

TRANSCRIPT

March 25, 2025

COMMITTEE HEARING

SEN. TOM COTTON, R-ARK.

SENATE SELECT INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE HEARINGS TO EXAMINE WORLDWIDE  
THREATS; TO BE IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY A CLOSED HEARING

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MARCH 25, 2025

SPEAKERS:

SEN. TOM COTTON, R-ARK., CHAIRMAN

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SEN. MARK KELLY, D-ARIZ.

SEN. CHARLES E. SCHUMER, D-N.Y., EX OFFICIO

SEN. JACK REED, D-R.I., EX OFFICIO

WITNESSES:

DIRECTOR TULSI GABBARD, OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL

INTELLIGENCE

DIRECTOR JOHN RATCLIFFE, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DIRECTOR KASH P. PATEL, FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

DIRECTOR TIMOTHY D. HAUGH, NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY/CENTRAL

SECURITY SERVICE

DIRECTOR JEFFREY A. KRUSE, DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

COTTON: The hearing will come to order.

Good morning. Welcome to the Senate Intelligence Committee Annual Worldwide Threats Hearing. I'd like to begin by welcoming our esteemed panel of witnesses, the director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, the CIA director, John Ratcliffe, the FBI director, Kash Patel, the director of the National Security Agency and commander of U.S. Cyber Command, General Tim Haugh and the Defense Intelligence Agency director, Lieutenant General Jeffrey Kruse.

Thank you all for your appearance. Thank you for your leadership.

I also want to recognize the hard work and dedication of the thousands of men and women in our intelligence community, whom you're here to represent today. Their successes are seldom celebrated, their accomplishments are often unseen, but our nation is grateful to each one for the vital work they do to keep our nation safe, prosperous and free.

Our Annual Worldwide Threats Hearing allows for the American people to receive an unvarnished and unbiased account of the real and present dangers that our nation faces. As we will hear from our witnesses, many of the threats we face are truly existential.

Communist China is actively working to replace the United States as the world's dominant superpower. China uses coercive military, economic and influence operations short of war to shape a world favorable to its interests and hostile to our -- ours. These methods include the biggest peacetime military buildup in history, rapidly expanding its nuclear forces, providing critical assistance to help Russia withstand U.S. sanctions, obscuring its role in accelerating the spread of COVID-19 beyond Wuhan, turning a blind eye to Chinese companies that enable the production of fentanyl flooding into the United States and putting space weapons on orbit, among other tactics.

Iran, despite set -- setbacks inflicted on its so-called axis of resistance by Israel over the last year, still aims to destroy what it calls "the little Satan", the state of Israel, and what it calls "the great Satan", the United States. It continues to arm Yemeni rebels to attack global shipping, though these outlaws have suffered terrible losses over the last two weeks, thanks to decisive action by President Trump and our brave troops. I commend the president, Mike Waltz, Pete Hegseth and his entire national security team for these actions.

Iran also continues its decades-long effort to develop surrogate networks inside the United States to threaten U.S. citizens. Furthermore, Iran's nuclear program continues apace (ph). It's actively developing multiple space-launched vehicles, which are little more than flimsy cover for an intercontinental ballistic missile program that could hit the United States in a matter of years.

But all this will soon come to an end. The supreme leader of Iran now faces a stark choice, thanks to President Trump. The supreme leader can fully dismantle his nuclear program, or he can have it dismantled for him.

Finally, today's report also acknowledges that illicit drug production endangers the health and safety of millions of Americans. For the first time, the Annual Threat Assessment lists foreign illicit drug actors as the very -- very first threat to our country. As the report highlights, Mexican-based cartels, using precursors produced in China, continue to smuggle fentanyl and synthetic opioids into the United States. Last year alone, these deadly drugs tragically killed more than 52,000 Americans, more than the number killed in attacks by foreign terrorists or foreign nations.

Given these threats, we have to ask, are our intelligence agencies well-postured against these threats? I'm afraid the answer is no, at least not yet. As the world became more dangerous in recent years, our intelligence agencies got more politicized, more bureaucratic and more focused on promulgating opinions, rather than gathering facts. As a result of these misplaced priorities, we've been caught off-guard and left in the dark too often.

I know that all of you agree that the core mission of the intelligence community is to steal our adversaries' secrets and convey them to policymakers to protect the United States.

COTTON: At the same time, it's not the role of the intelligence agencies to make policy, to justify presidential action, or to operate like other federal agencies. After years of drift, the Intelligence Community must recommit to its core mission of collecting clandestine intelligence from adversaries whose main objective is to destroy our nation and our way of life.

The reason is not that our Intelligence Community lacks dedicated patriots who show up to work every day to protect the American people. On the contrary, it has an abundance of them. The reasons are a misuse of resources, bureaucratic bloat, a default to play it safe, and a past administration that prioritized social engineering over espionage.

Coupled with recent failures, the finding of today's worldwide threat report should be a wakeup call to all of us to get our house in order. The status quo is proving inadequate to provide the President and Congress with the intelligence needed to protect the American people.

As more storms gather, America's intelligence capabilities require urgent reform and revitalization. As the Chairman of this committee, I look forward to working with each of you to strengthen America's intelligence edge and refocus our Intelligence Community on its core mission, stealing secrets. The American people deserve nothing less.

We've assembled an impressive team to get this done, and I look forward to hearing your comments.

Now, I recognize the Vice Chairman for opening remarks.

WARNER: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, everybody. I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here.

I got to say, I -- I've been on the committee now for 14 years, and this year's assessment is clearly one of the most complicated and challenging in my tenure on the -- on the committee. Now, I want to get into that in a moment, but I want to first of all address the recent story that has broken in the news.

Yesterday, we stunningly learned that senior members of this administration, and according to the reports, two of our witnesses here today, were members of a group chat that discussed highly sensitive and likely classified information that supposedly even included weapons packages, targets, and timing, and included the name of an active CIA agent.

Putting aside for a moment the classified information should never be discussed over an unclassified system, it's also just mind-boggling to me that all of these senior folks who were on this line and nobody bothered to even check. Security hygiene 101. Who are all the names, who are they? Well, it apparently included a journalist. And no matter how much the Secretary of Defense or others want to disparage him, this journalist had at least the ethics to not report, I think, everything he heard.

The question I -- I raise is, like, you know, everybody on this committee gets briefed on security protocols or told you don't make calls outside of SCIFs of this kind of classified nature. We don't know what I'm going to ask obviously.

Director Gabbard, is (inaudible) charge at all, keeping our secrets safe, or these government devices or the personal devices? Have devices been collected to make sure there's no malware? You know, there's plenty of declassified information that shows that our adversaries China and Russia are trying to break in to encrypted systems like Signal.

And again, I just say this -- if this was the case of a military officer or an intelligence officer and they had this kind of behavior, they would be fired. As I'm -- I think this is one more example of the kind of sloppy, careless, incompetent behavior, particularly towards classified information, that this is not a one-off or a first time error.

Let me take a couple minutes and review some of the other reckless choices that this administration has made regarding our national security.

We all recall -- it seems like it wasn't that long ago, but less than two months ago, in the first two weeks, the administration canceled all U.S. foreign assistance. Now, some may say how can that -- how can -- bad can that be? It's foreign assistance.

Well, U.S. foreign assistance paid for the units in Ukraine that provide air defense to civilian cities being attacked by Russia. Foreign assistance paid for guarding camps in Syria where ISIS fighters are to pain -- detained. Foreign assistance paid for programs abroad that ensure that diseases like ebola don't come home. And until recently, it paid for the construction of a railway

in Africa that would have helped given the United States much needed access to critical minerals in Congo. Now that project, China's going to try to finance it.

As well in the first two weeks, Director Patel, the administration fired several of our most experienced FBI agents, including the head of the Criminal Investigative Division (ph), the head of the Intelligence Division, the head of the Counter-Terrorism Division, the heads of the New York, Washington, and Miami field office, all individuals who were distinctly and directly responsible for helping to keep America safe.

The irony in -- a little bit was that currently, of -- the recently dismissed head of the Counter-Terrorism Division was involved in disrupting the ISIS attacks planned for Oklahoma City and Philadelphia, and helped lead the effort to bring to justice the key planner of the Abbey Gate bombing in Afghanistan that killed 13 U.S. servicemen and 150 civilians.

That very Abbey Gate effort was actually praised by the President in his State of the Union address, yet the response -- the administration's response to these agents', I believe, good works and years of service was to force these folks out. It's hard to imagine how that makes our country safer.

Nor can I understand how Americans are made more secure by firing more than 300 staff at the National Nuclear Security Administration, including those responsible for overseeing the security and safety of the nuclear stockpile, or by ousting 130 employees at CISA, the agency directly responsible for trying to take on China's Salt Typhoon attack. Again, after Salt Typhoon, I would have thought folks on that group chat might have thought twice.

Or how we're made safer by sacking 1,000 employees at the CDC and NIH who are actually directly working on trying to keep our country safe from disease, or by pushing out hundreds of intelligence officers. The amazing thing is that our intelligence officers, they're not interchangeable like a Twitter coder.

WARNER: These intelligence officers -- our country makes \$20,000 to \$40,000 of an investment just in getting a -- a security clearance. It literally goes into six figures when you take the training involved.

Can anyone tell how firing probationary individuals without any consideration for merit or expertise is an efficient use of taxpayer dollars?

And just to make clear that yesterday's story in The Atlantic was not this rookie one-off. It's a pattern.

And I want to acknowledge, Director Ratcliffe, was not here in his position when this took place but again, earlier in the administration when a nonclassified network was used thereby exposing literally hundreds of CIA officers identities, those folks can't go into the field now. How

does that make our government more efficient? You know, again this pattern of an amazing cavalier attitude towards classified information is reckless, sloppy, and stunning.

And perhaps what troubles me most is the way the administration has decided that we can take on all of our problems by ourselves without any need for friends or allies. I agree that we've got to put America's priorities first but America First cannot mean America Alone. The intelligence we gather to keep Americans safe depends on a lot of allies around the world who have access to sources we don't have. That sharing of information saves lives. And it's not hypothetical. We all remember it because it was declassified, last year when Austria worked with our community to make sure -- to expose a plot against Taylor Swift, in Vienna, that could have killed literally hundreds of individuals.

However this -- these relationships are not built in stone. They're not dictated by law. Things like the Five Eyes are based on trust, built on decades but so often that trust is now breaking literally overnight.

Yet suddenly and for no reason that I can understand, the United States is starting to act like our adversaries or our friends. Voting in the U.N. with Russia, Belarus, and North Korea, that's a rogues gallery if I ever heard of them; treating our allies like adversaries, whether it's threats to take over Greenland or over the Panama Canal; destructive trade war with Canada or literally threatening to kick Canada out of the Five Eyes.

I feel our credibility is being enormously undermined with our allies who I believe -- and I think most of us on this Committee regardless of party believes makes our country safer and stronger.

But how can our allies ever trust us as the kind of partner we used to be when we without consultation or notice, for example, stop sharing information to Ukraine in its war for survival against Russia?

Or how can our allies not only not trust our government but potentially not our businesses with such arbitrary political decision?

Let me give you a few examples. You know, as a result of a lot of work from this Committee and others, in Congress, we made sure America's Commercial Space industry is second to none. From SpaceX to Launch, to Commercial Sensing and communications, the United States has taken a record lead. Yet overnight this administration called into question the reliability of American Commercial Tech industry. When Maxar and other Commercial Space companies were directed to stop sharing intelligence with Ukraine.

