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THE COMPLEXITY OF TODAY'S GLOBAL THREAT ENVIRONMENT

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THE COMPLEXITY OF TODAY'S GLOBAL THREAT ENVIRONMENT

(Applause)

MR. ERVIN: Well, good evening everyone. What a wonderful crowd this is, an overflow crowd in fact. I'm Clark Ervin, the executive director of the Aspen Security Forum. Welcome to the sixth annual forum, I'm pleased to say. We're absolutely delighted by your being with us this week for what has become the convening outside Washington of the most senior national-security policymakers and the most influential outside-policy experts.

From terrorism to counterterrorism to cybersecurity, to the rise of China and its implications for America's continued global primacy, to Putin's challenge to NATO and the post-Cold War world order and to the just-concluded nuclear deal with Iran, there is no shortage of weighty policy debates to be had this week in Aspen as we gather together.

We are very grateful to Bob and Soledad Hurst, and the Hurst lecture series, for sponsoring tonight's opening session --

(Applause)

MR. ERVIN: -- to our corporate sponsors for the Forum, IBM, Intel Security, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and Target, and to our media partner, CNN. And now to formally introduce tonight's --

(Applause)

MR. ERVIN: And now to formally introduce tonight's exciting session with the director of the FBI, I'm very pleased to introduce, Jackie Rice, Target's senior vice president. Jackie.

(Applause)

MS. RICE: Good evening, everyone. Thank you, Clark, and thank you so much to the Aspen Institute for

this great event. It represents an unparalleled forum for us to engage and discuss and learn. And I'm so proud along with all of my colleagues from Target that we've been participating in this event for the past four years.

The organizations and individuals that we have here gathered this evening, whether public or private, all have a role to play in our current security situation. No single entity has the answer. We need constructive conversations and actions across sectors.

I'm eager to hear Director Comey's assessment of the global threat environment and we'll be thinking about how it could impact Target, whether that's our team members, our guests or our assets. I'll also be thinking about, again along with the Target team, what we can be doing to help.

To get the evening started I'm thrilled to introduce our moderator for the evening. He's a trusted voice behind some of the most important security and political moments of our time here and around the world. Join me in welcoming CNN's lead political anchor and host of "Wolf" in "The Situation Room," Wolf Blitzer.

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: Thank you. Thank you very much, and thank you ladies and gentlemen for joining us. It's great to be here. I love Aspen, I love the Aspen Institute, I've already been coming here for about 30 years. Only in the summer -- I'm not a skier. But it's fabulous to be here. Let's wait for a little stage production.

And I'm thrilled to be here tonight because there's so much we are all going to learn from the director of the FBI, James Comey. He's really a remarkable man, has had an amazing career, he's about to celebrate his second year, second anniversary as the director of the FBI. It's a 10-year -- he's got 8 years to go, it's a 10-year stint and he's doing his best and all the men and women who work at the FBI are doing their

best to keep all of us safe. So let's welcome the director of the FBI, James Comey.

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: Mister -- Director, what keeps you up at night?

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: Trying to decide whether to wear a tie to the Aspen Institute for the day.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: What keeps me up at night is, probably these days the ISIL threat in the homeland and I worry very much about what I can't see. That's what keeps me up.

MR. BLITZER: What you don't know, obviously you don't know.

MR. COMEY: Yeah. Our task is, if you imagine a nationwide haystack, we're trying to find needles in that haystack. And a lot of those needles are invisible to us either because of the way in which they're communicating or just because they haven't communicated or touched a place where we could see them. And knowing that there are needles out there that you can't see is very worrisome.

MR. BLITZER: Now, you say "ISIL," some of us say "ISIS," some of us say "Islamic State," it's all the same thing. Is that now a bigger threat to the U.S. homeland than al-Qaeda?

MR. COMEY: Yes. Yeah, the threat that ISIL presents, poses to the United States is very different in kind, in type, in degree than al-Qaeda. ISIL is not your parents' al-Qaeda. It's a very different model and by virtue of that model it's currently the threat that we're worrying about in the homeland most of all.

MR. BLITZER: Why is ISIS so powerful?

MR. COMEY: Well, they have adopted a model that takes advantage of social media in a way to crowd-source terrorism. They have invested, about the last year, in pushing a message of poison primarily through Twitter but other parts of social media that is a siren song with two dimensions -- they are preaching through social media to troubled souls urging them to join their so-called "Caliphate" in Syria and Iraq, or if you can't join, kill where you are. And Twitter is a valuable enterprise because it works, to sell shoes or to sell ideas, it works to sell this message to troubled souls.

