

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

ASPEN INSTITUTE HOMELAND SECURITY PROGRAM 2014

HOMELAND SECURITY FORUM

THE GLOBAL THREAT PICTURE AS THE DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE  
AGENCY SEES IT

Greenwald Pavilion  
Aspen Meadows Campus, Aspen, Colorado

Saturday, July 26, 2014

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

CLARK KENT ERVIN  
Director, Homeland Security Program, Aspen Institute

LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL T. FLYNN  
Director, Defense Intelligence Agency  
U.S. Department of Defense

EVAN PEREZ  
Justice and National Security Reporter, CNN

\* \* \* \* \*

THE GLOBAL THREAT PICTURE AS THE DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE  
AGENCY SEES IT

(Applause)

MR. ERVIN: Well, everyone, I won't elaborate further on that. Thanks to all of you for being here for the closing session of the fifth annual Aspen Security Forum. I want to note that Wolf Blitzer is still abroad covering the events of Gaza and the Ukraine and so we're very, very pleased to have one of Wolf's greatest colleagues, Evan Pérez, as the moderator for tonight's closing discussion with General Flynn. Evan is a justice and national security reporter for CNN.

He recently came to the network from a career, a distinguished career at the *Wall Street Journal*. At the *Journal* among other things he helped to break the news of the complaint that led to the resignation of General David Petraeus as director of the Central Intelligence Agency. And he also broke important news following the Boston Marathon bombings. With that, Evan Pérez will lead tonight's conversation with General Flynn, and my thanks to both of you.

(Applause)

MR. PÉREZ: Thank you. I want to say just a real quick thank you to Clark for having us all here for this wonderful event. We also want to thank the town of Aspen for being great hosts to us for this past week. It's a very, very, very wonderful place to come and talk about all these issues. With me -- well, first I also -- you know, Wolf sends his regards to everybody. He wishes he were here, he's stuck his -- he's doing *The Situation Room* today, as a matter of fact, from Jerusalem. So that's where he's at today.

With me is Lieutenant General Michael Flynn who's the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. In 2 weeks he is retiring after a three-decade career in the military intelligence that began as a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division. He served as the top intelligence officer for Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2010 General Flynn

published a report of some of the shortcomings in intelligence gathering in Afghanistan, in particular. You are known for your frankness and that report got a lot of -- you know, some people rankled, but it is something that appears was badly needed to have a discussion about.

I think we're going to have some of that here today. You know, I want to start, if I can, with, you know, how you come -- you come to the office every day. What are you looking at? How do you organize your day looking at the various threats that the country faces?

GEN. FLYNN: So a couple of things before I -- I'm going to go down a litany of things here that Evan and I talked about. But you got two rookies up here right now. And for those that were in the other room during the course of the day, I think we boiled three frogs and we ate at least one-and-a-half elephants.

MR. PÉREZ: That's right.

(Laughter)

GEN. FLYNN: So -- anyway, it's a real honor to be here and a real treat to meet you, Evan, and get to know a little bit about your background.

MR. PÉREZ: Same here.

GEN. FLYNN: And it's really just awesome. What I'm going to do is I'm going to walk through the kind of things that I deal with on a daily basis. I'm going to go through those very quickly and then go back to what Evan to just kind of run the show here, and give you a sense of what we in the Defense Department do, what we in the Defense Intelligence system do. And for me it's -- you know, I have 17,000 people in 140 countries around the world tonight doing the nation's business.

And we support 11 four-star commands -- Admiral McRaven -- you saw him -- General Jacoby, who's another one who was one of the speakers here today, as well as all of our other combatant commanders around the world that are out there sort of on the edge of our universe trying

to secure our nation's security. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to kind of tell you what I see on a daily basis quickly, why I think we are where we are with the kind of world that we're in, and then just give some thoughts about what I think we ought to do.

And I -- again, I kind of look at this from the perspective of -- this is about the institution of this country, not just about the institution of the Defense Department or the kinds of things that we do in the military. This is about our national security. So first, I'm going to tick these off very quickly because these are a lot of the things that have been talked about, you know, over the last couple of days here in the forum, and as well as many of the things that you see on the -- on television today or in the media. But also, many of these are things we're going to be dealing with for a long, long time.

So first off -- and I'm just going to kind of describe it and -- or state it and then describe it briefly. So terrorism -- terrorism, we have a whole gang of new actors out there that are far more extreme than al-Qaida. Syria and Iraq -- Syria and Iraq, these are regional wars that will continue to increase in complexity. So that's a blinding flash of the obvious. But these are regional wars and they're ongoing. This is beyond conflict and I'll -- you know, I'll describe a little bit of that probably in the Q&A.

Iran -- Iran is finding itself as a new sort of regional influencer because of all the things that are going on from Syria over the last couple years, what's happened in Iraq, the things that were seen in the Middle East with -- or in Israel and Gaza, how they are exerting power. Middle East and North Africa -- and the way I describe this is its far more agile substate actors that have or are dealing with what I describe as unfinished revolutions, okay? -- 1.3 billion people on the continent of Africa -- 1.3 billion.

And most of those people are between the age of 15 and 30 -- and again, we'll talk a little bit about why here in a second, why we see so much -- so many problems

in -- really in Africa alone. Russia -- Russia, they are reinvigorated to confront western influence with really unconventional tactics. So all this separatists and all these characters that are in East Ukraine and Crimea, all this sort of business about -- one of the gentlemen on the video said this discussion about, you know, what type of war are we in and I think we always have to define that.

Afghanistan -- I spent many years in Afghanistan. We are transitioning from a decade of war in Afghanistan -- actually a little bit longer than a decade of war in Afghanistan. But that transition is going to be complicated by the events in Iraq because what is happening in Iraq -- believe me, the -- these -- and I'll be very facetious here for a second, but these are very dangerous -- these are dangerous threats that we face. We look at some of these people as though they're in shower shoes and bathrobes, but twice they were defeating the most sophisticated military in the world in 2006 in Iraq, and 2009 in Afghanistan.

So they're watching everything that's going on in Iraq as we transition out of Afghanistan. The growing importance of Africa -- I mentioned Africa just a second ago, and I would just tell you that we have a whole complex set of allies that we have to -- we have to look at who do we want an our friends and our partners there; really, really important. China and South Asia -- this forum at least in the day that -- you know, this day that I've been here, talked a lot about terrorism in the Middle East. But China and really South Asia -- the Asia Pacific strategy that we have, it's not just about China and America. It's about competition for global resources.