I got to tell you, I'm not a business guy. I can't say longer than being an elected official but pretty close. That shockwave across all of Commercial Space and frankly not just Commercial Space. I've heard it from some of our Hyperscalers in the Tech community has sent an enormous chill.

Who's going to hire an American Commercial Space company. government or foreign business. with the ability to have that taken down so arbitrarily?

And it's not just in the case of Commercial Space. We've seen that Canada, Germany, Portugal, have all been saying they're rethinking buying F-35s. I've heard from Microsoft and Google directly, and Amazon, that they're having questions about whether they can still sell their services.

We've also seen foreign adversaries and friends take advantage of this rift in our national security areas, and our scientists. Germany has already put out ads, trying to attract some of our best scientists who've been riffed. And the Chinese intelligence agencies are posting on social media sites in the hopes of luring individuals with that national security clearance, who have been pushed out perhaps arbitrarily, to come into their service.

So no. The signal fiasco is not a one off. It is unfortunately a pattern we're seeing too often repeated. I fear that we feel the erosion of trust from our workplace, from our companies, and from our allies and partners, can't be put back in the bottle overnight. Make no mistake these actions make America less safe.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

COTTON: Before I turn to the witnesses' hearing, I want to welcome everyone in our large audience today.

I also want to note that we will not tolerate any disruptions of the witnesses testimony or senators questions and the witnesses answers.

You'll note that we have a large contingent of Capitol Police in the room. Any disruptions either opposed or in favor to the witnesses will result in prompt removal from the Hearing Room. And my encouragement to the U.S. attorney to throw the book at the person disrupting the hearing. No offense but we all came to hear the witnesses. No one else in the room.

Director Gabbard, I understand you'll make a statement for the Panel of Witnesses.

GABBARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Vice Chair, Members of the Committee, thanks for the opportunity for us to be here to present you the Intelligence Community's 2025 Annual Threat Assessment.

I'm joined here this morning by my colleagues from the CIA, DIA, FBI, and NSA. Our testimony offers the collective assessment of the 18 U.S. Intelligence elements making up the U.S. Intel Community, and draws on intelligence collection and information available to the IC from open source and private sector, and the expertise of our analysts.

This report evaluates what the IC assesses most threatens our people, and our nation's ability to live in a peaceful, free, secure, and prosperous society. As you know, we face an increasingly complex threat environment that is threatening us here at home and our interests abroad.

I'll begin by focusing on what most immediately and directly threatens the United States and the well-being of the American people. Nonstate criminal groups, and terrorists, putting American lives and livelihood at risk. Then I'll focus on the key nation states who have the capability to threaten the interests of the United States.

In this complex environment nonstate and state actors are able to exploit or take advantage of the effects of each other's activities. Conventional and asymmetrical capabilities, even the traditionally weakest of actors are able to acquire from available advanced technologies, creates an even more complex and serious threat landscape.

First, I'll highlight the threats presented by several nonstate actors, cartels, gangs, and other Transnational Criminal Organizations in our part of the world are engaging in a wide array of illicit activity, from narcotics trafficking, to money laundering, to smuggling of illegal immigrants and human trafficking, which endanger the health, welfare, and safety of everyday Americans.

Based on the latest reporting available for a year-long period ending October 2024, cartels were largely responsible for the deaths of more than 54,000 U.S. citizens from synthetic opioids.

Mexico-based Transnational Criminal Organizations or TCOs, are the main suppliers of illicit fentanyl to the U.S. market and are adapting to enforcement and regulatory pressures by using multiple sources and methods to procure precursor chemicals and equipment primarily from China and India, many of which are dual-use chemicals used in legitimate industries.

Independent fentanyl producers are also increasingly fragmenting the drug trade in Mexico. The availability of precursor chemicals and ease of making illicit fentanyl have enabled independent actors to increase illicit fentanyl production and smuggling operations in Mexico.

Cartels are profiting from human trafficking and have likely facilitated more than 2 million illegal immigrants encountered by law enforcement at the U.S. Southwest Border in 2024 alone, straining our vital resources and putting the American people at risk.

Criminal groups drive much of the unrest and lawlessness in the Western Hemisphere. They also engage in extortion, weapons, and human smuggling, and other illicit and dangerous revenue-seeking operations including kidnapping for ransom, forced labor, and sex trafficking. These and other human traffickers exploit vulnerable individuals and groups by promising well-paying jobs while confiscating their identification documents. They operate in the shadows. Exploiting lawlessness in various areas, and using coercion and intimidation to control their victims.

While these key drivers of migrants are expected to persist, heightened U.S. border security enforcement and deportations under the Trump administration are proving to serve as a deterrent for migrants seeking to illegally cross U.S. borders.

U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions along the Southwest Border in January 2025, dropped 85 percent from the same period in 2024.

Transnational Islamist Extremists such as ISIS, and al Qaeda, and affiliated jihadi groups continue to pursue enable or inspire attacks against the United States, and our citizens, abroad and within the Homeland, to advance their ultimate objective of establishing a global Islamist caliphate. This includes heightened efforts to spread their ideology to recruit and radicalize individuals in the U.S. and the West.

While the New Year's Day attacker in New Orleans had no known direct contact with ISIS terrorists, he was influenced and radicalized by ISIS ideological propaganda, as one example. Al Qaeda and its affiliates continue to call for attacks against the United States as they conduct attacks overseas.

These jihadist groups have shown their ability to adapt and evolve including using new technologies and tactics to spread their ideology and recruit new followers.

A range of nonstate cybercriminals are also targeting our economic interests, critical infrastructure, and advanced commercial capability for extortion and other coercive pursuits and financial gain. These actors use a variety of tactics including phishing, ransomware, and denial of service attacks to disrupt our systems and steal sensitive and lucrative information using available technologies and U.S. cyber vulnerabilities.

GABBARD: Ransomware actors last year, for example, attacked the largest payment processor for U.S. Healthcare institutions. And another set of criminal actors conducted cyberattacks against U.S. water utilities. Some of these non-state cyber actors also operate as proxies for or emulate similar activities carried out by major state actors.

While these non-state cyber actors often seek financial and intellectual property gains, they also carry out cyber operations for espionage purposes targeting our critical infrastructure. Turning to key state actors, the IC sees China, Russia, Iran and North Korea, engaging in activities that could challenge U.S. capabilities and interests, especially related to our security and economy.

These actors are in some cases working together in different areas to target U.S. interests and to protect themselves from U.S. sanctions. At this point, the IC assesses that China is our most capable strategic competitor. Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, the People's Republic of China seeks to position itself as a leading power on the world stage economically,

technologically and militarily. Beijing is driven in part by belief that Washington is pursuing a broad effort to contain China's rise and undermine CCP rule.

China's most serious domestic challenge is probably China's slowing economy and potential instability if socioeconomic grievances lead to large scale unrest. Growing economic tensions with the United States and other countries could also weigh on China's plans for economic growth and domestic job creation. China's military is fielding advanced capabilities including hypersonic weapons, stealth aircraft, advanced submarines, stronger space and cyberwarfare assets, and a larger arsenal of nuclear weapons.

While it would like to develop and maintain positive ties with the United States and the Trump administration to advance its interests and avoid conflict, China is building its military capability in part to gain advantage in the event of a military conflict with the United States around the issue of China's efforts toward unification with the Republic of China or Taiwan. China's military is also expanding its presence in the Asia region with a focus on disputed territorial claims in both the East China and South China seas.

Beijing is advancing at cyber capabilities for sophisticated operations aimed at stealing sensitive U.S. government and private sector information and pre positioning additional asymmetric attack options that may be deployed in a conflict. China's cyber activities have been linked to multiple high profile breaches, including last year's massive compromise of U.S. telecom infrastructure, commonly referred to as Salt Typhoon.

Beijing currently dominates global markets and strategically important supply chains, for example, with the mining and processing of several critical minerals. In December, China imposed an export ban to the United States on gallium, germanium and antimony, all of which are important to the production of semiconductors and our defense technologies. This was in direct response to U.S. export controls on chips designed to broadly limit PRC access to advanced chips and chip making equipment.

China also aims to compete in other critical global industries, including AI, legacy semiconductor chip production, biomanufacturing and genetic sequencing, and medical and pharmaceutical supply production. Leveraging often heavily state subsidized production at greater scale, lower costs, and weaker regulatory standards than required in the West, Beijing's strategy has given it a leading position in many parts of these sectors and supply chains that support them. In 2023, for example, China had five first in class domestic drug approvals and three FDA approvals.

Turning to Russia, Russia's nuclear and conventional military capabilities, along with its demonstrated economic and military resilience, make it a formidable competitor. Moscow is more nuclear weapons than any other nation that could inflict catastrophic damage on the

United States and the world in the event of a major war that Russian leaders feared put them and their regime at serious risk.

In late 2024, Russia announced updates to its public nuclear doctrine, expanding the conditions under which Russia would consider using nuclear weapons. Russia is building a more modern and survivable nuclear force designed to circumvent U.S. missile defense through reliable retaliatory strike potential. Russia intends to deter the U.S. by holding both the U.S. homeland at risk and by having the capabilities to threaten nuclear war in a conflict.

Russia has developed advanced cyber capabilities and has attempted to pre position access to U.S. critical infrastructure for asymmetric options and make it a persistent cyber threat. Russia's cyber activities have been linked to multiple high profile breaches including the 2023 hack of Microsoft. Russia is also fielding new capabilities and anti satellite weapons meant to degrade U.S. and allied space infrastructure.

Among Russia's most concerning developments is a new satellite intended to carry a nuclear weapon as an anti satellite weapon, violating long standing international law against such activity and putting the U.S. and global economy at risk. Iran continues to seek expansion of its influence in the Middle East despite the degradation to its proxies and defenses during the Gaza conflict. Iran has developed and maintains ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and UAVs including systems capable of striking U.S. targets and allies in the region.

Tehran has shown a willingness to use these weapons, including during a 2020 attack on U.S. forces in Iraq and in attacks against Israel in April and October 2024. Iran's cyber operations and capabilities also present a serious threat to U.S. networks and data. The IC continues to assess that Iran is not building a nuclear weapon and Supreme Leader Khamenei has not authorized the nuclear weapons program that he suspended in 2003. The IC continues to monitor closely if Tehran decides to reauthorize its nuclear weapons program.

In the past year we've seen an erosion of a decades long taboo in Iran on discussing nuclear weapons in public, likely emboldening nuclear weapons advocates within Iran's decision making apparatus. Iran's enriched uranium stockpile is at its highest levels and is unprecedented for a state without nuclear weapons. Iran will likely continue efforts to counter Israel and press for U.S. military withdrawal from the region by aiding, arming and helping to reconstitute its loose consortium of like minded terrorists and militant actors, which it refers to as its axis of resistance.

Although weakened, this collection of actors still presents a wide range of threats, including to Israel's population, U.S. forces deployed in Iraq and Syria, and to U.S. and international military and commercial shipping and transit. North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un is pursuing stronger strategic and conventional capabilities that can target U.S. forces and allies in the region as well

as the U.S. homeland to bolster North Korea's leverage and stature, defend its regime, and achieve at least tacit recognition as a nuclear weapons power.