Again, I talked about you know your "parents' al-Qaeda," and I mean to convey the sense that the model, is just totally different, right. With al-Qaeda if you wanted to consume their propaganda you had to go find it somewhere in the web, you'd read their magazine. If you wanted to talk to a terrorist, you might send an e-mail in to their magazine and hoped that somebody answers you. ISIL has changed that model entirely because ISIL is buzzing on your hip, right. That message is being pushed all day along.

And if you want to talk to a terrorist, they're right there on Twitter direct messaging for you to communicate with. And so they've invested in months and months of pushing this message and it resonates with troubled souls, with young folks and with troubled older people. It's the reason we have these investigations all across the United States.

That year of investment is producing a warped view of the world on the part of a lot of people who either want to travel to the Caliphate or kill where they are. And my job along with a lot of our partners is to find the travelers and stop them and most urgently to stop those who want to kill where they are.

MR. BLITZER: You think you have a pretty good appreciation of how many Americans have actually gone over there and trained with ISIS?

MR. COMEY: I think we have a reasonable idea. It's not a high-confidence read, because there's lots of ways to get to Syria, but I think we have a pretty good sense.

MR. BLITZER: How many?

MR. COMEY: I'd give you dozens of people have gone with ISIL, to ISIL. Again it's a hard phenomenon to track because they range in age from 18 to 62, people who've gone over to join up with ISIL. And so I think we have a reasonable handle on that. Their going there is very worrisome. They're inevitably coming back if they survive the battlefield is more worrisome still.

MR. BLITZER: These are men and women, right?

MR. COMEY: Yes, primarily men, but increasingly young women drawn to that siren song that's buzzing on their Twitter feed that this is some sort of wonderland where they can live a life of glory in the Caliphate.

MR. BLITZER: All right. We're going to get to a lot more of that Twitter feed and the communications, because there is what you call the "dark side," the encrypted messages that aren't publicly seen on social media, and I want to get to that. But let's, since I'm a news guy, we'll get through some of the newsy questions of the day, you tell us whatever you can. Mohammad Yousuf Abdulaziz, the killer of these four Marines, the one sailor, he was not inspired by ISIS or ISIL, was he?

MR. COMEY: Well, we're not in a position to say yet. I mean we're still combing through his entire life including his electronic media to understand so who is he communicating with and about what.

MR. BLITZER: Because the assumption that -- what we're hearing is he was inspired by, more like AQAP, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born cleric, who was killed in a U.S. drone strike back in 2011, but whose messages are still out there. Right?

MR. COMEY: The messages are very much still out there, and that's a dimension to the threat we haven't taken our eye off of. There are still those who are motivated by the Awlaki poison that bounces around the Internet. But we don't know yet with Abdulaziz, we're still combing through his life.

MR. BLITZER: But we do know -- you know and the FBI as the lead investigator in this heinous crime that occurred in Chattanooga, you know that he was at least inspired by Anwar al-Awlaki, that he was reading his sermons if you will, his teachings, jihad, martyrdom, even in the days before he went out there and killed these five military personnel.

MR. COMEY: Yeah, I'm not prepared to say that yet. I'm still trying -- we're still trying to fully understand what were the influences on his life, and that's a complex picture in any case, but especially in a case like this.

MR. BLITZER: But it is possible, since he told one of his close friends, and we interviewed that friend only a day or two before he went out there and killed these Americans, he did say, "ISIS," in his words, "was stupid." But that doesn't necessarily indicate the fact that he may have thought AQAP, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, is smart.

MR. COMEY: Again, I'm not going to go there.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: I don't blame you for trying.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: And I don't want to jeopardize the investigation, but I'll just ask the questions.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: Yeah.

MR. BLITZER: We also know, and you can tell us whatever you want --

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: -- he spent seven months in Jordan last year with his uncle who's now under arrest by Jordanian authorities. The FBI is there in Jordan right now. There's obviously an FBI presence of the U.S. Embassy in Amman, but you've sent over a bunch of FBI experts to go over there, find out what was going on during those seven months, right?

MR. COMEY: Correct, that's part of combing through his life to understand so what happened in Jordan, who influenced him, who did he meet, what did he consume, that sort of thing, yes.