And it's really, really important that we understand that because it's not just about what's happening in the Pacific. It's what's happening around the world. Cyber threats and opportunities -- and I know we're going to talk a little bit more about that. We had some great discussions about cyber. But that is a significant wildcard in everything that we do. And then persistent spoilers -- persistent spoilers. One of them is North Korea. North Korea fired off another missile, another ballistic missile today.

North Korea is -- has been in the process of firing off these missiles, been in the media, and they are essentially desensitizing us because they want to know or they want us to know that they have this capability. But that is a -- that is clearly a spoiler. Weapons of mass destruction are another spoiler and I'll talk a little bit about -- you know, I said in open testimony in fact last March in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee that I thought the most dangerous -- one of the most dangerous threats that we were facing was the -- was these Syrian -- or I'm sorry, the ISIS and ISIL, these different terrorist groups inside of Syria getting their hands on chemical weapons. And I still believe that.

So we're worried about foreign fighters coming out of there doing attacks here in this country or maybe against our partners. But actually there's -- there are still chemical weapons or chemical capabilities in that part of the world. And in the hands of people who I know have the intent to use them, we need to be concerned about that. And then finally to our south, Latin America -- Latin America has significant partnership opportunities, but it also has enormous transnational or the highest criminal cartels, and we're dealing with that.

General Kelly, our Southern Command commander, General Jacoby, who's here, they both know this and we're dealing with this on a daily basis. So all that said, some key points. Nation states -- not all of them -- but nation states around the world are being challenged. And as -- also as somebody said in that video, we are in this period of prolonged societal conflict, I believe, from what I see and what I've studied over my 33 years of doing this, and certainly over the last 10 or 15 years of what I've been watching, we're in this period of prolonged societal conflict.

Now, some would describe it as a post-colonial sort of border or political order that is changing. And this is -- when we get into, like, you know, our boundary is still going to stay the same, our geographic boundary is going to stay the same. So this societal conflict is a big deal. We need to recognize -- United States needs to

recognize that we cannot win alone, we cannot win alone. In fact, the U.S. role is very important, always is going to -- it's going to be important, but it may not be the determinant, you know, on a scale -- on the scale that we're operating, you know, given the situation that we're in.

And then really our need for -- to recognize, acknowledge, and pull in and create new regional powers, regional forums, regional conferences -- you know, the ASEAN, the African Union, Southern Hemisphere Security Forum. I mean there's different ones out there. We need to figure out how to better tap into those. These are different things that sort of popped up post Cold War. Some have been around since the Cold War. There's two failures that are occurring in the world -- there's a failure of nation states -- and I talk briefly about that -- and there's a failure of governance. And they are being challenged, those two areas.

And when you look at different parts of the world -- very, very clear -- they are being challenged by this rise of corruption. And we have to recognize that because we invest in places where there's a lot of corruption, where there's kleptocracies. We have to recognize that. So what do we need to do? And I'm going to list a couple of words and I can get into more detail of what I believe they mean. But I think it's really important because as I look at the threats that we face -- many of that I just ticked off -- we need to be thinking like this.

We need to have an enormous agility as a nation to be able to operate in the different environments that we are in. Agility -- agility is something that allows us to be -- to move at a relative speed that's good and helpful for what it is that we're trying to do. We need to be very adaptive. We need adaptability. When I look at the threats and I look at the way the world has changed from when I came in and we faced the Soviet Union in the Cold War and that collapsed and now all of a sudden we went into different -- you know, we went to the Balkans, we -- you know, we went -- now the last 13 years -- I mean, so we need to be very adaptive.

Our system needs to be adaptive -- great political system, but our -- I think our system needs to be far more adaptive -- so adaptability. Transparency -- transparency is a big word that came up a lot today. What transparency does is transparency breeds trust. And from an intelligence -- as a senior intelligence officer, we cannot afford to have the United -- the people of this country not trust its intelligence community. We can't afford that. And when it happened in the past, this community got gutted and we failed the country again -- we just have to be conscious of that. But transparency has to be a sort of a watchword for the intelligence community and certainly for, I think, everything that we do.

And then the final thing is accountability. You have to be accountable for what -- our actions, we got to be accountable for the things we do, what we say, and how we want to be. And the last comment is that -- I just wrote down that stability is only temporary without good governance -- stability is only temporary without good governance. And I saw this in many of the places that I've been in the last -- certainly the last decade. So unless you have good governance you really can't have stability, and they kind of -- the two, you know, sort of meet in the middle. So with that --

MR. PÉREZ: So with that -- that's a good rundown of all the things that you have been thinking about these last few years. As you wrap up your government career in the next couple of weeks, I'm trying to -- one thing that people often talk about is are we safer today. And then that's a question for you -- are we safer today than we were 2 years, 5 years, 10 years ago in your -- what's your assessment on that?

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, my quick answer is we're not. My expanded answer is we understand that we're not and we are working to organize ourselves better. We're facing a different type of threat that they don't love a beautiful place like Aspen. You know, I went down -- I got in here late last night, was out in one of the little (inaudible) or something, you know, for you know, a bowl of soup and a beer and nice music out there. There are people in this

world that don't like that -- that don't like that way of our life.

MR. PÉREZ: But you know, for an audience like this, I mean, we have a mix of people in national security and also townspeople who came in to watch this. Some of them think -- thought they were going to see Wolf, which I'm sorry to say.

(Laughter)

MR. PÉREZ: But you know, I think that's going to be surprising to a lot of people, right? The idea that trillions -- you know, a trillion dollars has been spent on various things to improve our security and we're not?

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah. I think that we are in a place now where, as I mentioned, this business of our conflict, it costs us our resources --

MR. PÉREZ: Sure.

GEN. FLYNN: -- it costs us our time, it costs us our people. And so we have to recognize that we want to keep it over there.

MR. PÉREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: And I think that to do that it's going to come at a cost. There is every intention for these individuals and in these -- you know, especially, you know, as has been described the last couple of days with this foreign fighter crowd over in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere around the world they, you know, have every intention to come back to this country and do damage here. And also, you know, I -- you know, I work very closely with our FBI. And the FBI's responsibilities inside of this country, they do amazing work for the people of this country on a daily basis to protect us from --

MR. PÉREZ: -- from these --

GEN. FLYNN: -- and these connections that occur internationally and domestically.