Kim's recently cemented strategic partnership with Russia supports these goals by providing him greater financial, military, and diplomatic support, reduce reliance on China, and providing North Korean forces and weapons systems authentic war fighting experience. Kim views his strategic weapons advances since 2019, its deepening ties with Russia, and North Korea's economic durability as strengthening his negotiating position against Washington's demands for denuclearization and lessening his need for sanctions relief.

North Korea is probably prepared to conduct another nuclear test on short notice and continues to flight test its ICBMs to demonstrate their increasing capabilities as leverage in future negotiations. Since 2022, China, Russia, Iran and North Korea have grown closer. Removing the accelerant of the war in Ukraine is unlikely to revert these bilateral relationships to a pre war 2021 baseline, leaving room for new strategic priorities and world events to create new incentives or challenges to their currently high levels of cooperation.

Russia has been a catalyst for much of this expanded cooperation, driven heavily by the support it is needed for its war effort against Ukraine, including protection from U.S. and Western sanctions. In addition to its exchange of military and other resource capabilities with North Korea, Russia's relied more heavily on China's financial and defense industry backing and also has increased combined military exercises with China to signal shared fortitude against the United States and U.S. allies in the Asia-Pacific region.

With Iran, Russia has also expanded financial ties to mitigate sanctions. Iran has become a critical military supplier to Russia, especially of UAVs in exchange for Russian technical support for Iranian weapons, intelligence and advanced cyber capabilities. In conclusion, the threats that we see to U.S. national security are both complex and multifaceted and put the lives, safety and well being of the American people at serious risk.

As the heads of the American peoples intelligence community, we will continue to provide the President, Congress and our warfighters with timely, unbiased, relevant intelligence to keep the United States secure, free, prosperous and at peace. To the American people, specifically our intelligence community, exists to serve you and to ensure your safety, security and freedom. Thank you.

COTTON: Thank you, Director Gabbard. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, the annual threat assessment for the first time lists cartels and traffickers as the very first threat. Director Patel, I'm pleased to say that the FBI's Little Rock field office has been doing its part in addressing this threat. The field office, along with other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, have arrested nearly 300 immigrants in my state in 2025 so far.

Could you provide some color about the nature of the threat these illegal immigrants have posed, not just to Arkansas, but our nation, perhaps including some of the details of the horrific offenses they've committed against the American people?

PATEL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Vice...

PROTESTER: (OFF-MIKE)

COTTON: Witness will suspend.

PROTESTER: Stop funding Israel! Stop funding Israel! Stop funding Israel!

COTTON: So, that protester was a Code Pink lunatic saying the greatest threat to world peace is funding Israel.

I will observe for the benefit of the audience here on television that Code Pink is funded by Communist China as well, which simply illustrates -- speak up now if you want to be removed as well, whoever's saying that.

PROTESTER: (OFF-MIKE)

COTTON: If anyone else would like to join them, speak now, please, so we don't have any more disruptions. As I was saying, the fact that Communist China funds Code Pink which interrupts a hearing like this about Israel, simply illustrate Director Gabbard's point that China, Russia, Iran, North Korea and other American adversaries are working in concert to a greater degree than they ever have before.

Director Patel, back to my question, could you give us some color about the threat that illegal migrants have posed, not only to my state, which has resulted in nearly 300 arrests in 2025, but also to the nation at large?

PATEL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman and members of the Committee. I appreciate the time to address you all. Specifically to Arkansas, Senator, the priorities at the FBI, which I identified during my confirmation hearing and since is attacking violent crime, along with national security. And every single state in this country is a border state. Arkansas is no exception.

Allow me to highlight the -- the work of the men and women in the FBI and state and local law enforcement in the State of Arkansas. Since February 5th alone, we got 220 illegal immigrants arrested on charges varying from violent offenses, weapons offenses, narcotics offenses and serious violent felonies, 253 separate individuals have been charged related to those offenses.

And here's something I want the American people to hear about narcotics and countering narcotics, thousands of pounds of narcotics were seized in these three weeks in the state of

Arkansas, thousands worth tens of millions of dollars, everything from fentanyl, to meth, to cocaine, to heroine, to marijuana and more, and also including manufactured drugs.

The FBI does have the biggest footprint in Arkansas, but we could not achieve this mission without our state and local law enforcement partners, which has been one of the priorities since I took the helm at the FBI. They provide the greatest ground level intelligence to conduct these operations in Arkansas and in every single state across the union.

Since February 5th, we've assisted with the arrest of hundreds of criminals and illegals throughout your state, and that was just a three week operation.

Prior to that, Senator, there was a bust of 17 federal indictments relating to a meth lab in the State of Arkansas in the southwest corner of your state. All those individuals are now facing prosecution for hundreds of pounds of illegal opioids, guns and other illicit material.

So, we will continue to do that work. We will work at (ph) six, seven (ph) days a week, 365 days a year, not just in your state, Mr. Chairman, but in every state.

COTTON: Thank you, Director Patel. As (ph) Director Gabbard highlighted from the Annual Threat Report, Director Ratcliffe, many if not most of the chemical precursors for deadly fentanyl produced by Mexican drug cartels originates in China. China, of course, is a techno-totalitarian police state.

They have technology to monitor their own people that Soviet Russia could have only imagined. Is there any reason, Director Ratcliffe to believe that China could not monitor and -- and (ph) crack down on this flow of chemical precursors to Mexico if it chose to do so?

RATCLIFFE: Thank you, Senator -- thank you, Senator for the question. No, there's nothing that prevent (ph) China -- the People's Republic of China from cracking down on fentanyl precursors.

As you well know, Senator, one of the reasons that they don't is that there are more than 600 PRC related companies that produce those precursor chemicals in an industry that generates \$1.5 trillion. That is one of the reasons that we see that Chinese efforts to affect the fentanyl precursors are really limited in nature and intermittent in nature, and not a dedicated effort to enforce their own laws and regulations to crack down on this.

COTTON: Thank you, Director Ratcliffe, but I have many more questions I could ask, but I'm going to try to lead by example and stay within the five minute limit. For the benefit of Senators, I remind everyone there is a vote scheduled at noon. I hope to finish the open portion of this hearing before that vote closes, after which time, we will move to the closed portion.

The Vice Chairman?

WARNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be happy to take your extra 13 seconds, but I want to go back to what I addressed at the outset. I mean, this was not only sloppy, it not only violated all procedures, but if this information had gotten out, American lives could have been lost.

The (ph) Houthis had this information and could reposition their defensive systems, so I -- I want to get a little more information about this. Director Gabbard, did you participate in the group chat with Security of Defense and other Trump senior officials discussing the Yemen war plans?

GABBARD: Senator, I -- I don't want to get into the specifics (inaudible)...

WARNER: Ma'am -- ma'am did you -- were you on -- you're not going to be willing to address...

GABBARD: ... conversation that (inaudible)...

WARNER: ... so you're not -- are you denying that -- will you (ph) answer my question, ma'am?

You were not TG on this group chat?

GABBARD: I'm not going to get into the specifics of the (inaudible)...

WARNER: So, you refuse to acknowledge whether you were on this group chat?

GABBARD: Senator, I'm not going to get into the specifics...

WARNER: Why aren't (ph) you -- why aren't you going to get into the specifics? Is this -- is it because it's all classified?

GABBARD: Because this is currently under review by the National Security (inaudible)...

WARNER: Because it's all classified? If it's not classified, share the text now.

GABBARD: As the White House previously stated (inaudible)...

WARNER: Is it classified or non-classified information on this text?

GABBARD: I can confirm (inaudible)...

WARNER: Director Ratcliffe, were you on the group chat?

RATCLIFFE: Senator, I was on a Signal messaging group...

WARNER: So, you were the -- John Ratcliffe on that chat?

RATCLIFFE: I was.

WARNER: Thank you -- thank you...

RATCLIFFE: Can -- can I provide some context, Senator to that?

WARNER: Yes, but I've got a -- a series of questions...

RATCLIFFE: Well -- but (ph) I think it's important because at the outset, you made a couple of comments about Signal messaging using encrypted apps. So that we're clear, one of the first things that happened when I was confirmed as CIA Director was Signal was loaded on to my computer at the CIA -- as it is for most CIA officers.

One of the things that I was briefed on very early, Senator, was by the CIA records management folks about -- about the use of Signal as a permissible work use. It is. That is a practice that preceded the current administration to the Biden administration...

WARNER: Director Ratcliffe, I've got a series of questions, I -- I -- you know, do you -- if you're making the statement (ph)...

RATCLIFFE: (Inaudible) point (ph) (inaudible)...

WARNER: ... well if you're making the statement that Signal is a secure channel (inaudible)...

RATCLIFFE: No -- can I -- can I answer that? It is...

WARNER: Sir, (ph) I've got a series (inaudible)...

RATCLIFFE: ... (inaudible) encryption -- so (inaudible) finish...

WARNER: (Inaudible) -- I understand encryption...

RATCLIFFE: ... it is permissible to use to communicate and coordinate for work purposes, provided -- provided, Senator, that any decisions that are made, are also recorded through formal channels...

WARNER: Right.

RATCLIFFE: ... so, those were procedures that were implemented...

WARNER: Director Ratcliffe...

RATCLIFFE: ... my staff implemented those processes, followed those processes, complied with those processes...

WARNER: So, are you saying...

RATCLIFFE: ... and -- and -- and finally, just please, so my communications to be clear, in the Signal message group were entirely permissible and lawful and did not include classified information...

WARNER: Well, we will -- we will make (ph)...

RATCLIFFE: ... to be clear.

WARNER: ... that determination, because if it's not classified, share the text with the Committee. You know, let me go -- go on, Director Gabbard, you are the security executive, and set access guidelines for classified information. Did you contact the Defense Secretary or others after this (ph) specific military planning was put out and -- and say hey, we should be doing this in a SCIF?

GABBARD: There was no classified material that was shared in that Signal (inaudible)...

WARNER: So then, if there was (ph) no classified material, share it with the Committee. You can't have it both ways.

These are important jobs. This is our national security. Bobbing and weaving and trying to -- you know, filibuster your answer, so please answer the question, if this was a (ph) -- Director Gabbard, if this was a rank and file intelligence officer who did this kind of careless behavior, what would you do with them?

GABBARD: Senator, I'll reiterate that there was no classified material that was shared in that Signal (inaudible)...

WARNER: Ma'am, if there's no classified materials (ph), share. And then, if there's no classified materials, then answer -- but you can't even answer the question whether you were on the chat. This is strangely familiar and I think my colleagues remember when you couldn't answer the question is Edward Snowden a traitor.

Ma'am, I have serious doubts about your -- anyway (ph), Director Gabbard, well (ph) I'm (ph) -- I'm going to give you this, tweeted just 11 days ago, and I'm quoting you, "any unauthorized release of classified information is a violation of the law and will be treated as such". So, if this information is classified, what are you going to do?

GABBARD: Senator, two points here, first of all, there's a difference between inadvertent release versus...

WARNER: Careless and sloppy...

GABBARD: ... malicious leaks of classified information. The second point is there was no classified information that was on (inaudible) Signal group chat (ph)...

WARNER: Then the information -- this Committee should get that information. Director Patel...

GABBARD: ... and the National Security Council is reviewing (inaudible)...