MR. BLITZER: Tell us what you've learned so far.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: Okay, if you put it that way.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: You tricked me into it Wolf.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: No, but we are -- no, you know that --

MR. BLITZER: Well, just tell us a little bit about --

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: -- what the FBI people who were there in Jordan right now, you know, what are they doing?

MR. COMEY: Well, they're doing the same things we're doing all over Chattanooga and all over the United

States. We have hundreds of people working on this, we are literally trying to understand every second of his life for the last couple years at least, what was written, what was said, what was bought, how was he trained, who did he know, who did he hang out with. We are going to develop a very complete picture and part of this is working with our partners in Jordan to understand so what happened while he was there.

MR. BLITZER: And the U.S. has an excellent relationship in law enforcement with Jordan, right?

MR. COMEY: Tremendous.

MR. BLITZER: They're helping and they're doing whatever they can --

MR. COMEY: Yes.

MR. BLITZER: -- to find out the uncle. There's a report that the uncle may have been Jordanian, but also an American citizen. What can you tell us about the uncle?

MR. COMEY: Nothing.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: I mean I can tell you, but I'm not going to tell you.

MR. BLITZER: But you know a lot about the uncle right now.

MR. COMEY: I'm not going to tell you what I know about the uncle.

MR. BLITZER: You don't have to tell us what you know, but you know a lot about the uncle. The uncle's under arrest by Jordanian authorities.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: We are working with the Jordanians to understand both the uncle and any other contacts that he had while he was in Jordan.

MR. BLITZER: He spent seven months in Jordan last year. We also know he was born in Kuwait, visited Kuwait as an older person, a naturalized U.S. citizen. There are rumors out there, and you can just tell us yes or no, do you know if he visited any other countries in the Middle East?

MR. COMEY: I could also say I'm not going to say. I'm not going to comment on what I know about his travels.

MR. BLITZER: Because that's rumors that he may have gone to Yemen.

MR. COMEY: Okay. I'm not going to say though.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: Can you negate that?

MR. COMEY: No, I'm not going to comment on that.

MR. BLITZER: Because it's a sensitive --

MR. COMEY: Because the investigation's still ongoing, yeah.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: Yes, sir?

MR. COMEY: They're telling you --

MR. BLITZER: He wants me to move on.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: These are good questions.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: Just the answers that stink.

(Laughter)

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: The answers are good answers. No such thing as a bad question, no such thing as a bad answer, these are good answers, important answers. But we're trying to get a little flavor obviously of what's going on, because what worries all of us and worries you the most is that what happened in Chattanooga could happen anyplace in the United States.

MR. COMEY: Worries me very much.

MR. BLITZER: That somebody who may have some mental problems, depression, issues -- drug use or whatever, could be, could go out there and learn about jihad and do what this young man did, 24 years old.

MR. COMEY: Worries us all day every day, and that's why we're trying to find those people and stop them all over the country.

MR. BLITZER: What's the biggest stumbling block you have right now, because we were talking about the encrypted communications, the dark side that some of these young people have now. And you can't get access to that, can you?

MR. COMEY: That's, I'll tell you, one of two stumbling blocks in these cases. The first is the technological one. ISIL's m.o. is they broadcast on Twitter, get people to follow them, then move them to Twitter direct messaging while they evaluate whether they're a potential liaison either to travel or to kill where they are.

Then they'll move them to an encrypted mobile messaging app where they go dark to us. And so that's what I mean by the needle becoming invisible. We can with

court authority, get access to the Twitter contacts but we don't have the ability to break strong encryption. And so if they move to the mobile messaging app we're going to lose them, so that's a huge worry.

MR. BLITZER: What do you need now legally in order to get access to that, because as you know there's a big controversy, a lot of people who don't want their privacy infringed on, they don't want you to have access to that?

MR. COMEY: We need what the FBI needs in all of our investigations, right. If we want to listen to that communication or intercept the content flowing back-and-forth, we've got to get a court order. So we go to a judge or if it's sitting on a device we go to a judge for a search warrant. But the problem we're facing is even with judicial orders, which is at the core of our work, we're unable to find out what people are talking about when we've demonstrated probable cause to believe that they are terrorists or they are serious criminals.

MR. BLITZER: Why is that?