MR. PÉREZ: We -- you know, there's a lot of obviously political noise surrounding a comment that the President made sometime ago about --

GEN. FLYNN: He can make any comment he wants.

MR. PÉREZ: -- core al-Qaida being on the run. Lot of dispute as to what exactly that means. What is your assessment of that entire idea?

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah. So my -- the difference that I have -- and people -- you know, we throw this word "core al-Qaida" or this phrase "core al-Qaida" out. My belief -- so this is Mike Flynn -- core al-Qaida is the ideology. Al-Qaida command and control is where the senior leadership resides. So al-Qaida command and control resides today, Zawahiri over in the FATA, Pakistan. And we've got this guy, al-Baghdadi, who we actually captured in 2007. He's, you know, claiming a caliphate.

And we've got all these other leaders that are out there. We use the term "core al-Qaida" -- and I, you know, have been going against these guys for a long time -- the core is the core belief that these individuals have --

MR. PÉREZ: And that's not on the run.

GEN. FLYNN: It's not on the run. And that ideology is actually -- it's -- you know, sadly it's -- it feels like it's exponentially growing.

MR. PÉREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: And we have to be conscious of that. You know, I mentioned about the size of the population in Africa. You look at the size, the demographics in the Middle East, you look at the demographics in Central Asia which is the Central Asia Republics of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and you know, large Muslim populations, you know, is in -- generally in that area -- and I said between 15 and about 30 years of age. And if they don't have institutions in their countries, if

they don't have jobs, if they don't have the things to do, then they're going to turn to other stuff.

MR. PÉREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: And these organizations that are out there that are well-organized, they are well-funded, they reach into these young people and they pull them in. And there seems to be -- to me there's -- you know, it seems to be more and more of them today than there were when I first started this thing in, you know, post 9/11.

MR. PÉREZ: Looking at, you know, just in the last couple weeks, there's been a lot of concern about increased aviation security. We hear that there is intelligence that was behind that and obviously some of this is stuff that crosses your desk. I'm wondering, you know, from what we hear, these guys have been working on perfecting or improving a bomb design with stuff that can evade our screening procedures.

GEN. FLYNN: Right.

MR. PÉREZ: It seems to me that, you know, from what we can tell, this has gone from beyond theoretical. This is -- they've done this. They've -- you know, perhaps a laptop bomb or something like that. Can you talk a little bit about what we can -- or what you can talk about on this issue?

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah. So first, when you travel around the world or you travel in this country, don't get frustrated with those TSA agents, okay? They are doing work -- they are doing national security work. As all the crazy stories that you heard about them, you know, they do this, they do that, they got (inaudible), you know, I mean -- all this kind of stuff -- I mean --

MR. PÉREZ: They didn't know a D.C. driver's license?

GEN. FLYNN: They -- yeah, they -- you know, we have to thank them because they are a front line of defense for this country. And decisions that were made

recently, what Evan's talking about, about you know, at least, you know, raising the levels of concern. What we have to be very careful of is we have to be careful that we don't get -- we don't desensitize the American public to kind of go, oh, it's another one of those -- it's a -- you know, the boy who cried wolf syndrome.

And people have to pay very close attention, and they have to understand what it is that we're facing. I mean think about an individual who's willing to put on a bomb and go blow themselves up. I mean that is a mentality that -- I don't know if anybody in this room could -- I can't -- I don't understand that.

MR. PÉREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: And I've studied this problem a lot. So they exist --

MR. PÉREZ: Going back to the question. We -- this seems to be a case where they've gone from beyond the theoretical. They -- you've got intelligence that shows that they've done it.

GEN. FLYNN: They have the capability and they have the -- they are working towards the capability and they have the intention to continue to look, seek, find the gaps and seams in our system. You know, they look for those weaknesses and they will exploit those weaknesses.

MR. PÉREZ: Now, talking about Syria and Iraq, Iraq is a place you spent a lot of time working and trying to fix the way intelligence works with the people, the operators, the people who are actually carrying operations out in the Iraqi cities. I'm wondering, you know, do you look back at your service there and wonder, you know, what went wrong? Because it does -- I mean from our standpoint, from -- you know, from the outside, it looks like some kind of intelligence failure for us to be surprised that ISIS has, you know, moved in and taken control of Mosul and vast parts of territory in both Iraq and Syria.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah. You know, I think that -- so kind of part of what you're -- I think you're getting at is the speed --

MR. PÉREZ: Was there a failure there, right.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah. I mean, I think the speed that they came in -- for those that paid real close attention last month-and-a-half -- the speed that they came into this northern city in Iraq, into Mosul and they were able to, you know, kind of, you know, like a hot knife through butter --

MR. PÉREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: -- through really about four divisions, I would say that, yeah, that caught us -- that level of speed that they were able to do that caught us by surprise. The buildup to that did not. The -- you know, the warning signs were there and I know that we had -- you know, we saw this for the last couple of years. I would say though, on one -- to kind of jump a little bit on this -- both Afghanistan and Iraq -- and they know it and we're pushing this on them. They have a responsibility to take responsibility for themselves.

MR. PÉREZ: Right, right.

GEN. FLYNN: I mean, we can only give so much. And nobody -- no one in uniform wants to say, oh yeah, I'm ready to go back -- no way. I mean they -- we have given and given, given. Now you know, you hand it off to a child at some point in time and you hope that they are ready to take that, you know, those reins and go drive the car.

MR. PÉREZ: So you don't think this at all implicates the quality of the training our military -- the military and perhaps the contractors gave to some of these -- to -- for example, the Iraqi military which melted away as you said?

GEN. FLYNN: No, I don't think -- I don't think it does -- doesn't really, you know, say that the training

was good or bad. I mean, I think the training was -- you know, everything that I saw in units that we have actually worked with was actually pretty good. It's the sustainment of that. And in Iraq we didn't have the sustainment. And as I said upfront in laying out the litany of threats that we face and some of these challenges, as we look at Afghanistan we have to recognize that they're looking to see -- you know, it's -- this is about confidence, this is about instilling confidence in these new partners that we have around the world.

MR. PÉREZ: Maybe these are -- you know, Iraq in particular, but looking at the countries of the Arab Spring, you know, it looks like democracy has taken it on the chin for these last couple of years. This is what we went to these countries to do allegedly, right? We wanted to try to spread democracy and help them perhaps lead more peaceful lives. It's in disarray. I mean, what's your assessment of that strategy?