WARNER: ... Director Patel, my time's about up (ph) and I'm going to use my 12 seconds that the -- the Chairman gave me, Director Patel, has the FBI launched (ph) any investigation of this?

PATEL: Senator, I was just briefed about it late last night and this morning. I don't have an updated.

WARNER: I would like to get an answer by the end of the day.

COTTON: At this point in the ordinary course of affairs, I would recognize Senator Collins, she asked me to express to you that she is under the weather this morning, she regrets her absence, but anticipates submitting written questions, to which I would request your prompt replies for the Senator.

Senator Cornyn?

CORNYN: Director Gabbard, I applaud President Trump's efforts to try to bring a end to the war between Russia and Ukraine. I want to read a statement out of the Annual Threat Assessment and just confirm that you agree with this.

It says "Russia views its ongoing war with Ukraine as a proxy conflict with the West and its objective to restore Russian strength and security and its near abroad (ph) against perceived U.S. and western encroachment has increased the risks of unintended escalation between Russia and NATO."

Do you -- do you agree with that statement? And that is -- that is in the Annual Threat Assessment, correct?

GABBARD: Correct.

CORNYN: I'd like to refer to an AP story -- Associated Press, dated March 21st, 2025, the title of the article is Western Officials Say Russia Is Behind a Campaign of Sabotage Across Europe. This AP map shows it.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask unanimous consent that's being (ph) made part of the record.

COTTON: Without objection.

CORNYN: The document that AP compiled -- and I presume this is through open sources, documented 59 incidents, including cyberattacks, spreading propaganda, plotting killings or committing acts of vandalism, arson, sabotage or espionage, is that consistent with your understanding and impression of what Russia's currently engaged in in Europe?

GABBARD: Senator, I haven't seen that specific article, but I can confirm that we assess Russia's attempts to conduct such sabotage activities in Europe.

CORNYN: Thank you. One of the things that I'm most concerned about following some of the discussions between Russia and Ukraine and the United States and our other allies, obviously as I said, peace between Ukraine and Russia is the desirable end state. I think you'd have to be

something -- you'd have to be crazy to say otherwise. But I also want to talk a little bit about the unexpected or maybe unintended consequences of European insecurity.

I know the incoming Chancellor of Germany has talked about the possibility that Germany might share its nuclear weapons with Ukraine and suggested that the U.K. would be part of that. I know that Poland has talked about acquiring nuclear weapons and perhaps other European countries to make up for what they view as a receding of the American umbrella of protection.

General Kruse, what would be the result of the proliferation of nuclear weapon-armed countries in Europe, if in fact, that would occur as a result of the perception of Russian -- excuse me, European insecurity?

KRUSE: Senator, thank you for the question. One of the things that the intelligence community works very hard on is to understand who has nuclear weapons throughout the planet. And as discussed in the opening statements, both by the Chair and by Director Gabbard, the proliferation and the increase in the types and the lethality of nuclear weapons is one of the things that we have to track and we as a nation are going to have to face. It has changed dramatically in the last five years and will continue to change over the next five years.

The addition of additional countries which have their own deterrence policies and will act in a nuclear dialogue or the presence of those weapons, the security of those weapons, the movement and the threat of use of those weapons complicates the environment by which all of us will operate and will complicate all of the decisions by which all future conflict in the political decisions that we support are the decision makers.

CORNYN: It makes the world a more dangerous place, does it not?

KRUSE: Senator, yes it does.

CORNYN: And just by way of history, Ukraine used to be -- have the third largest arsenal of nuclear weapons on the planet. But as a result of negotiations between Russia and Ukraine and the United Kingdom, the Budapest Memorandum documented a commitment by Russia and the United States to protect the territorial integrity of Ukraine in exchange for them giving up their nuclear weapons. Did I correctly summarize the content of the Budapest Memorandum back in 1994?

KRUSE: Yes, Senator, you did. And Ukraine willingly gave up its weapons for the protection of other.

CORNYN: Thank you very much.

COTTON: Senator Wyden.

WYDEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And obviously my colleagues and I feel very strongly about the war planning meeting over unclassified phones; obviously reckless, obviously dangerous. Both the mishandling of classified information and the deliberate destruction of federal records are potential crimes that ought to be investigated immediately. And I want to make clear that I'm of the view that there ought to be resignations starting with the National Security Advisor and the Secretary of Defense.

Director Ratcliffe and Director Gabbard, have you participated in any other group chats with Senior Trump Administration Officials in which classified information was shared using phones that weren't cleared for such information? Question for the two of you.

RATCLIFFE: Senator, thank you for the question. I haven't -- your question was, have I participated in any other group chats sharing classified information? To be clear, I haven't participated in any signal group messaging that relates to any classified information at all.

WYDEN: OK. Director Gabbard?

GABBARD: Senator, I have the same answer. I have not participated in any signal group chat or any other chat on another app that contained any classified information.

WYDEN: Yeah, and I just think it's important to follow through here. Would the two of you cooperate with an audit to confirm that that is the case?

GABBARD: I have no objection.

RATCLIFFE: Senator, I'll certainly comply with any follow-up that the National Security Council would deem appropriate. But again, to be clear, the use of signal message and end-to-end encryption applications is permissible and was, in this case used permissibly, at least to my understanding, and in a lawful manner.

WYDEN: The seriousness of this is so clear. That's why I want to have an audit, and both of you gave me an answer indicating that you would be open to that, and I appreciate it.

Director Patel, you weren't in this particular group chat, but have you participated in any chats on unclassified phones with other administration officials relating to national security? And if so, on what other topics?

PATEL: Thank you. Thank you for your question, Senator, and not that I can recall.

WYDEN: OK. A question I have for you, Director Gabbard, involves this question of Elon Musk wasn't going to see the military's China war plans, because he said, he quote, "has business in China and he would be susceptible perhaps to that." That was his comment.

So as DNI, you're responsible for security clearance policies across the government. Under your watch, how are you going to go about carrying out this obligation? Because I think it obviously is a very significant one in terms of American national security.

RATCLIFFE: Thank you, Senator. As you know, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence provides oversight over these different 18 intelligence elements. Leaders within those elements are empowered with that responsibility to uphold the trust that the American people have placed in them.

In this example that you've cited, both Secretary Hegseth as well as President Trump completely denied the assertion that Elon Musk was going to receive any kind of classified war plan brief pertaining to China or any other country.

WYDEN: So on the question of whether the President has the prerogative to get clearances is really the area that I want to touch on, because you are formally responsible for security clearance policies, and that's why I'm asking about it. So can a President decide who gets the clearance?

RATCLIFFE: Yes.

WYDEN: So what about your role? You're formally responsible for security clearance policies.

RATCLIFFE: That is also true.

WYDEN: So how do we resolve it? The President just gets his way.

RATCLIFFE: The elected President and Commander-in-Chief has the authority to provide a security clearance to those who he deems necessary.

WYDEN: Mr. Chairman and to the Ranking Member, I think we have to have a further discussion on this and figure out what the ground rules are. I think it's clear what the Director says. I just think we need more clarity, because I think you have the formal responsibility for security clearances, and now we've heard that this somehow is going to be the President's project, and I think we ought to have further discussions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

COTTON: Senator Lankford.

LANKFORD: Mr. Chairman, thank you. Thank you to all of you and your service to the country. It matters. There are a lot of citizens of our country right now that have much greater security in their life because of the work that you do and the people that are working around you do. So I just want to say I appreciate that. For the folks in Oklahoma, they would definitely want me to be able to say thank you for your service.

Let me let me ask a couple of questions. Director Gabbard, let me start with you on this. Iran has been listed as one of the top sponsors of terrorism for a very long time. This is -- they're the primary armors of Hezbollah of Hamas of the Houthis. They are arming the Russians to be able to kill Ukrainians.

They continue to be able to destabilize the region. And just in the recent days, when many nations in the Gulf region have talked about how to provide greater stability, Iranian leadership stepped out and made very clear statements. They want a one state solution for Israel and this is to drive out all Jews. So this continues to be an issue not just for the region, but for Americans in particular.

So my question is on this, is the sanctions and the effect of sanctions, what we know about the Iranian response under the Biden administration, those sanctions were turned down where, quite frankly, Iran has been able to sell \$90 billion in oil on the global market to be able to rearm itself and all the others around the region. Now, sanctions are now going back on to Iran again. What do we know about the effect of those sanctions?

GABBARD: Thank you, Senator, for the question. These sanctions have just begun to be reinstated, so the full effects are not yet -- have not yet borne fruit. But the message that the president has sent with his maximum pressure campaign is certainly heard.

As the Chairman mentioned in his opening remarks, President Trump recently sent a letter to the leader of Iran expressing his interest in direct talks in order to try to de-escalate and to prevent war, prevent Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon, but also stated that there would be military consequences if there was no direct negotiations.

So President Trump is continuing to carry out his vision and mission of peace through strength, acting in the best interests of the American people. We will see what choices are made from here.

LANKFORD: OK, thank you. Director Patel, during the last administration and the very open border policy that they had, we had some years, including 2022 and 2023, where there were 70,000 individuals that were released into the country that were identified as special interest aliens. This is something this committee and the Homeland Security Committee tried over and over again to get details on. The Biden administration was unwilling to be able to share any of the details in the special interest aliens, which led to a great amount of frustration.

The comment came often back to us, is that FBI is going to track all these individuals and to be able to identify them, even though it was 70,000 a year that were coming into the country.

You just walked into this position and trying to get your feet on the ground in so many different issues that are outstanding on that. I raised to you the issue of individuals that are currently

illegally present in the country going through a process, but are listed as special interest aliens by definition from the administration. Those are individuals that we don't know their level of risk, but where they are considered a national security risk. But we don't know anything else about them from there.

So how are you trying to get on top of the number of people that are criminal aliens in the country, but also these special interest aliens that come from terrorist areas?

PATEL: Thank you, Senator. I appreciate your question. As far as the FBI is concerned, you hit on it, criminal.

So we are focused across our interagency partners at DHS, ICBP, CIS and elsewhere to identify through our information sharing networks that we have stood up with state and local law enforcement to provide us the details on any criminal evidence relating to any of the individuals you highlighted. And if there's a nexus there, a case will be open, excuse me, by the line agents who predicated lawful and factual basis to do so, and we will further refer that matter to the Department of Justice for prosecution. We are reviewing all of these cases anew and we will report back to you senator with some fidelity on the outcome of that process.

LANKFORD: OK, thank you. Are you getting good feedback from social media technology companies and cooperation from them on illegal activities that are promoted on their site. All the different sites have rules and standards for what can and can't be done on that, but for instance in the border areas, many of the sites are allowing child trafficking or they are allowing, basically, the hiring of Americans to come be drivers and such, and they know this is being circumvented are they working with you on that to be able to take illegal content off their sites.

PATEL: Thank you senator and we have engaged directly at the top levels of all the private sector software communities and social media companies, and they have been very helpful, because they have known, they have been told that this is a priority for me at the FBI to work with them, because they have so much information to share back with us. Now that's of course just on the public systems, we're not talking about the dark net.

LANKFORD: Thank you. Thank you Mr. Chairman.

COTTON: Senator Heinrich.

HEINRICH: Thank you, Chairman. Director Ratcliffe, I want to start with you. Who determined that the content of this discussion on signal was not classified?

RATCLIFFE: Senator, I guess I'm not -- well for example, I can speak to my personal knowledge, that there's no classified.

