreading throughout the hemisphere, particularly in Argentina, Ecuador and Venezuela, Panetta said.

"Clearly, it's related: What happens in the economy, and what's happening as a result of that, is affecting the stability of the world," he said.

Other key intelligence officials have raised similar alarms in other settings. The new director of national intelligence, Dennis C. Blair, told a Senate panel this month that economic woes have largely replaced terrorism as the country's No. 1 security challenge.

Blair repeated the theme yesterday in testimony before the House intelligence committee, noting that three European governments have fallen because of economic issues. Central and Eastern Europe "are under tremendous strain," and much of Eurasia, Latin American and sub-Saharan Africa lack sufficient cash reserves and access to international aid, he said.

"Our analysis indicates that economic crisis increases the risk of regime-threatening instability if it continues for a one- or two-year period," Blair said. "Instability can loosen the fragile hold that many developing countries have on law and order."

The economic crunch adds to a formidable list of global concerns facing the new administration's security team. Panetta said the CIA continues to regard al-Qaeda as a serious threat, as the terrorist movement retains its stronghold along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and gains momentum in Somalia and Yemen.

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