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, I won't assess the, you know, the decisions and the various policies. But as I look at the environment and I assess the environment, we -- and this is -- this gets back to comments that I -- you know, that couple of us wrote about when we were talking about Afghanistan.

MR. PÉREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: Because that paper which is "Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Afghanistan," it could be a blueprint for Libya, a blueprint for Mali, a blueprint for -- you name that country.

MR. PÉREZ: Yeah. Sure.

GEN. FLYNN: Because it is about the underlying social conditions that exist. The Arab -- whatever you want to call it -- enlightenment, movement, transformation -- when you go back and you do the forensics of -- you know, when Tahrir Square occurred and you go back and you do the forensics of that -- so if you look at, like, Gallup or Pew polls, actually in the Egyptian economy there was what we would describe as economic thriving. So

their economy actually from all the different, you know, categories that you look at, it was actually going in the right direction.

But when you look at the -- again, this is hindsight -- when you look at the social conditions, it was just declining rapidly. And certainly we missed it and definitely the --

MR. PÉREZ: Not enough attention was being placed on --

GEN. FLYNN: -- and definitely the -- and even the Egyptian -- you know, the Egyptian leadership missed it. And all of a sudden, boom, you had this rapid shift that was caused by really the social -- the poor social conditions that existed. But it was fueled by essentially leaders that grabbed the movement. And then they used something called social media.

MR. PÉREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: And this interaction between human beings and technology -- remember, Facebook didn't come around until 2005 -- February 2005 was when it really kind of broke. You know, Twitter for a while was just -- you know, was a sound, you know. I mean now it's -- and so it's only been around a little bit. So this interaction caused this unrest at the social level to just explode, and we're dealing with that.

MR. PÉREZ: So next door, you -- we're talking about Egypt -- and obviously the conflict in Gaza has just exploded in the last couple of weeks. Bob Mueller, the former director of the FBI, said that he thought that conflict would actually lead to more recruitment for people who wanted to join jihadi causes. I'm wondering whether you think -- well, maybe you can give me your thoughts on what Israel is up to, what are they trying to do with Hamas. Because there are other things there that -- you know, behind Hamas that if Hamas gets out of the way, that perhaps could be worse.

GEN. FLYNN: Wow. I mean this has been going on since I can remember as a kid, and it'll be going on --

MR. PÉREZ: -- for --

GEN. FLYNN: I have two grandchildren and they will live this, they will deal with this. One comment that I'd make -- and I'll just say it. All these tunnels that you see being -- that the Israelis are in there trying to destroy -- I mean, the amount of physical energy, the amount of money, the amount of intellect, and engineering intellect that's -- that is being put into building the subterranean, you know, ability to do nothing but -- to bring what? -- to bring violence to not just Israel, but just to the region. I mean if they took that physical energy, the money, those resources, and the skills that did that and put it into the street-level and build jobs and schools and hospitals and turned it into wealth instead of, you know, hold the surface or as you've -- or as we talked earlier, like sunk cost. I mean --

MR. PÉREZ: But what's the end game? What --

GEN. FLYNN: No, the end game is going to be one where, you know, the Israelis are probably going to be, you know, beaten about this. You know, we have humanitarian issues --

MR. PÉREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: There -- you know, is there going to be peace in the Middle East? Not in my lifetime. Not in my lifetime. So what does that mean? What does it mean? It means that we have to understand how to shape this environment. And it goes back to really getting the, you know, frankly the Arab community to recognize that there are challenges that they face and that they need to come together to help us out.

MR. PÉREZ: But you know, in this operation that the Israelis are doing, is it about degrading Hamas, is it about making them disappear? I mean I'm not sure what -- what do you think is the --

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, I think that -- and again, I -- I'll -- sort of my, you know, intel hat, I guess sitting up here, my thing would be to -- if Hamas were fully destroyed, and you know, and gone, we would probably end up with something much worse, or the region would end up with something much worse. There would be a worse threat that could come into the sort of the ecosystem there and be more dangerous --

MR. PÉREZ: Something like ISIS perhaps?

GEN. FLYNN: Something like an ISIS or an ISIL, you know, or other -- these groups that are in that region right now. So we really have to be careful. The Israelis got a -- you know, I think that they recognize this, you know, better than anybody. It's -- you know, to live though, you know, they're a -- I've not been to Israel a lot, I've been to the Gaza, I've been in that region a number of times, and this is about trying to figure out how do we live together.

MR. PÉREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: And it's not just about those two organizations or that one country and Hamas figuring this out. It's about the entire region saying, how do we want to be. And if we want to have perpetual conflict -- as I believe we're in right now for some period of time.

MR. PÉREZ: Right. We -- you spoke at the top about transparency and the need to regain trust. A year ago this conference was dominated by Edward Snowden and the revelations that had just started at that point. I'm wondering what you think needs to happen now because clearly I think, you know, a lot of people here had one set of ideas as to what government surveillance was doing and it turned out not to be quite true. General Clapper has gotten a lot of criticism for that. But I'm just wondering whether you think -- what do you think the intelligence community needs to do to regain that trust?

GEN. FLYNN: Well, I know that -- some of this was talked about earlier, but I'll try to pick some of the points that came out earlier for the audience that just

came in tonight. First, the damage done by this young man is severe, grave, serious, whatever word you want to use. It's terrible. It's damage to this country that -- we can sustain big body blows.

This country can sustain big body blows. We will sustain this one, but it will -- there will be risk and there will be some decisions that are going to have to be made by not only our Department of Defense, but certainly by our intelligence community, and frankly our political leadership.

The second thing is from -- since that time, we've made a lot of -- we've corrected ourselves. We've done -- we've taken a lot of things and we've, you know, we've learned from it and we've made some -- taken some corrective actions to make us a little bit more or a little bit less bulletproof.

I think the third thing though is this business about transparency, and really what's challenging us, and so the -- you know, if there's a light on all this, and we have to be -- we have to have this discussion with the entire American public because I said about transparency and trust, but this is about transparency, security, civil liberties, our ability to protect this nation and trust.

And I think the most of all those, the most important one is trust. The American public has to trust what it is that we are doing and they will trust us if we tell them that there are certain things that we do that are by law, and they are, you know, approved by the -- not only the legislative body that they elect in, but also by the executive body and our judicial body.