HEINRICH: There was no classified agent mentioned as part of this story. Normally that would be classified information. So I guess what I'm asking, actually, did you just determine it was not classified or was there any declassification after the fact?

RATCLIFFE: So to be clear, so everyone understands the process. As we talked about signal as a permissible use, I understand that the CIA has been approved by the White House for senior officials and appropriate for many conversations and recommended by CISA for high-level officials who would be targeted by foreign adversaries to use end-to-end encrypted apps whenever possible, like signal.

In this case what the National Security Advisor did was to request through a signal message that there be coordination. So you mentioned the name of a CIA active officer, correct?

HEINRICH: I didn't mention the name. I mentioned the existence of that.

RATCLIFFE: You didn't mention the name, and in the article the implication was that somehow that was improper, that was not the case. So a CIA officer was not operating undercover, so the request for coordination was for a staff member to coordinate on the high side. So I communicated the name of a CIA officer, not operating undercover, completely appropriate, who does openly and routinely coordinate with the White House as a member of my staff. So the intimation there that there was something inappropriate was clearly incorrect.

HEINRICH: Did it occur to you that that given the sensitive nature of this discussion, that it could just move to the high side?

PATEL: So that was clearly senator, I think, the intent was that this was initially set up by the National Security Advisor with the instruction, that send a point of contact, and then you will be provided with information further on the high side, for high side communications. So I think clearly it reflects that the National Security Advisor intended this to be as it should have been, a mechanism for coordinating between senior-level officials, but not a substitute for using high side or classified communications for anything that would be classified, and I think that that is exactly what did happen.

HEINRICH: So I'm curious, did this conversation at some point include information on weapons packages, targets or timing?

PATEL: Not that I'm aware of.

HEINRICH: Director Gabbard, same question.

GABBARD: Same answer and defer to the Department of Defense on that question.

HEINRICH: Those are two different answers, but you are saying that did not -- that was not part of the conversation?

GABBARD: That's my knowledge.

HEINRICH: Precise operational issues were not part of this conversation?

GABBARD: Correct.

HEINRICH: OK. I want to ask you, Director Gabbard, something on a very different track here, which is, I very much agree with the conclusion of the ATA, that foreign illicit drug actors are a major threat in the United States, and many of you have spoken to this today. Is the IC wrong in its omission of Canada as a source of illicit fentanyl in the ATA? I was surprised given some of the rhetoric that there is no mention of Canada in the ATA.

GABBARD: Senator, the focus in my opening and the ATA was really to focus on the most extreme threats in that area, and our assessment is that the most extreme threat related to fentanyl continues to come from and through Mexico.

HEINRICH: So the President has stated that the fentanyl coming through Canada is massive and actually said it was an unusual and extraordinary threat, and that was the language that was used to justify putting tariffs on Canada. I'm just trying to reconcile those two issues. Is it an unusual and extraordinary threat or is it a minor threat that doesn't even merit mention in the annual threat assessment?

GABBARD: Senator, I don't have the numbers related to Canada in front of me at this time. I'd like to get back to you on the specifics of that answer.

HEINRICH: It's less than 1 percent of the fentanyl that we are able to interdict. But if you have different information, I would very much welcome that.

COTTON: Senator Budd.

BUDD: Thank you all for being here. Director Gabbard, prior to your role here, we had a big storm in Western North Carolina and you were among those first from outside our state to show up. So thank you for your work there. Thank you for your ongoing work there and that of your family as well. It was good to see them when out in Western North Carolina last week. So thank you.

Director Haugh, so what do we need to do in regards to Volt Typhoon? There's a lot of pre-positioning that went on there. So where are we with that and what do we need to do in regards to our power companies, whether it's generation or distribution, Duke Energy in my home state, or even the rural electric co-ops? What do we need -- what have we learned and what can I tell them?

HAUGH: Senator, 99 percent of the critical infrastructure in the United States is controlled by private companies. So that really drives us to talk about how do we partner with industry and with the commercial sector, in this case the power sector.

Volt Typhoon began when industry came to the intelligence community and said, we're seeing anomalous activity. Can you help us gain context? And we were able to bring context to that, to be able to understand what the threat was, and then to ultimately be able to identify who was behind that threat. Since that time, we've continued to work very closely with industry, to be able to determine what are the right ways for us to be able to pursue these threats within networks, to enable the interagency, to enable our partners and industry to be able to pursue them. That's the approach we have to take.

It is a collaboration between the government and industry to be able to eradicate these threats, and we have continued to pursue them together since our first identification and notification that we did related to this particular threat.

BUDD: Thank you. What have you done on the offensive side here in regards to, I think there were three; Salt Typhoon, Volt Typhoon, and even Flax Typhoon. Maybe there were others, but those are the three that are known.

HAUGH: Senator, I've been given really clear guidance in terms of what the Secretary of Defense expects in terms of our aggressive approach to be able to restore deterrence, and I look forward to talking with you about that in the closed hearing.

BUDD: Look forward to that. Director Gabbard and Ratcliffe and Patel, thank you all again for being here. So as you're all keenly aware, Section 702 of FISA is an extremely useful authority to help keep our nation safe. I also know that we need to rebuild American people's trust and confidence that such authorities are not being misused by the intelligence community to unlawfully target Americans.

So since taking over your respective agencies, can you tell me and tell the American people how effective the recent changes have been in protecting privacy and civil liberties of each and every Americans. And then if you will, comment on how useful the authority is in generating intelligence that actually protects the homeland. We'll start with you, Director Gabbard.

GABBARD: Senator, Section 702, which authorizes the foreign collection of non-U.S. persons outside of the United States, continues to be one of our most effective collection tools to ensure our national security. There are a number of reforms that the Senate passed, that Congress passed last year, that have proven to strengthen the protections of Americans' Fourth Amendment rights.

In the short time that I've been in the seat, I've seen a few examples of that directly. Most recently, through the FISA court, calling in an amici to come in and weigh in on a dispute regarding provisions that would further protect Americans' Fourth Amendment rights.

I'll be visiting our friends at the NSA next week and doing a "ride-along," to observe directly, how those reforms that Congress passed are being implemented to protect Americans' civil liberties, and look forward to reporting back after I've had that opportunity.

BUDD: Thank you. Director Patel.

PATEL: Thank you, Senator. With my background in FISA and 702, I just want to clearly delineate between FISA Title I, III, and 702 collection. We need to both ardently defend its use, but also ardently support reforms that allow the American public to entrust that those charged with those capabilities are not violating the Fourth Amendment or any other violation.

Speaking to Title I, Title III, when it comes to U.S. persons, I have already included an amendment, in terms of FBI language, to make sure that when a U.S. person is targeted, that the FBI specifically is responsible for calling through all exculpatory information that is reasonably known and satisfying that burden and stating it in the application.

PATEL: When it comes to 702, Senator, some of the biggest enterprise efforts we have had to thwart national security risk would not have occurred if 702 collection had gone dark, and the FBI continues to use that information to protect the homeland. We've had multiple takedowns in the last six months based on 702 and interagency collection processes, but we just need to ensure the American public, and I'm working with my team, that even in the 702 sphere, American citizens' information is protected.

BUDD: Thank you all. I'll look forward to the discussion in the closed session.

COTTON: Senator King?

KING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Director Gabbard, I didn't intend to get into the Jeffrey Goldberg story but something you said has sort of puzzled me. According to open source reporting, at 11:44 on the morning of March 15th, Secretary Hegseth put into this group text a detailed operation plan including targets, the weapons we were going to be using, attack sequences, and timing, and yet you've testified that the -- nothing in that -- in that chain was classified. Wouldn't that be classified? What if that had been made public that morning, before the attack took place?

GABBARD: Senator, I can attest to the fact that there were no classified or intelligence equities that were included in that chat group at any time. And I -- I...

(CROSSTALK)

KING: ... so the attack sequencing and timing and weapons and targets, you -- you don't consider to have -- should have been classified?

GABBARD: I defer to the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Council on that question.

KING: Well, you're the head of -- you -- you -- you're the head of the Intelligence Community and you're supposed to know about classifications. So your testimony very clearly today is that nothing was in that set of texts that were classified. I'll follow up on Senator Wyden's question. If that's the case, please release that whole text stream so that the public can -- can have a -- a -- a view of what actually transpired on this -- on this discussion. It's hard for me to believe that targets and timing and weapons would not have been classified.

Well, let me -- let me move on. You approved this report -- this annual report prepared by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Is this submitted to the White House routinely, in -- in a -- in anticipation of its public release?

GABBARD: I -- I don't know what you mean by submitted routinely.

KING: Was it -- well, was it -- was this report submitted to the White House before its release today?

GABBARD: It was submitted to them once it was completed. I think probably around the same time it was sent to all of you.

KING: I -- I want to move on. One note that surprised me. I've been on this committee now for -- this is my 13th year. Every single one of these reports that we have had has mentioned global climate change as a significant national security threat except this one. Has something happened? Has global climate change been solved? Why -- why is that not in this report? And did -- who made the decision that it should not be in the report when it's been every -- in every one of the 11 prior reports?

GABBARD: I can't speak to the decisions made previously, but this annual threat assessment has been focused very directly on the threats that we deem most critical to the United States and our national security. Obviously, we're aware of occurrences within the environment and how they may impact operations, but we're focused on the direct threats...

(CROSSTALK)

KING: ... about how they will impact...

GABBARD: ... safety, wellbeing, and security.

KING: How about how they will impact mass migration, famine, dislocation, political violence, which is the finding, by the way, of the 2019 annual threat assessment under the first Trump administration? Do you -- you don't consider that a -- a -- a significant national security threat?

GABBARD: For the Intelligence Community, being aware of -- of the environment that we're operating in is a given. What I focused this annual threat assessment on and the IC focused this threat assessment on are the most extreme and critical direct threats to our national security.

KING: Let me ask you a direct question -- who decided climate change should be left out of this report after it's been in the prior 11? Where was that decision made?

GABBARD: I -- I gave direction to our team at ODNI to focus on the most extreme and critical national security threats...

KING: Did your direction include no comments on climate change?

GABBARD: Senator, as I said, I focused on the most extreme and direct national...

KING: That's not a response to my question. Did you -- did you instruct that there be no -- there -- no finding in terms of climate change in this report?

GABBARD: I don't recall giving that instruction.

KING: The final questions in a -- in a few short seconds that I have left. You all concede, and -- and it's in the report repeatedly, about the cyber danger from China, from Russia, from Iran. Why then is the administration deconstructing CISA? 130 people fired. The -- General Haugh talked about the importance of public/private cooperation. That -- that section of CISA seems to have been dis-established.

What possible policy reason is there for undermining CISA's relationship to the states with regard to elections -- elections and to the private sector with regard to cybersecurity when the cybersecurity threat is only growing? Anybody want to tackle that?

GABBARD: I -- I won't speak for all of my colleagues here, but I don't believe any of us have any insight into those specific staffing decisions that have been made.

KING: Well, let me ask you this question. You have all file -- the -- the -- the report has found explicitly cyber -- growing cyber threats, including to elections, from Russia, China, Iran. Do you believe that it's in the national interests to diminish our capacity to deal with those cyber issues, yes or no?