MR. COMEY: Because of the nature of the encryption. We don't have the ability to break the strong encryption. Now I'm a fan of strong encryption, right, that's the challenge we all face. There's two values in conflict. All of us believe in safety and security on the Internet, right, hugely important to protecting all of us. All of us also believe in public safety. Those two things are coming into tension. We have to as a country figure out how to resolve them. We share the same values, we care about both. If they're crashing together, we have to resolve it.

MR. BLITZER: Who's stopping you from getting access to those encrypted messages that may in fact be terror-related?

MR. COMEY: Well, the way in which the mobile messaging app for example has been designed stops us, by virtue of its design, right. It is end-to-end encrypted, so without the key at one of the two devices at the user

end, you've no ability with a court order to intercept and look at that communication. So it's the nature of the technology that's stopping us.

MR. BLITZER: So do you want the software manufacturers to allow some sort of key that will give you that kind of access once you get a court order?

MR. COMEY: The answer is I don't know exactly. I can picture the end state we need. We need judges orders to be complied with. Now, how to figure that out, lots of people, smart people, tell me, oh, it's too hard. I don't buy that. I don't think we've tried hard enough yet. If we recognize that we all share the same values, I think smart people can figure out how to do it.

And it may not be the same for every company, right. The goal of the government is clear -- we need to with the right showing to a judge be able to get access to the information in those targeted individual cases. How a company does it may depend upon the company's business model, right. There are companies out there now that encrypt their data-in-motion and are able to comply with judges' orders because they see the content of the communication because it's part of their business model.

We need to figure out how to achieve the end goal, but the government will not be telling people this is the way you ought to do it, because we don't know their business well enough or their technology.

MR. BLITZER: This is a whole new world for the FBI right now, right?

MR. COMEY: It's a whole new world for all of us.

MR. BLITZER: Do you have enough people, experts, to deal with this?

MR. COMEY: I guess I'm -- I hate to sound like a typical manager -- I never have enough. I've got a huge group of great people. The problem here is not my people or the people in the private sector, the problem is we

have not gotten our best brains together to say so how could we maximize both of these values -- safety and security on the Internet and public safety.

MR. BLITZER: I know you say ISIS or ISIL is the biggest terror threat to the U.S. homeland. Right now AQAP, al-Qaeda, some of the offshoots of al-Qaeda, are still are a major threat.

MR. COMEY: Right.

MR. BLITZER: The Khorasan Group, that's a big threat right now as well, right?

MR. COMEY: The Khorasan Group is a group that is an al-Qaeda-aligned group. It's a name that's given to a particular group of operatives.

MR. BLITZER: Because yesterday the Pentagon said the U.S. killed a leader of the Khorasan Group.

MR. COMEY: I don't know what they've said, I guess all I'll say is our military brothers and sisters have done a fabulous job of protecting the country by targeting terrorists around the globe, including that group.

MR. BLITZER: The Khorasan Group, they got the guy they said killed Muhsin al-Fahdli in a U.S. air strike. He's the one who is apparently plotting attacks not against people in the Middle East, but against people here in the United States. That was the main mission of the Khorasan Group. I think back in September you thought some sort of an attack could be potentially "imminent," that was the word you used, right?

MR. COMEY: And they're very -- they were a very serious threat to the United States, more in sort of the classic al-Qaeda model, airplane based, sophisticated, long-tailed, long planning and surveillance-type operation.

MR. BLITZER: Is that threat from the Khorasan Group in the United States to the American homeland still imminent or have they been diminished in their capability?

MR. COMEY: They've been diminished by virtue of the work done by our great military. Still hasn't gone away but they've been significantly diminished.

MR. BLITZER: Well, that's news, that's important.

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: You told us recently that you and your colleagues thwarted a July 4th attack or attacks, right?

MR. COMEY: Correct.

MR. BLITZER: What can you tell us about that?

MR. COMEY: Not much.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: There were a number of -- what's interesting about the ISIL model there too is, the normal terms of "inspired", "directed" or "enabled," blend together with ISIL, because they're just pushy, they're like a devil on somebody's shoulders saying, kill, kill, kill, all day long. So figuring out whether someone was directed or inspired or enabled is actually a waste of time in many cases.

They were a number of people who were bent on engaging in attacks in the United States, killing innocent people timed to the July 4th holiday, and thanks to great work not just by the FBI but by our partners in state and local and federal law enforcement, it was disrupted.

MR. BLITZER: "Disrupted" and you say -- go ahead --

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: Were these ISIS or ISIL-related threats?