MR. PEREZ: I think some of the public sentiment is driven by the fact that every time one of these disclosures comes out, you know, we hear one thing, and then later on, you know, you have an additional revelation that sort of change the way we perceive these things. And so I'm wondering whether, you know, maybe while you're -- on your way out the door, you can just, give us all the Snowden documents --

(Laughter)

MR. PEREZ: -- so we can all take a look at them, and you know, and see, you know, once and for all the whole story. No?

GEN. FLYNN: No.

(Laughter)

MR. PEREZ: No. All right, I thought I'd try.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, it's good. It's good. You -

-

(Laughter)

GEN. FLYNN: We're still feeling each other out here.

MR. PEREZ: Yeah, exactly. So on cyber, I mean we have to talk a little bit about that.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah.

MR. PEREZ: What's your sense of where these threats are going? You know, we know -- we hear a lot about what the Chinese are doing, what the Iranians are doing, what some of the criminal groups in Eastern Europe and Russia are doing.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah.

MR. PEREZ: Where do you see this going?

GEN. FLYNN: Well, it's part of our lives.

MR. PEREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: Okay, it's absolutely part of our lives. So my concerns, you know, was talked about today. You know, 80 percent of the affected areas in our country are what we would call a critical infrastructure and they're in the private world. They're not really in the

government world. So most of our vulnerabilities are not in -- on the government side where we do a lot of things to protect ourselves.

MR. PEREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: It's out there in the private world. So I mean we have -- you know, I'll kind of use it sort of at where we are like a human. We are still -- I believe we are still at -- you know, we're sort of at the infant stage of figuring this out. And we haven't really gotten to the toddler stage and we haven't really -- you know, we are working our way toward, you know, growing up to be a mature, young adult.

And then one of these days we'll be really good at this. We are very good. We are the best at it. But we are still growing and learning and we're growing capacity in this country. I know we're growing capacity in the Department of Defense. We're not growing it fast enough and we need to grow it fast enough. And I think all of our leaders in the Department of Defense would absolutely agree with me.

So we need to grow that type of capacity, but we also have to have this conversation with the sort of the public and the private sectors about what are the vulnerabilities because it's not just they shut down our telecommunication system or they shut down our healthcare system, and it's not just a nation-state like China or Russia or some of these other countries that are a bit more sophisticated. It's also these non-nation-state actors out there that actually do form as groups at times --

MR. PEREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: -- you know, anonymous, that you see, sometimes you read about, that's one of these groups. And so we have to understand this. And this is a really -- this is a big problem. My -- I guess my gripe as I sit up here and as I listen to today, we need to decide what do we want to do, how do we want to organize before we have the next 9/11 kind of event.

MR. PEREZ: A lot of times, you know, the criticism of the government is that it doesn't act until after an event, right?

GEN. FLYNN: We have to --

MR. PEREZ: We're always fighting the last thing.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah.

MR. PEREZ: And is that a problem in this space too?

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, I mean it's -- you know, to a degree, I mean, everybody is working very hard to try to figure out are we organized properly, do we have the right mechanisms. You know, I talk about three layers of national security that we have --

MR. PEREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: -- three layers. We have the international layer, we have the perimeter layer, and we have the domestic layer. The international layer is essentially State Department, the Department of Defense, it's the CIA. It's other elements of our national structure that work sort of outside the boundaries of CONUS.

The perimeter layer, really important that we understand this because this was created after 9/11. It's called the Department of Homeland Security. You know, it's things like the Border Patrol, things like Immigration and Customs --

MR. PEREZ: The TSA --

MR. PEREZ: The TSA, Coast Guard. I mean, so we have this perimeter layer of national security as DHS. So I mentioned the three or four for international. DHS for perimeter; now domestic. Domestic is the Department of Justice. And for security purposes, it's really the

executive agency, is really the Federal Bureau of Investigation. They kind of run the federal, state, local, tribal components of our domestic security.

MR. PEREZ: How are those layers working together?

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, I mean, so that's a great question. I mean, so what we have to do, because remember DHS just came in to vogue. It's only -- I think it's on its third director with Secretary Johnson. These other components, these are big things, lots of people, lots of processes, all have different sets of muscles that they work out and some don't connect with each other. So we have to really figure out how we need to work together.

MR. PEREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: And we had a 9/11 commission that post-9/11, they figured all this out and they said, hey, here's the -- here are some recommendations. Well, we're there. We are starting to take baby steps with this stuff, and we're actually doing pretty good given the variety of threats that we face.

But it may be time to sit down and -- particularly on cyber and really look at are we properly organized to deal with this threat because it's coming. It's here.

MR. PEREZ: And maybe getting new agencies, is that what you're talking about, building --

GEN. FLYNN: Not only new agencies. You know, I'm always asked what keeps you up at night. And no enemy in the world keeps me up at night. No enemy. There's no enemy that we -- if our nation -- I mean, we can defeat any enemy out there, any enemy. We have the best military, we have the intelligence system, we have the best law enforcement. We have all these things that are great.

What keeps me up at night is somebody who doesn't want to work together, somebody who wants to --

some person or some organization that wants credit for something. You do the -- again you do the forensics of 9/11 and there are local cops out in the streets of the United States that stop those guys.

MR. PEREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: And they didn't know that they were being looked at.

MR. PEREZ: Right. And by the way, I mean those problems are still -- I mean, the FBI had the same problem, not briefing the Boston police on what they knew about the Tsarnaev brothers before that bombing.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, but I will tell you, because, you know, big family -- I see what the FBI has to deal with on a daily basis. So you know, I don't want to -- you're good, but I'm not going to let you get away with that.

(Laughter)

GEN. FLYNN: You know, I'm going to tell you, if you knew what the -- what our FBI was doing on a daily basis and how much they were stopping, how many things they were stopping, and it's not just terrorist threats or these lone wolves, but it's also just all kinds of criminal activities, transnational organized criminal cartels that exist in this country.

MR. PEREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: So our domestic -- our rule of law, okay, our country has what's called the rule of law. It is a strategic advantage for this country. It is one of our principal strategic advantages, and it's because we have law enforcement, you know, despite, you know, problems that they have, you know, that 1 percent, they're pretty darn good.

MR. PEREZ: Are we good on time? I'm trying to figure out. We're going to go to questions in a little while. I wanted to talk a little bit about the DIA and

where it is right now. The profile of the agency grew over the course of obviously two wars. You sent analysts on to the battlefield. I'm wondering, now that those wars are ending and you're not going to have generals out there carrying out operations --

GEN. FLYNN: Get those generals out of there.

MR. PEREZ: Get them out of there. What's the future for this agency? Seems like it is at a crossroads.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, it is. It is.