GABBARD: President Trump is focused on effects and making sure that the people that we have and the resources that we have are focused on our national security. He and his team recognize that more people doesn't necessarily always mean better effects. Those are some of the things

that are driving the changes that we're seeing across the administration, is getting all of our agencies back and focused on their core mission.

KING: General Haugh, do you agree that...

(CROSSTALK)

KING: Thank you.

COTTON: Senator Rounds?

ROUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, thank you to all of you for your service to our country.

With regard to the issues surrounding Signal, I am going to address it but I'm going to address it in the closed session so that we can get more in-depth into that issue.

In the meantime, I -- I want to direct my first question to Director Ratcliffe. As the debate continues in Washington regarding spectrum, what can you share in this unclassified setting regarding the critical nature of spectrum to national security interests generally?

RATCLIFFE: Thanks for the question, Senator. I know this is an interest -- an issue of great interest to the Senate, and the potential auction of commercial space on spectrum. Those -- as you correctly point out, the discussions about spectrum, I -- I will start out by saying there are national security implications from such an auction -- were to take -- to take place to both the DOD and the IC.

I think the discussions that -- that we need to have in a classified setting -- I can relate to you that the direction from early meetings that we've had is that the discussion about where that might take place would not affect specifically CIA or IC equities.

And I hope that's the case and where the discussion goes, but I think we need to be concerned that a public auction at bands at certain levels would have an impact on our ability to deliver an accurate intelligence picture.

ROUNDS: In other words, there are parts of the spectrum which simply cannot be shared with the commercial...

RATCLIFFE: That's correct.

ROUNDS: All right, thank you.

RATCLIFFE: And we can talk about the specific reasons about why in a classified setting, that would cause a diminishment of our ability to deliver a good threat picture to the Commander in Chief.

ROUNDS: And in some cases, life or death consequences.

RATCLIFFE: Absolutely.

ROUNDS: Thank you.

Director Patel, first of all, I just want to thank you for what you are doing. And I know that there's a number of items that in your previous life you did that simply can't be discussed. But nonetheless, we've appreciated what you have done for your country already. Today I just wanted to talk to you about, we've seen a series of public news reports about ISIS threats within the United States.

And there have been several successful interdictions. Oklahoma City, Philadelphia, New York. Although the question remains as to the total number of ISIS operatives who were able to breach porous borders in the months and years before policy changes in this January, January of 2025. To what extent is the FBI tracking operatives who remain in the United States today? And what is the FBI doing to track them down?

PATEL: Thank you, Senator Vance. I appreciate your question and your comments. So, the priorities that the FBI since I took over have been violent crime and national security. And this speaks directly to national security. The direction for the FBI is to track down any individuals with any terrorist ties whatsoever, whether it be ISIS or another foreign terrorist organization. And now to include the new designations of the cartels, down south and elsewhere.

So, the FBI is utilizing our Joint Terrorism Task Force, which are situated in all 55 field offices. But the key to success there is our partnership with state and local law enforcement who have the ground level intelligence on some of these operatives. And as you've highlighted, we've already shut down numerous threats, and we've identified publicly where permissible these threats and individuals and where they're coming from.

And I think the FBI is doing a very good job right now in collecting this information through our interagency process. And we will continue to thwart every bad actor affiliated with a terrorist organization or otherwise.

ROUNDS: Thank you. And Director Haugh, first of all, you've talked a little bit about already about Salt Typhoon, but what I want to really get into is the things that are moving right now that you haven't had a chance to address, and in particular, CYBERCOM 2.0 and the need to accelerate that particular plan moving forward. Can you talk just briefly? I've got 40 seconds left. Talk to us a little bit about how critical 2.0 is in terms of countering the cyber activity that's going on through nefarious actors.

HAUGH: Senator, what we were asked to do by Congress was to look at what's the fourth generation model for the Department of Defense to be able to generate cyber forces? Based off

of that request, I produced the recommendation for the Secretary that outlined three critical things, which is really how we manage the talent, how we develop the talent in the department, and also how we equip that talent, underpinned by compute and AI. We've brought that plan initially back to Secretary Hegseth. He told us to go faster. We've delivered him that plan, and now, based off of his guidance, we will now begin to move forward with the rest of the department.

ROUNDS: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

COTTON: Senator Bennet.

BENNET: Thank you, Mr. Chairman Thank you very much for holding this hearing. And thank you for being here. Mr. Director Ratcliffe, it sounds to me like your testimony today in the sector and the DNI's testimony is that there was nothing wrong at all with the signal thread that you were on. That it didn't include any targeting information or battle sequence. That that is your testimony. That's your testimony. And I'm a little staggered that that is your view, Director Ratcliffe. Does the CIA have any rules about handling of classified information? Yes or no?

RATCLIFFE: Yes.

BENNET: Thank you. Director Ratcliffe, do you agree, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth said this morning when asked by members of the press, what had happened, he said this morning in Hawaii that Atlantic Editor in Chief Jeff Goldberg is a, quote, deceitful and highly discredited so called journalist who's made a profession of providing hoaxes time and time again. Do you share that evaluation, the Secretary of Defense's evaluation of Jeff Goldberg as a journalist?

RATCLIFFE: Senator, I didn't see those comments. I don't know Jeff Goldberg.

BENNET: So, do you share that view of the Secretary of Defense?

RATCLIFFE: Well, I don't have a view on...

BENNET: OK. Do you -- Do you, assuming that he has that view, I'm curious about whether, you are the CIA director. OK? This has happened. We know it's happened. Did Jeff Goldberg somehow, was it a -- did he create a hoax that allowed him to become part of this Signal thread? Please answer the question. You don't -- don't -- don't insult the intelligence of the American people. Did he invite himself to the Signal thread?

RATCLIFFE: I don't know how he was invited, but clearly...

BENNET: Was he (ph) not added? Clearly it was. Finish your sentence please.

RATCLIFFE: Clearly he was added to the Signal group. Your question is...

BENNET: So, you don't know that the President's national security advisor invited him to join the Signal thread? Everybody in America knows that. Does the CIA director not know that?

RATCLIFFE: I've seen conflicting reports about who added the reporter to the Signal messaging group.

BENNET: It's perfectly appropriate that there was a reporter at it. Especially one that the Secretary of Defense says is deceitful, highly discredited. A so-called journalist who's made a profession of peddling hoaxes over and over again. Do you -- Is your testimony that it was appropriate that he was added to this Signal thread?

RATCLIFFE: No, of course not. And Senator...

BENNET: Why did you not call...

RATCLIFFE: Hold on, Senator, you are mischaracterizing my testimony...

BENNET: You are the CIA -- No, you answered -- You answered -- You answered the question. Let me ask you, when he was added to the thread, you're the CIA Director. Why didn't you call out that his -- he was present on the Signal thread?

RATCLIFFE: I don't know if you use Signal messaging app.

BENNET: I do. I do, not for classified information. Not for targeting...

RATCLIFFE: Neither do I, Senator.

BENNET: Not for anything remote (ph)...

RATCLIFFE: Neither do I, Senator.

BENNET: Well, it competes (ph) with your testimony today.

RATCLIFFE: It absolutely is not, Senator, were you not listening at the beginning when I said that I was using it as permitted, it is permissible to use...

BENNET: I agree that's your testimony. I agree that's your testimony. You asked me if I use it and I said not for targeting, not for classified information.

RATCLIFFE: And I said I don't either.

BENNET: I also know Jeff Goldberg. I don't use it to communicate with him, but you thought it was appropriate, by the way I think he's one of the more outstanding journalists in America, but I'm shocked to find him on a thread that he's reading in the parking lot of a grocery store in Washington D.C. and your testimony as the director of the CIA is that it's totally appropriate. Is it appropriate that the president...

RATCLIFFE: No, that is not what I...

BENNET: OK, go ahead, please.

RATCLIFFE: When did I say it was -- When did I use the word appropriate?

BENNET: Well, go ahead please.

RATCLIFFE: Well, I didn't.

BENNET: That everybody in America...

RATCLIFFE: Clearly, Senator...

BENNET: There's nothing to see here is what your testimony is.

RATCLIFFE: No, I never said that.

BENNET: This is just a normal day at the CIA where we chat about this kind of stuff over Signal, in fact it's so normal that the last administration left it here for us. That's your testimony today.

RATCLIFFE: That's your testimony.

BENNET: No, that's not my testimony. That's what you said.

RATCLIFFE: I didn't say any of those things that you just relayed (ph), Senator.

BENNET: I heard you say it, we'll let the American people decide. Let me ask you one final point. I'm out of time.

RATCLIFFE: Well, I think you mischaracterized it. Well, are you going to give me a chance to...

BENNET: Is it appropriate? Did you know that the President's Middle East advisor was in Moscow on this thread while you were as Director of the CIA participating in this thread? Were you aware of that? Are you aware of that today?

RATCLIFFE: I'm not aware of that today. This sloppiness, this incompetence, this disrespect for our intelligence agencies and the personnel who work for him is entirely unacceptable. It's an embarrassment.

RATCLIFFE: Senator?

BENNET: You need to do better. You need to do better. Thank you. I'm being gaveled by the Chairman, and I apologize for over -- going over my time.

COTTON: Senator Young.

YOUNG: Thank you all for being here. I'll be asking some follow up questions, clarifications about this Signal episode in a closed setting and try and work with all of you to bring clarity to that situation. It appears to me there's some unanswered questions. It'll take some time, I think to get there in a more dispassionate setting. Director Gabbard, I'm going to begin today, asking you some questions about emerging technologies. Been a real point of emphasis. I know of our broader national security community for a period of time. We know that PRC is making generational investments in certain emerging tech, AI, biotech and other areas of technology to reduce their vulnerability against any supply chain disruptions and to lead the world in some areas.

As the IC assesses, the PRC is seeking to, quote, become a global S&T superpower, surpass the United States, promote self-reliance and achieve further economic, political and military gain. So, Director Gabbard, can you describe the actions China is taking to operationalize that IC assessment in ways that directly target the security and prosperity of everyday Americans?

GABBARD: Senator, what we know is that they are trying to use these capabilities as a means to continue to exploit vulnerabilities within our own critical infrastructure and our cyber technology. Critical infrastructure is a key area of concern given what we know has already been exploited. These asymmetric attacks that have been placed within our critical infrastructure, that are of serious concern given how they could be exploited, especially during a time of conflict.

We know that they are experiencing a boom in their generative AI capability, and are competing very heavily against our own AI capabilities. Obviously, AI can and will be used across a multitude of every sector of our society, both here as we are in our own country. And we expect China to be able to continue to do the same there.

YOUNG: So, two key areas of vulnerability to the United States conceivably, susceptibility to cyber attacks, and as China's leveraging of AI towards misinformation increasingly into the physical realm, they can pose threats to us as well. As follow up, Director Ratcliffe, you know, we've had Huawei, we've had TikTok, what do you believe will be the next point of technological friction in competition between the U.S. and China? What should members of Congress be looking for?

RATCLIFFE: Senator, I think I can answer this question more fully in the classified setting. What I would say is it relates to the issue of emerging technologies and matters of quantum computing and quantum sensing, and our ability to stay ahead of China on the technological curve with respect to those issues. I'd be happy to get into that in further detail in a classified setting.

YOUNG: Excellent. We'll dive into that. Director Haugh, General, how do you see biotech playing into this broader competition?