MR. COMEY: Yes.

MR. BLITZER: And that's why you've concluded now that ISIS represents the major threat to the U.S. homeland as far as terrorism is concerned.

MR. COMEY: Right, and one of the reasons I say that is the sheer volume. Again I have investigations, the FBI's investigations related to this threat all across the country. And there are hundreds of investigations we're trying to understand where somebody is on the spectrum between a consumer of this poison on Twitter, to an actor who's about to try and murder innocent people, and evaluate where are they in that spectrum. We have hundreds of people we're looking at on that spectrum.

The ISIL tweeters in Syria have 21,000 English-language followers. Hundreds of those people, probably thousands are in the United States. So our job in the law enforcement community is figuring out so who are they and where are they along this line from consuming to acting. And that's why this is our dominant threat that we face today.

MR. BLITZER: Can you monitor all those people?

MR. COMEY: Of course not, right. Our challenge is finding them all in that haystack as I said. Even if I can find one find one that ISIL has concluded is a live one and that I think is a live one. Our investigators often lose them because they move to a mobile messaging app that is encrypted end to end.

MR. BLITZER: We've been told repeatedly that Mohammad Yousuf Abdulaziz, the Chattanooga killer, was under no threat warnings or threat lists or terror lists, no watch list or anything like that, he wasn't on anyone's radar. Is that right?

MR. COMEY: We've no indications he has ever crossed our screen or anybody else's screen in the intelligence community.

MR. BLITZER: Which is so frightening, to think there could be others like him out there.

MR. COMEY: Of course.

MR. BLITZER: Even if he had some depression, some mental issues, he also potentially is inspired or whatever to go ahead --

MR. COMEY: And the people that ISIL is trying to reach are people that al-Qaeda would never use as an operative.

MR. BLITZER: Why is that?

MR. COMEY: Because they are often unstable, troubled drug users. And ISIL also does something that al-Qaeda would never do, they'll vet an operative by tasking them, right, give them an assignment go kill somebody as a way of checking out whether they are a real person or an informant of some kind.

MR. BLITZER: So when ISIS publicly puts out there in social media if you can come over to Iraq and Syria and fight with us, go out there and kill U.S. military personnel or law enforcement officers, you take that seriously?

MR. COMEY: Very.

MR. BLITZER: And there are current investigations underway right now I assume, not just in New York or Washington or L.A. but I believe you said all over the country?

MR. COMEY: All 50 states. We have hundreds of these investigations.

MR. BLITZER: And the FBI has a lead in all these investigations?

MR. COMEY: Sure, but we're able to do it because we have partners in the federal government, and we over a 100 joint terrorism task forces where state and local officers help us.

MR. BLITZER: So that's --

MR. COMEY: This is a national team effort.

MR. BLITZER: So that's what really keeps you up at night.

MR. COMEY: Yes.

MR. BLITZER: The major fear that you have.

MR. COMEY: Sure.

MR. BLITZER: It's a real fear. Let's talk a little bit about some of these most recent incidents involving ISIS supporters in Garland, Texas. Tell us what happened there.

MR. COMEY: A group of people led by a guy named Simpson and his roommate were -- again, the blending of "inspired," "directed," "enabled" comes together in this case -- were consumers of the ISIL poison and decided that their mission on behalf of the Islamic State was to go and kill people at this "Draw Mohammed" contest, in Garland, Texas.

MR. BLITZER: And they succeeded to a certain degree. They got there, they got till --

MR. COMEY: They got there, they wounded one police officer and through great work by the Garland police, they were eliminated.

MR. BLITZER: It's an enormous -- yeah --

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: People are grateful. But there are other incidents like this potentially that you're investigating even as we speak right now.

MR. COMEY: Yes. Yeah, that's what I meant. We're doing this work all over the country to try and evaluate where is someone along that spectrum from consumer -- again, we know there are hundreds or thousands of consumers -- to actor. And the challenge we face is, again totally unlike the typical al-Qaeda model, is what we call the "flash-to-bang," is both short and unpredictable with ISIL. That is, often an operative will have an idea to do something say on July 4th and wake up on June 2nd and say you know I'm not waiting, today's the day I'm going to go kill people, which poses an additional challenge for us conducting investigations.

MR. BLITZER: So I take it the biggest fear of these terror organizations, coming here to the United States and wanting to kill Americans, whether ISIS or al-Qaeda or Khorasan Group or any of these terror groups, the state-sponsored terror organizations, are they plotting here in the United States as well? I specifically raised the question -- go ahead and answer the question, I'll tell you why I raised it.