MR. PEREZ: And what it's going to be.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, so great, and it gives me a chance to talk about DIA briefly. We have a tremendous workforce. What's different is we have 6,000 of our civilians, not our military 6,000 of our civilians have served in Iraq or Afghanistan. That's awesome.

MR. PEREZ: These are analysts.

GEN. FLYNN: These are analysts. And from pre-9/11 our -- the workforce -- a) the age of our workforce pre-9/11 it was about 70 percent were over the age of 40. Today, almost 60 percent are under the age of 40. So we have this young, you know, really squared away, experienced, talented, group of people and we need to protect them.

MR. PEREZ: What's going to happen to them.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah. So we need to protect them. So we made some significant business decisions over the last 2 years on reducing things like our reliance on contracts, and we've done that. In fact we've had -- in our headquarters alone, we've had over 2,000 contractors that we've let go. They had families, but you know, on the other hand, that's a temporary thing. So these are difficult decisions.

We've also made a big move to invest in small businesses. Small businesses are the engines of

innovation in this country and they also are part of our -  
- sort of our base of our industrial base. So we -- right  
now we have the highest --

MR. PEREZ: What does that entail?

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah. That entails making sure  
that we are investing our dollars in the new technologies  
that are out there, in innovative ideas, taking those  
ideas and turning them into action. So we've doubled our  
investment in small businesses this past year. The  
government average is 25 percent, okay? We are right now  
--

MR. PEREZ: So these are --

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah.

MR. PEREZ: -- presumably technologies that we  
don't know exist yet.

GEN. FLYNN: That's right. These will be leap  
ahead --

MR. PEREZ: That will be key tools for your  
business.

GEN. FLYNN: What I like to call -- these are  
technologies that give us an unfair advantage against  
these enemies that we face. So we have doubled our  
investment in that. And that helps us a lot because it  
helps us be more innovative because at the end of the day  
what we do -- what DIA does, we provide knowledge for  
decision-making.

We have a big old, you know, typical military  
mission statement, but really what we do is we provide  
knowledge for decision-making, and the better the  
knowledge, the better the decisions. That's kind of what  
we do.

MR. PEREZ: That's codeword for, like, new ways  
to spy, right? That's basically --

GEN. FLYNN: Sure.

(Laughter)

GEN. FLYNN: Why not?

MR. PEREZ: What is the -- obviously there's going to be a shortage of money. I mean you're going to have, you know, the Army is facing some cutbacks. You are going to be faced with -- well, not you, your successor is going to be --

GEN. FLYNN: Huge, yeah.

MR. PEREZ: -- faced with what to do about the Defense Clandestine Agency and some of the other initiatives that you started. How do you, you know, support those things while at the same time fulfilling the mission of the Pentagon, the military in other ways?

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, and the way that I think the folks in -- everybody needs to understand that at this level, this is about the health of the institution. And like I said earlier, it's about the health of the institution of America. We have an incredibly professional force. I know who will come in behind me and they've got to go through a nomination and send a confirmation process --

MR. PEREZ: You're going to tell us?

GEN. FLYNN: -- and all that, but --

(Laughter)

MR. PEREZ: Go ahead.

GEN. FLYNN: So we -- each of us, each of us that's given a responsibility for a period of time to be in these jobs, it's an enormous privilege, it's an enormous responsibility, but each of us has a responsibility to take what we were given, make it better than what we got, and hand it off to the next person. And they have the responsibility to do the same thing again,

to take it and make it better.

So I know whoever shows in to replace me and I know, you know, those --

MR. PEREZ: We have a lot of reporters here, we'd love to know.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, well, I'll tell you what, it will be a great American.

(Laughter)

GEN. FLYNN: That's right. You know, we never want to presume converse, right?

MR. PEREZ: Yeah, exactly. So questions. If you could show your hands, and I'll choose a few people. We'll start over here with Josh and back there.

MR. ROGIN: Thank you very much, and thank you for your service over these many years. I'm Josh Rogin, I'm a reporter with the *Daily Beast* in Washington. You mentioned that the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria is something that you've been following for years. There have been many people in the administration under pitched debate over whether or not we should have been training, equipping, arming the Syrian rebels more than we have to the point that they could have stemmed the rise of ISIS or even fight them now.

We learn after people retire that they were for this all along; David Petraeus, Hillary Clinton, Leon Panetta. You are about to retire, but were you one of these people?

(Laughter)

MR. ROGIN: Thank you. Also, is it too late now? Thank you.

GEN. FLYNN: I mean, if you're asking -- I mean, I guess what you're asking is --

MR. PEREZ: He wants a dish.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, and if we know all this, what are we doing about it or you know, are we too late to the party or what, you know? I mean, this is really, really complex, and I hate to be, you know, state it so obviously, but some of me says just isolate the region and let them have at it.

(Laughter)

GEN. FLYNN: Some of me says that, you know, I mean, and that's an option. That's an option. What we have to do though is we have to recognize that the United States -- the rest of the world continues to look at this country for leadership. And so it's been going on a while. This has been going on -- you know, Syria -- now we're in our 3rd year here with Syria. So whatever the -- whatever happened in the past, whatever decisions weren't -- were or weren't made, you know, we are where we are today.

And so now what we have to be thinking about is we have to start to consider how do we want this place to be in the future. And you know, I mean, we've got to be very careful that we're not looking for the headline. We're not looking for Saturday night, you know, because that tends to be the way frankly Americans think. We have to start thinking about what is this place going to be like, you know, 10 years from now, 20 years from now. I can tell you just a study in global demographics and the shift of populations, I mean we're going to be challenged. We're going to be challenged. We're going to be challenged for three things; access to energy, access to food, and access to good drinking water.

MR. PEREZ: And what's your assessment of --

GEN. FLYNN: Okay? So I mean so what I'm getting at is that we are dealing with this here and now problem and we're going to have to do some things. There are some things that the -- you know, that the White House has already decided on with some of the stuff that we're doing through Central Command in Iraq, and we'll get in

there and get an assessment, and we'll, you know, try to give good information so that we can make better decisions. But this is --

MR. PEREZ: But how are we doing on the question? You just said you guys showed some leadership. How do we -- how are we doing on that count, on that front, which is showing leadership, you know, to try to help resolve some of these problems?