HAUGH: I think it's an area that, from our perspective, has increasingly been a priority as we want to understand the approach that China has taken and also to ensure that as we think about the President's priorities in terms of both economic and technology security, we are certainly, as a community, following DNI's guidance, that we are increasingly putting our resources to be able to ensure that we understand where China is investing in those resources and how that will impact our economy and overall the overall health of our national security.

YOUNG: Thank you, General. Director Gabbard, not a lot of time left on this end, but I do have a little crypto interest I wanted to communicate to you. Can you share with this committee how we're positioned to disrupt foreign cyber efforts to steal cryptocurrency such as the North Koreans have successfully done. If others would like to pull this thread and weigh in on this question, very briefly, that would be great.

GABBARD: Senator, we're obviously aware of North Korea's revenue generating by stealing. Cryptocurrency has had a significant effect on North Korea's capabilities. I defer to our technical experts on the actions that are being taken.

HAUGH: Senator, I think this would be a great topic when we go to closed.

YOUNG: It's going to be a busy close setting.

(UNKNOWN): Yes.

YOUNG: Director Patel?

PATEL: I agree with the General. In closed session, I can provide some details.

YOUNG: It's what you get when you visit with a bunch of spies. All right, Chairman.

COTTON: Senator Kelly.

KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to come back to the topic of the day here. The Signal chain, as reported by The Atlantic. Ms. Gabbard and Mr. Ratcliffe, you each testified that there was no information operational in nature, no classified information. So, I want to ask each of you, just a series of -- just respond yes or no. I'll start with Ms. Gabbard. In the Signal chain that we have been talking about, was there any mention of a target in Yemen?

GABBARD: I don't remember mention of specific targets.

KELLY: Any generic target?

GABBARD: I believe there was discussion around targets in general.

KELLY: Mr. Ratcliffe?

RATCLIFFE: I think that's consistent with my recollection. Again, I don't have access to that.

KELLY: Was there -- was there any mention, Ms. Gabbard, of a weapon or weapons system?

GABBARD: I don't recall specific weapons systems being named.

KELLY: I'm not talking about specific any, weapon or weapons system.

GABBARD: I don't recall specific names of systems or weapons being used or named within the chat.

KELLY: Well, I'm not asking whether -- I -- I don't want you to tell me what the specific weapon was, but any weapon at all.

Mr. Ratcliffe, same question.

RATCLIFFE: I don't recall.

KELLY: How about anything about timing? Ms. Gabbard?

GABBARD: I don't recall specific timing. But I won't...

KELLY: Was there any mention...

GABBARD: I won't get into the detail of -- of the conversation, but obviously, there was a significant amount of planning and internal discussions that had occurred prior to and outside of this Signal chat.

KELLY: Mr. Ratcliffe, you're nodding your head. Any mention of any military unit whatsoever? Mr. Ratcliffe?

RATCLIFFE: Not that I recall.

KELLY: Ms. Gabbard?

GABBARD: Not that I recall.

KELLY: OK, so I understand that DOD policy prohibits discussion of even what is called controlled unclassified information, or CUI, on unsecured devices. Are both of you aware of that DOD policy?

GABBARD: I haven't read that policy.

RATCLIFFE: I'm not familiar with the DOD policy, but I would say that the secretary of defense is the original classification authority for DOD in deciding what would be classified information.

KELLY: Ms. Gabbard, does the intelligence community have a policy that prohibits discussion of controlled unclassified information?

GABBARD: Yes.

KELLY: It does, OK. Controlled unclassified information according to DOD includes information that is -- information that has not been approved for public release. Would you -- of what's been disclosed publicly of the Signal chain, would -- would either of you feel that that would be approved for public release? Ms. Gabbard?

GABBARD: The discussion that took place in that Signal chat group was a -- a conversation reflecting national security leaders and the vice president around the president's objectives.

KELLY: So yes or no, would you approve that for public release?

GABBARD: I don't feel I can answer that question here.

KELLY: Because of the nature of this hearing?

GABBARD: Because of -- because of the nature of a private discussion that took place between individual leaders in our government.

KELLY: It would make sense that you would not approve it for public release, wouldn't it?

GABBARD: There are other factors that I -- that would...

KELLY: OK.

GABBARD: ... go into that consideration.

KELLY: Mr. Ratcliffe, yes or no?

RATCLIFFE: I wouldn't approve the release of classified information. Again, as I've said, my understanding is that...

KELLY: I'm not talking about classified information, Mr. Ratcliffe. I'm talking about information that has not been approved for public release. That is information that is considered controlled unclassified information.

RATCLIFFE: The -- the principles that would've been on that would've been individuals capable of approving that for public release.

KELLY: Do you -- let me -- I've got 20 seconds. The deliberation as to whether or not we should launch a strike on another country, would you consider that classified information, Ms. Gabbard?

GABBARD: Well, the information was not classified.

KELLY: This is a hu- -- this is no- -- I'm not talking about this; I'm just talking about deliberation as -- from principles as to whether or not we should launch a strike on another country. Would you consider that classified information? I'm not talking about what happened this week.

GABBARD: There are other factors that would go into determining that classification.

KELLY: Mr. Ratcliffe? The deliberation between principles in our national security apparatus about whether or not to strike another country, would you consider that -- that to be classified information?

RATCLIFFE: Pre-decisional strike deliberation should be conducted through classified channels.

KELLY: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

COTTON: If I may, I just want to return, Mr. Ratcliffe, to your answer there, and part Senator Kelly. It's been raised at several occasions now in this hearing about whether classified information was discussed in this chat, and I -- I -- you mentioned about the secretary of defense being what you called, I think, the original classification authority.

RATCLIFFE: Correct. Correct.

COTTON: I -- I think it's important for the public to understand that although you and Director Gabbard are original classification authorities on many matters, you're not that for all matters that might be classified in the government. Is that right?

RATCLIFFE: That's correct.

COTTON: So if the secretary of state has classified sensitive diplomatic details, that's his authority. If the secretary of energy has classi- -- sensitive classified information about our national laboratories, that's his authority. And -- and the two of you can't speak to other departments who have their own original classification authority, and which, of course, as Director Gabbard said, ultimately la- -- rest with one person, the president of the United States. Is that correct?

RATCLIFFE: That's correct.

COTTON: OK. I -- I -- I just wanted to clarify that. It looks like the vice chairman wants to weigh in, as well.

WARNER: Just very briefly. I mean, I think it's strange the audience and the watching public's credibility, if we're talking about timing, packages, that somehow this would be OK to put out, or just, frankly, senior American officials trashing Europe. I -- I've been around this for a while. This is not information you generally put out. And the notion there's not even acknowledgment of, "Hey, gosh, we screwed up," is stunning to me. And the idea somehow -- well, none of this was classified, but we can't talk about it here? You can't have it both ways.

COTTON: I think the witnesses' point is that they can't speak for every official in the government who has original classification authority.

WARNER: Mr. Chairman, I -- I don't -- that's not what we're -- I -- I'm not trying to litigate that; I'm trying to litigate on the face, unless, as Senator Bennet said, this reporter is -- is somehow making this all up -- and I think the White House has acknowledged that the text chain that he submitted was authentic -- it strains my mind to think -- Mr. Chairman, this strains my mind if -- if the shoe had been on the other foot, what my colleagues would be saying about this.

And again, we're going to get to the bottom of it. I mean, I -- I appreciate your comments, but you guys have both testified under law. There's nothing classified in that information. There's nothing -- and since I've not heard any -- either one of you say, "Gosh, we screwed up." So we'll find out. This is too important to our national security. And again, I know we've got more members to go, so...

COTTON: They -- they testified -- it's my understanding -- correct me if I'm wrong -- that there's no intelligence community classified information. Is that correct?

RATCLIFFE: That's correct.

COTTON: Mr. Ratcliffe, is that correct?

Director Gabbard?

GABBARD: Yes, Chairman.

(UNKNOWN): Well, again...

WARNER: That's not correct. She said repeatedly there's nothing classified, period -- period. You can't have it both -- and again, we'll see. I cannot believe this is not going to come out. And if it's not classified, again, we'd ask you to make it -- give it to the public today. I'm sure some -- one of your aides back there have probably got it on paper. If you've got here, it's not classified. Stand by your position. Or is this just one more example of a careless approach to how we keep our secrets in this administration.

COTTON: With apologies to Senator Moran.

MORAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to our witnesses for being here.

I want to explore a little bit about Ukraine. And I'll direct this to Director Ratcliffe or Director Kruse.

The ATA assesses that, quote, "the grinding war of attrition," in Ukraine, quote, "will lead to a gradual but steady erosion of Kiev's positions on the battlefield." Are Ukrainian forces at any significant risk of collapse this year?

RATCLIFFE (?): (inaudible).

KRUSE: Before I turn it over to Director Ratcliffe, I think both sides are working through the equipment that they need the industrial base they need to support that and the personnel that are required to man all of that equipment and man the front lines. And as we see the battle space in the various portions whether it's in Kursk whether it's in any of the four Oblasts we see areas where Kyiv will struggle to prevent the slow attritional grind. We do not see an imminent collapse in any of the Line of Control, battle spaces at this point.

MORAN: And then vice versa. That answers my question, unless you want to add something, Director?

Whatever advantages in manpower and materiel they have, can Russia maintain its operational tempo without significant changes to how it's conducting the war?

KRUSE: I think our assessment from a military perspective is that Russia has the ability to sustain its campaign longer than Kyiv would. Now when that timeline hits we do not have an assessment of. But I believe that if this were to go on for more than the remainder of this year both sides would have a significant challenge maintaining their defense industrial base as well as their operational ops tempo.

MORAN: Longer than this year?

KRUSE: That is correct. And they will each have difficulty at various points throughout the spring, summer, and fall as well.

MORAN: Thank you.

Director Ratcliffe, ATA says continuing the Russia-Ukraine war perpetuates strategic risks to the United States of unintended escalation to large-scale war and heightened insecurity among NATO allies. What are the strategic risks to the United States, if Russia were to achieve its maximalist objectives via a peace agreement?

RATCLIFFE: Achieved via peace agreement?

MORAN: Yes.

RATCLIFFE: Well, I think that -- clearly the negotiations that are going on reflect that President Trump is seeking a cessation of the war on terms that will end the war permanently.

From an intelligence community standpoint, and specifically with regard to CIA assets, we've taken steps to support that, the president's goal of an enduring peace.

To General Kruse's comments, I agree with his assessment and the -- generally the public assessment, that Russia has the battlefield advantage, is grinding forward slowly.

I want to comment on that, however, to say, that with regard to the Ukrainian resistance, the Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian military have been underestimated for a period of several years now. And ultimately, I'm convinced from my reflections in observing from an intelligence standpoint, that they will fight with their bare hands if they have to if they don't have terms that are acceptable to an enduring peace.

Obviously to the point of maximalist goals, President Trump has communicated that he is aware of the dangers of that, of Russia getting what they want. And I think that the peace talks that are taking place would reflect, if successful, and they are making progress, that both sides would not get everything that they want and no one's maximalist goals would be achieved.

MORAN: Thank you both.

In the short time I have I'm going to skip a question and ask the -- that I intended to ask but ask the Director of the FBI.

Director, I Chair the Subcommittee that appropriates money for the Department of Justice, including the FBI. It has been our practice that the FBI Director as well as the Attorney General appear before our Committee each year. And I would want to make certain that you do not foresee any challenges that I will have in your presence when you come to speak to -- when we invite you to come speak about your budget. I think when we visited in the office, you made yourself often available, pleased to talk to Congress.