MR. COMEY: Tell me why you raised it because my answer --

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: -- my answer was going to be kind of a non answer.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: The reason I asked that question is because there's a huge debate underway right now about the \$100 billion that Iran is about to get if they follow this nuclear deal and that that money will flow in over the next year or two. They could spend it to build hospitals and schools or bridges in Iran or they could spend it, give it to some of their terror partners if you will. Most of those terror partners, whether Hezbollah or

Hamas or the Houthis in Yemen or in Syria, have a very close partnership with the Bashar al-Assad regime or Shiite militias in Iraq, they have their missions there. But occasionally they spread their missions overseas and I'm wondering if you fear that some of that money could be spent launching terror strikes here in the United States by state sponsors, by organizations for example who may get some money from Iran.

MR. COMEY: I think all I can say about that is, Iran's sponsorship of terrorism remains the focus of the entire intelligence community including the FBI. We're responsible here in the United States and I don't expect that threat to change, to diminish certainly in the wake of the additional money being available.

MR. BLITZER: Did the FBI conclude that the Saudi ambassador to the United States, Adel Al-Jubeir, was the target of an Iranian assassination plot in Washington?

MR. COMEY: Yes.

MR. BLITZER: At Café Milano?

MR. COMEY: Yes.

MR. BLITZER: In Georgetown?

MR. COMEY: Correct.

MR. BLITZER: And did the U.S. go to the Iranians and complain about that --

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: -- and say why did you want to kill the Saudi ambassador who's now the foreign minister by the way of Saudi Arabia?

MR. COMEY: Yeah, I'm not going to comment on that.

MR. BLITZER: But you're concerned about that, that's a potential threat out there.

MR. COMEY: So I'm standing by what I said earlier.

MR. BLITZER: Let's talk about some other areas where the FBI is deeply involved right now. As you know the Office of Personnel Management, which is the U.S. government's agency that's in charge of all the federal employees, their -- it's shocking to think about this that their secure sites were hacked and maybe 20 or 21, 22 million workers and their families, their most sensitive information along with their social security numbers, their families, their travel, all of the information that they provided to get top secret security clearances, potentially are now in the hands of these hackers. Is that right?

MR. COMEY: Correct, and a lot of those workers are probably sitting here, one of them is sitting next to you.

MR. BLITZER: You assume that the most sensitive information you provided the U.S. government when you sought security clearances, whether when you were deputy attorney general of the United States or working as a U.S. attorney, now the FBI director, you assume whoever hacked the computers of the Office of Personnel Management in Washington, they have all that information about you and your family?

MR. COMEY: I do. I assume that the actors in that intrusion have my SF86 and the --

MR. BLITZER: Tell us --

MR. COMEY: SF86 is a form that anybody who wants to work for the government in a cleared position fills out where you list, as I recall, every place you've ever lived since 18, all foreign travel, all relatives, contacts, references, jobs, basically your entire life. It's the world most detailed resume, and there are -- everyone who's ever worked in a cleared position has filled one out. Even if you didn't get the job, if you were disqualified because of some problem on that form,

that's in that database. So we have to assume that the intrusion netted those.

MR. BLITZER: It's so shocking to me and I guess the bottom line clearly, how could this possibly happen?

MR. COMEY: Yeah, I'm not in a position to answer that.

MR. BLITZER: Can you tell us who did it?

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: No. I could but I'm not going to.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: Because everybody assumes it's the Chinese.

MR. COMEY: I've read that.

(Laughter)

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: Last year, you compared U.S. capabilities in dealing with cyber crime, U.S. government capabilities of dealing in cyber crime, you made the analogy that these are like little kids playing soccer and they obviously are competing against World Cup champs. Do you still believe that?

MR. COMEY: That's not quite what I said.

MR. BLITZER: Tell us what you said.

MR. COMEY: I was explaining that when I left government -- I was in government until about 2005 -- our national response to soccer was a bit like -- excuse me, to cyber events was a bit like watching four-year-old soccer, big clumps of people chasing the ball. And where we've developed significantly, we've spread out on the field, we've pass to each other much better, we're against

an adversary that's World Cup level, and so we have some growing to do to make sure that we keep up with that threat.