GEN. FLYNN: Well, I think that -- I'll tell you from my -- you know, from what I see, certainly from the military perspective, you know, and I'm going to really, really kind of stay in my lane here because I don't sit, you know, in the White House where the President's trying -- I'm not in his shoes, and so I'm not going to second-guess, you know, what he does or what he doesn't -- you know, why he's making a certain decision because it's complex.

I know having watched really, really difficult things and really difficult decisions have to be made that didn't have the kind of consequences that our President is having to deal with. They are tough, and you're talking about lives, you're talking about treasure, you're talking about time, commitment. So I just -- I would leave it at that because we're in a place right now, the first thing we have to do is we have to understand what this problem is that we're facing.

And I'm telling you folks we are facing an ideology that does not like our way of life. Now, it's an extremist strain of that ideology, but they do not like the way we live.

MR. PEREZ: So the -- I can't remember who was -- okay, there you go. And -- only reporters are asking questions. Okay, I'm going to go to a member of the general public right there.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, get somebody who paid 20 bucks.

MR. PEREZ: Okay, yeah. Yes. Yes.

(Laughter)

GEN. FLYNN: You know, why not?

MR. DELANIUM: General, hi, Ken Delanium (phonetic) with the AP. You've championed something called the Defense Clandestine Service, right, which is a human intelligence collection --

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah.

MR. DELANIUM: -- element of DIA where you're going to send operatives into the field. Critics in Congress and elsewhere have said that it's too duplicative of the CIA. Can you explain what its mission is and why it's different from what the CIA does?

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, so first thanks for asking because that is a -- it is our means of doing what I call getting a fingertip feel of the operational environment that only human beings can get, trained experts can get. And so number one, we have a superb partnership between the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency in that regard. So a superb partnership.

One of the big -- last year I was getting beat about the head and shoulders by Congress. This year, I got one question in six different times where I had to testify, one question on DCS. Because we put discipline in the system, we shut down non-productive things, and we moved a lot of people out to the field. And when I say out to the field, we moved them overseas in many cases, and we put them to where they -- where the folks that were joining this service, this very capable service, they wanted to be -- they wanted to be out there doing their job.

And so that's where they are and it's a -- you know, again, like I said about my replacement, this is not about something that was going to get completed on Flynn's watch. This is about a 5-year plan, and it has -- you know, it will have a long-term capability for this country

that will actually help us in the Defense Department understand these kind of difficult places that we are going to operate in, you know, for the most part in the world in the future.

MR. PEREZ: We're going to go to that lady right there.

GEN. FLYNN: Sure.

MR. PEREZ: But real quick before we go, we -- how is this not going to duplicate what the CIA does?

GEN. FLYNN: Because we're -- the thing is -- which you have to understand is there's different types of requirements which you're going after.

MR. PEREZ: Right.

GEN. FLYNN: So the military has a different set of requirements.

MR. PEREZ: Okay.

GEN. FLYNN: And we need to know about military capabilities, military intentions. We need to know about infrastructure. We need to know about things that are not, you know, political or economic types of nuances that we need to know about a particular nation-state.

MR. PEREZ: Okay. Go with -- nobody over there? It's a quiet side of the room. Okay.

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, a little back.

MR. PEREZ: That gentleman right there. Okay, so first it's you, miss.

SPEAKER: My question is about sustainment and why the status of forces agreement was not able to be signed in 2011 because Senators Graham and McCain said they were there and that it could have been signed if we had done something different. I want to know what it was that we could have done different because I know you

believe in transparency. Thank you.

(Laughter)

MR. PEREZ: Boom. She got you there. Yes, I like her.

GEN. FLYNN: No, I'm sorry. Well, you know, I mean I really can't answer that because I wasn't there, and that's terrible for me to say because I hate to not give you what I believe. And what I believe is that the Iraqis blew it. That's what I believe. The Iraqis blew it. The Afghans, same sort of situation right now, and they watch that and they don't want to blow it.

So I believe -- again Flynn's opinion, that Iraqis blew it. And boy, is it coming back to haunt them. And frankly it's a -- it is a global -- it's becoming a beyond trans-regional and it is becoming more of a global problem because of the number of foreigners that are operating inside of this region right now that will return to their countries to include ours.

MR. PEREZ: Gentleman has a question over there.

MR. STEWART: Yeah, hi, General. Phil Stewart from Reuters. If you could just --

(Laughter)

GEN. FLYNN: Another reporter. Nobody from Aspen? Nobody. Oh, we're going to jump right here. Yeah, good. Good.

MR. STEWART: General, could you look ahead, like, you know, to 2016 in Afghanistan and tell us whether or not you see the likelihood that what's happening in Iraq could happen there too? And if you could also just backup a bit to the small business issue, are you buying the shares in these small businesses? Are you in -- what's going on there?

(Laughter)

GEN. FLYNN: Am I what?

MR. STEWART: Are you buying stock in these small businesses? Is this a partnership?

GEN. FLYNN: No, no. Small businesses are part of our industrial base and we're in an age of information where technology is changing so rapidly, I mean if you even think of -- if you know what Moore's law is, we are so past Moore's law. So we've got to -- we have to invest in these good ideas, but we've got to turn them into actions. So that's part of that.

You know, in terms of 2016, I'm not going to sit here and try to be clairvoyant. I will tell you that we are -- and I know the Afghans, you know, those, you know, in the government that we're working with and in the military, certainly they're in their interior forces, they're paying very close attention and they don't want this to happen. They don't want this to happen. This is, you know, this is actually a very resilient society. You know, and I could -- I've sat down with more of these people, you know, in their homes and asked them what do they want.

And they want the same thing that I want for my kids. They want a better way of life for their kids. Now, their way of life is different than what I, you know, what I would, you know, be able to provide to my kids in terms of the kinds of things that we have. But people are generally the same, you know, around the world. It's just how we, you know, sort of try to impose ourselves on them sometimes.

MR. PEREZ: So we have a gentleman here --

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, right here, this gentleman.

MR. PEREZ: -- with a question.

SPEAKER: Thank you. General, I'm a local and I paid 20 bucks.

(Laughter)

GEN. FLYNN: Good for you. That's right.

MR. PEREZ: Worth every dollar?

SPEAKER: Absolutely.

MR. PEREZ: Okay.

GEN. FLYNN: Good.

SPEAKER: Even if Wolf isn't here.

(Laughter)

SPEAKER: I wonder if you could comment on the situation in Ukraine and where it's headed, but in particular was the intelligence community surprised by Putin's actions in Crimea?