We're getting ready for the Appropriations Process to begin. The budget that the president intends to submit is seemingly months away -- weeks away -- long weeks away. And we may ask you to come testify about your priorities now or sooner than that. Is that a challenge for you that I to be aware of?

PATEL: At the -- from the FBI, no. As long as the Department of Justice and the Attorney General are good with it.

MORAN: Thank you.

COTTON: Senator Reed?

REED: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Director Ratcliffe, you have repeatedly made the point that there was no classified information contained in any of these discussions that were reported in the Atlantic Monthly. Is that correct?

RATCLIFFE: No. That's not correct.

So Senator, what I related is that, that any information that was related from my perspective or that I observed from the Intelligence perspective, was not Classified Information.

With respect to the assertions and the allegations that there was strike packages or targeting information or things that relate to DOD. As I've pointed out, the Secretary of Defense is the original classification authority for determining whether something is classified or not. And as I've understood from media reports, the Secretary of Defense has said the information was not classified.

REED: Are you aware that the Secretary of Defense declassified this information prior to the (inaudible).

RATCLIFFE: I'm not.

REED: Director Gabbard, same question. You've said -- you've indicated -- at least the impression I got, was there was no classified information discussed. Is that correct?

GABBARD: Senator, my answer is the same as the Director of the CIA's.

REED: So the question has to be posed to Secretary Hegseth, whether he declassified the information, and at what point he did declassify it. Do you agree?

GABBARD: Yes. I defer questions to the secretary of Defense.

REED: OK.

Director Patel, are you conducting an investigation of this -- these discussions and activities?

PATEL: Thank, Senator. As I informed the chair -- the vice chairman on the same question, I found out about this late last night-early this morning, so I don't have an update for you on that.

REED: Well, thank you. When you get an update we'd appreciate it very much.

PATEL: Yes sir.

REED: Director Gabbard, were you overseas during any parts of these discussions?

GABBARD: Yes, Senator. I was.

REED: Were you using your private phone or public phone for the Signal discussions?

GABBARD: I won't speak to this because it's under review by the National Security Council. Once that review is complete, I'm sure we'll share the results with the committee.

REED: What is under review? It's a very simple question. Your private phone or officially issued phone?

GABBARD: When that review is complete, I'm sure we'll share the results with the committee.

REED: What is under review? It's a very simple question. Your private phone or officially issued phone? What could be under review?

GABBARD: National Security Council is reviewing all aspects of how this came to be, how the journalist was inadvertently added to the group chat, and what occurred within that chat across the board.

REED: But -- so you were not going to disclose anything about whether you use the phone.

Director Ratcliffe, there's been indication that the CIA has warned recently, retired personnel about the vulnerabilities of Signal, and other encrypted messaging applications. If that's the case, why were you discussing these issues on Signal?

RATCLIFFE: Senator, Signal use, as I've said repeatedly is permissible for work purposes. I've never said that, end-to-end encryption apps like Signal are a substitute for classified systems. And I was not discussing classified information in this in this setting.

REED: But as you've indicated previously, perhaps the secretary of Defense was discussing classified information and only he can be held accountable in terms of whether it was classified or declassified at the time we spoke. Is that accurate?

RATCLIFFE: Well, I didn't say it that way. I said the secretary of Defense is the original classification authority and my understanding is that his comments are that any information that he shared was not classified.

REED: But you have no way to verify that?

RATCLIFFE: I don't.

REED: Again, this is a very troubling example. And a great lapse in our intelligence and our discussion.

One further point, if you are not aware of any classified information on the discussions back and forth, would it be appropriate for the author to release the entire text of what he heard, and transcribed?

RATCLIFFE: I think the author has released -- my understanding essentially, almost all of the information as it's been related to me. I don't know what calculation the author made with regard to what information would be released or not.

REED: Well, he (inaudible).

RATCLIFFE: And I can -- I can again confirm that with respect to the communications that were related -- as to me, there was no classified information.

REED: According to the article, quote, "the message contained information that might be interpreted as related to actual and current intelligence operations" and the author did not disclose that information.

So the question would be, if he disclosed everything he heard, in your view...

RATCLIFFE: That wouldn't be classified information. I know the context of what that is. And I think the author said, might be interpreted as related to intelligence information. It was not classified information.

REED: So it goes back to my point. If he released all this information, he did not release, he could do so without any liability at the federal level.

RATCLIFFE: I think you're asking for a legal -- a legal answer. And that I'm not able to give you. But...

REED: Mr. Patel, can you opine? You're a lawyer and you're the Director of the FBI? Would he face any legal liability if he released the information?

PATEL: Because of the questions you and the vice chairman have put to me, I'm not going to prejudge the situation. And that legal counsel is ultimately for the Department of Justice.

REED: Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

COTTON: Senator Ossoff?

OSSOFF: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you all for joining us. And for your service.

Just to make sure I understand some of the basics here. So Director Ratcliffe, you were a member of the HUTPC Small Group Signal Chain (ph), correct?

RATCLIFFE: I was. Yes.

OSSOFF: And so were the vice president, the secretaries of State and Defense, the National Security advisor, and Ms. Gabbard, correct?

RATCLIFFE: I believe so. I don't have a list of who was invited to be on.

OSSOFF: So -- and so was national political reporter Jeffrey Goldberg, correct?

RATCLIFFE: I don't know that.

OSSOFF: Yes. You do.

RATCLIFFE: I don't know Jeffrey Goldberg. And I don't -- I've already testified. I don't know whether or how he was added.

OSSOFF: OK. Well, he was a member of the Signal Chain. And the discussion included the vice president's private opinion on the wisdom of proposed U.S. strikes in Yemen, correct?

RATCLIFFE: I don't recall.

OSSOFF: Vance, quote, "I think we are making a mistake. I am not sure the president is aware of how inconsistent this is with his message on Europe right now. There is a strong argument for delaying this a month."

You don't recall?

RATCLIFFE: I don't -- as you -- as you...

OSSOFF: You don't recall seeing that?

RATCLIFFE: ... read that, I don't.

OSSOFF: It included the private opinions of the secretary of Defense on the timing of the strikes in Yemen, correct?

RATCLIFFE: I don't recall.

OSSOFF: Director Ratcliffe, surely you prepared for this hearing today. You were part of a group of principals, senior echelons of the U.S. government, in now a widely publicized breach of sensitive information. You don't recall whether the vice president opined on the wisdom of the strikes. That's your testimony today under oath?

RATCLIFFE: In that setting, I don't recall.

OSSOFF: Here's what Secretary Hegseth said, quote, "waiting a few weeks or months does not fundamentally change the calculus. Two immediate risks on waiting. One, this leaks and we look indecisive. Two, Israel takes an action first or Gaza ceasefire falls apart and we don't get to start this on our own terms."

Your testimony is, you don't recall the Secretary of Defense sending that message or reading it?

RATCLIFFE: I recall there being an exchange. I don't recall the specifics as you're reading it.

OSSOFF: Well, let's put it this way, Director Ratcliffe, a discussion by senior U.S. officials on the timing and risks of a proposed military campaign, and disagreements between the president and the vice president about U.S. plans and intentions, would be of obvious interest to foreign intelligence services. Would it not?

RATCLIFFE: Yes.

OSSOFF: And they were discussing the timing of sending U.S. aircrews into enemy airspace, where they faced an air defense threat, correct?

RATCLIFFE: I'm going to -- Senator, defer to the other principals that you referred to...

OSSOFF: Director Ratcliffe...

RATCLIFFE: ... about what the meaning and the context of what...

OSSOFF: ... we're...

RATCLIFFE: (inaudible)

OSSOFF: ... talking about the timing of U.S. airstrikes, correct?

RATCLIFFE: Yes.

OSSOFF: Yes. And therefore the timing of sending U.S. aircrews into hostile airspace, correct?

RATCLIFFE: Yes.

OSSOFF: And therefore, the time period during which enemy air defenses could target U.S. aircrews, flying in enemy airspace, correct?

RATCLIFFE: I don't know.

OSSOFF: You do know that.

Let me ask this question General Haugh. You lead America's Signals Intelligence collection. Would the private deliberation of foreign, senior officials, about the wisdom and timing of potential Military action be a collection priority for you and the U.S. intelligence community?

HAUGH: Senator, it's our job to do indications and warning for both the plans and intentions of adversary leaders and for military commanders.

OSSOFF: And would not information about the timing of airstrikes allow a military to preposition or queue air defense systems to shoot down enemy aircraft?

HAUGH: I think Senator, the -- from our perspective any advance warning is something that we certainly are trying to protect.

OSSOFF: Director Ratcliffe, this was a huge mistake, Correct?

RATCLIFFE: No.

OSSOFF: A national -- hold on. No, no, you...

(CROSSTALK)

OSSOFF: No, no, Dr. Ratcliffe, I asked you a yes-or-no question and now you will hold on. A national political reporter...

(CROSSTALK)

RATCLIFFE: ... can characterize it how you want...

OSSOFF: ... was made privy to sensitive information about imminent military operations against a foreign terrorist organization.

RATCLIFFE: ... inadvertent mistake of adding a reporter...

OSSOFF: ... and you -- and that wasn't a huge mistake -- that wasn't a huge mistake?

RATCLIFFE: Well, I think the -- look, they characterized...

(CROSSTALK)

OSSOFF: ... embarrassment. This is utterly unprofessional. There's been no apology. There has been no recognition of the gravity of this error. And by the way, we will get the full transcript of this chain, and your testimony will be measured carefully against its content.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

COTTON: I thank the witnesses again for their appearance today. I sense the Vice Chairman has something to add.

WARNER: I -- I do.

COTTON: So I will recognize him briefly.

WARNER: Well, again, I -- I thank the witnesses. But what you're saying doesn't make sense on the face of it. Every -- knows -- at least, Director Ratcliffe, you had the courtesy of acknowledging you were on the chain. Director Gabbard wouldn't even touch that, even though we've got her initials.

And if we want a comparison, think back to the beginning of the Ukraine war, when the United States, in concert with our then-ally the United Kingdom, declassified a lot of Putin's battle plans that allowed the Ukrainians to push back successfully on the Russian invasion. How was that -- that was -- gone through a real process of declassification.

As Senator Ossoff so clearly made the point, this information out potentially where our adversary could reposition its defenses, and the unwillingness of the individuals on this panel who were on the chat to even apologize or acknowledging what a colossal screwup this is speaks volumes.

COTTON: Thank you to our witnesses for your appearance.

A -- a few administrative matters. As I mentioned earlier, Senator Collins is under the weather. She regrets that she could not be here for your testimony. Senator Risch, likewise, had to preside over a hearing of the Foreign Relations Committee, to include the nomination of my former Governor Mike Huckabee, a great American and a great friend of Israel, to be the next Ambassador to Israel. He also regrets that he could not be here. I anticipate he may have written questions as well. I would urge you all to respond to those promptly.

Now, the audience will remain seated while our witnesses and their aides depart the hearing room. The Capitol Police will ensure this occurs. I want to commend the Capitol Police and our committee's security staff for running an orderly hearing today.

For the benefit of members, the vote on the floor has been called. We will adjourn this open hearing and we will reconvene in closed setting at 12:40 pm.

The hearing is adjourned.

END

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