MR. BLITZER: Why are they so good at it, and our experts, who invented all the social media stuff, not necessarily that good at the dealing with this cyber crime?

MR. COMEY: Well, we are very good in different parts of our world, both public and private sector. We're just not consistently good enough across that spectrum.

MR. BLITZER: Who are the main cyber threats? Where do they come from right now?

MR. COMEY: The primary state actors -- I don't want to you give you too long a list -- I'll name two; China and Russia, then there are others.

MR. BLITZER: We assumed North Korea too.

MR. COMEY: I don't want to name any others.

MR. BLITZER: Why not?

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: I don't want to say that either.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: Yeah.

MR. BLITZER: Is Iran one of those countries?

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: I don't want to go further down the list.

MR. BLITZER: Okay. But China and Russia are major threats and they have this information. I don't know what information they have, but I'll say they have sensitive information that could be incredibly useful to them, couldn't it? Not only in terms of stealing sensitive business, technology and stuff like that, but in

terms of recruiting spies, and the FBI is in charge of preventing that?

MR. COMEY: You mean information like we just talk about?

MR. BLITZER: Yeah.

MR. COMEY: Sure. In the hands of a state actor, it would be a gold mine for intelligence operations. You could craft recruitment strategies; you could craft the world's best spearphishing e-mails, right. You could send me an e-mail that appears to be from my sister about some family event that you figured out from my background forms with an attachment and I would click on that attachment and then you'd be into my system. So there is lots of ways it could be used by an intelligence agency of a foreign state actor.

MR. BLITZER: It's such a chilling thought when you think about it. You just click a -- you know, a link and that all of your most sensitive information potentially is gone.

MR. COMEY: Right.

MR. BLITZER: How do you deal with that?

MR. COMEY: Well, you deal with it by having great people, great equipment and deploying yourself in a smart way, which -- again, we've made tremendous progress on. We've still got a ways to go. But we are, like I said, I meant the four-year-old soccer comparison to show what it was like back in the day and compare to where we are today.

Today, we, 20 of the United States' agencies sit together at an operation outside of Washington and share information at the speed of light so we can figure out who has seen what and who should respond to what. It's almost World Cup level sharing of information. That's the answer to this threat and working together better around the globe because the bad guys have shrunk the globe to the size of pinhead, right. They've made, you know, Beijing as next door to Boston on the Internet. So we have to shrink the world back, and part of that is embedding U.S. people and personnel in our foreign partners' offices and

sharing equipments and ideas to shrink it back against the bad guys.

MR. BLITZER: What advice do you have for people that are listening to you right now and how to deal with this potential threat?

MR. COMEY: Well, for companies, it's fairly easy to figure out what you need to do, the basic hygiene of patching and segmenting your network in a bunch of the fancier stuff, is out there, it is known, you simply got to make sure you get the people who know that to help you set up your system that way. For individuals, it's just use the common sense that you would use walking around a dark parking lot at night, right.

It's amazing how comfortable we seem at our keyboards sitting in our kitchens when we're actually wondering all of the earth potentially exposing the things that matter most to us to total strangers. So I tell folks, look, if someone knocks on your door, you're not going to open the door without looking through the peephole. An e-mail to you is a knock on your door, right. Why on earth would you open the attachment without knowing so who is this and where is this coming from?

Understand that you are actually out in the world even though you're on your keyboard and the same with your children, right. You wouldn't let your children go wander around a parking lot. So understand where they are in the world on the Internet.

MR. BLITZER: Let's talk about some of the work the FBI is doing here at home, but I want to quickly get your thoughts on Dylann Roof in Charleston. As we all know what happened, and he got a gun because within three days no one bothered to say he shouldn't be allowed to purchase a gun, right?

MR. COMEY: We got the gun because we, the FBI runs the National Instant Background Check System. We made a mistake and though a geographic mix-up didn't figure out within three days that he had admitted to using drugs in a police report, so shouldn't get the gun. And the way the law is set up is if we don't stop it within three days, the seller can transfer it, the big companies won't; Wal-Mart, for example, will wait for a clear yes from us. But many smaller dealers, because they need the

sale, will exercise their discretion to let it go. In his case, the mistake meant we didn't figure that out within that time window and so the gun was sold, which was lawful, was lawful for the dealer to transfer.

MR. BLITZER: So how do we fix that? We got to learn lessons from these mistakes. How do we fix that?