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah, we're always surprised, you know. I mean, come on, so -- I'm sorry, I'm being -- I'm really being disrespectful. You know, this is a really, really interesting issue. When I first came to the Pentagon, my first time in the Pentagon is -- being assigned was in 2008, I was a two-star. And I arrived in July of 2008 and August 6th, Russia attacked Georgia. And I'm like -- when I came in that morning about 4:00 o'clock in the morning, you know, one of my analysts who works our night watch said, hey, Russians attacked Georgia. I'm like, I mean, like, Georgia, the state? I mean --

(Laughter)

GEN. FLYNN: -- it's so -- and so -- but the point is it's the same thing with Crimea, with Ukraine, okay, because remember we don't talk about Crimea much, that was part of that sovereign country. What this is really about is it's about an individual who's in charge of a federation -- a federated -- a group of states, the Russian Federation, who will not be the historic Russian leader that will allow the Russian Federation to fritter away while he's in charge.

So that's what we're dealing with. And so all the things you see and all the things you hear about, you know, this unbelievable tragedy of this aircraft that was -- this civilian aircraft and these 298, you know, unsuspecting people that were murdered. I mean, now what we have to do is -- again, it's every problem that we face is an international problem and requires an international solution.

And the international community has to be highly, highly agile right now to deal with this. And as you -- and I'm sure that you switched on, if you watch the way we -- this -- the way we kind of very, you know, cumbersome way, try to get our act together and try to get together and try to figure out what we're going to do next, we can't be like that in situations like this.

MR. PEREZ: But in the case of Crimea and in the case of Eastern Ukraine, I mean, we did have some visibility problems. I mean --

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah.

MR. PEREZ: -- it seems like, you know, for especially the first, you know, few days we didn't quite know what the Russians' intentions was.

GEN. FLYNN: So --

MR. PEREZ: We didn't know -- they weren't communicating by normal means, so we weren't listening as much as -- hearing what they were trying to do. So I'm wondering whether, you know, this has led to some changes in the way --

GEN. FLYNN: Well, it has. I mean, it has, but one of the things that -- we have these -- for all of you because this has happened in every single day, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for this country. We have what we call warning conditions. So when something changes, and it's enough to cause us to say we need to change that warning condition from low to medium to high, it happens a lot. Actually it happens a lot more these days. So those warning conditions were changed, and they are reported

back into our system.

So you get -- you go from warning condition -- and I'll just use low because I won't go into the details of it, but it's low and now all of a sudden it goes to medium. Well, why is it medium? It's medium because these conditions just changed. We see movement of forces, we see -- you know, we see different things. And so -- okay, so that's reported. That kind of stuff gets reported and I see it all the time. And I know that kind of stuff gets reported all the way up to the highest levels.

Now it's a matter of, okay, how do we want to respond? That's a totally different issue than an intelligence issue.

MR. PEREZ: That's not -- right, that's not your (inaudible). Right.

GEN. FLYNN: So now it's a matter of do we -- how do we properly respond? Do we do nothing? Do we move forces? Do we, you know, do sanctions? Whatever.

MR. PEREZ: There's a gentleman up here with a question.

MR. LICHTENGER: Hi. General, my name is David Lichtenger (phonetic). I'm just a concerned citizen. I'm not with the press. You know, sometimes in the military the best defense is a good offense. In cyber, do you think that -- this is a yes or no answer by the way, do you think that we should -- we should scale up our offensive capabilities in cyber?

GEN. FLYNN: Yes.

(Laughter)

MR. PEREZ: Gentleman here.

GEN. FLYNN: Thank you. That gave us 4 minutes back.

MR. PEREZ: Yeah.

SPEAKER: Can you discuss the NSA issue going around Washington, what your thoughts are on it?

GEN. FLYNN: For what?

MR. PEREZ: The NSA.

SPEAKER: The NSA.

MR. PEREZ: The NSA. What -- you want to know what --

GEN. FLYNN: Oh man, that's a big issue.

MR. PEREZ: Yeah, it's a big issue.

GEN. FLYNN: Well, I mean --

SPEAKER: (Inaudible) less.

GEN. FLYNN: Well, I mean, you know, I will just tell you NSA and the people that work in NSA, because I'll -- instead of trying to go in and describing you're really an unbelievable organization, a superb organization, the people that work in that agency have saved many soldiers' lives; soldiers, sailors, marines, airmens' lives. And they do it routinely, they do it without batting an eye.

They don't care about the credit that they richly deserve, and they do it 24/7. And they've been doing it for a long time. And I have been the beneficiary of their services.

MR. PEREZ: This gentleman over here. We've got about 2 more minutes. If you have any questions, anybody else, raise your hand and I'll come back to you.

SPEAKER: General, good evening and thank you for coming as well. I'm not with the press, but I have question about the many threats that you talked about. Could you rank in order of severity the top three threats that you feel we have as a nation? In terms of cyber or

conflicts across the world, what are the top three in order of severity?

GEN. FLYNN: Well, you know, this foreign fighter business and their ability to sneak back through the lines of those three layers that I talked about, I think the -- I really, really am concerned about somebody getting their hands on a chemical or a biological weapon. I really -- I mean just because it's so -- it could be so dangerous. And we saw just what happened with anthrax, the anthrax scares. You know, that was 10 years ago, more than 10 years ago.

So that, you know, that bothers me. And I think that a miscalculation of an event or the event occurs and we miscalculate who made the decision, so if there's an incident in the South China sea between a maritime vessel and a fishing vessel or something like that, was the decision made at a really low level and all of a sudden we're -- you know, we're scaling up to go to war with China. But it was made at such a low level.

So we have to really understand who makes the decision, whether it's -- because we don't want to scale up too rapidly, and I think that's -- you know, if I have watched anything, you know, in terms of what our government and different administrations do, they really do try to understand who's making that decision before we, you know, jump in and go into something emotionally instead of taking a deep breath and stepping back and going, okay, what is it that we're dealing with here.

MR. PEREZ: Well, General Flynn, thanks again for joining us. Thank you to everyone who came to the discussion.

(Applause)

MR. PEREZ: Appreciate it. Thanks again to the wonderful people --

GEN. FLYNN: Yeah.

MR. PEREZ: -- at the Aspen Institute. Hope to

see you again next year. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Could I get your attention please?  
Thank you for attending tonight's discussion. Please join  
us for a reception. It's across campus at the tent near  
the Marble Garden and all are welcome.

\* \* \* \* \*