MR. COMEY: Well, there is a piece that -- the piece that I'm responsible for at the FBI is I've sent a team in to figure out so what exactly went wrong, how can our training be better, how can our process to be better. That's our piece of the world. It's a very hard job to process tens of thousands of gun purchases. But the law -- that's the burden the law puts on us. And so we need to meet it. I mean that's the part I'm responsible for and can speak to.

MR. BLITZER: He was charged today with a hate crime.

MR. COMEY: Right. The attorney general announced he was indicted for a hate crime and acts of violence to interfere with people's religious worship.

MR. BLITZER: The -- he killed nine people, and I know you guys take the lead in investigating this kind of stuff, right?

MR. COMEY: Right. We've been investigating the case that led to the Department of Justice indictment today.

MR. BLITZER: All of these cases that we've heard so much about involving race, for example, allegation against the police, at some point, the Justice Department comes in, launches a civil rights investigation, but the role of the FBI in that is to take the lead in the investigation, right?

MR. COMEY: Right. In a federal civil rights investigation or a terrorism investigation, the FBI will have the lead.

MR. BLITZER: So the information that led to the hate crime charge against Dylann Roof was information that you guys put together, right?

MR. COMEY: Sure. Working with the Charleston Police Department, the Charleston County sheriff, a bunch of other folks.

MR. BLITZER: Where else are you working now in these civil rights investigations, whether at Ferguson or Baltimore, or Staten Island, are you involved in all of those investigations as well?

MR. COMEY: Sure. Yeah, many of them. Staten Island's an example that's under investigation. So I'm not going to say anything about it. But yeah, our special agents will conduct investigation working with Department of Justice lawyers to figure out whether there is the basis for a federal charge.

MR. BLITZER: That takes up a big amount of work at the FBI, right?

MR. COMEY: It does.

MR. BLITZER: How --

MR. COMEY: We have a Civil Rights unit. We have Civil Rights special agents, investigators in every field office.

MR. BLITZER: It's an enormous challenge the threats from foreign terrorist, but homegrown terrorists as well, that's a huge threat whether white supremacists or others, right?

MR. COMEY: Right. Our Counterterrorism Division has two pieces; an international terrorism part and a domestic terrorism part. The hundreds of people in the FBI wake up every day worrying about groups in the United States, homegrown because of some sense of -- some twisted sense of the illegitimacy of our government or something are bent on acts of violence.

MR. BLITZER: What's the most important thing in some of these communities -- and we've all been watching it in recent months -- what's the most important thing that can be done from your perspective to restore confidence between law enforcement and a lot of these communities?

MR. COMEY: To get to know each other. It's hard to hate up close, and so I think about a human zipper, we just need to -- we need to blend together and get to know each other. We in law enforcement got to get out of our cars and get to know the people we're trying to protect and they need to see us and the kind of people we are, why we sign up to do this work, okay. And the more of that that goes on, the healthier the relationship is.

MR. BLITZER: Under you, there were about 30,000-35,000 FBI personnel, is that right?

MR. COMEY: About 36,000.

MR. BLITZER: -- FBI agents, intelligence --

MR. COMEY: Yeah.

MR. BLITZER: -- analysts. Are you satisfied with the level of diversity that you have, African-Americans, Hispanics, women?

MR. COMEY: No, not by a long stretch.

MR. BLITZER: What's the problem here?

MR. COMEY: That's a great question. Let's take the special agent population. My special agents are about 85 percent white and that number has actually been growing while my country is going in the other direction and I believe that's a crisis for the FBI. I don't know exactly what the problem is. I have a pretty good sense of what the solution is. We just got to make sure that talent out there, especially talented people of color, come to see us and see our work.

I think I only have one diversity problem; a lot of places have two, a lot of places it can be a challenge for a person of color to work. I actually don't think that's a problem at the bureau. It's a welcoming family. My challenge is I got to get people of color to give us a look and not to think I don't want to work for them, they're the man or something. We do a lot a good in this country and the people who come work for us, whether they are women or people of color, find that extraordinarily fulfilling. I got to get more people to see us and join us.

MR. BLITZER: How do you do that?

MR. COMEY: Well, part of my -- I don't want to give too much of my strategy away because I'm competing for talent with a lot of other parts of the government.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: But one of the things I'm doing is we are working very hard to do much more collegiate-level hiring, to hire people, kids right out of college into non-agent roles. The average age of a new agent is 29. But our strategy is if we can get these young folks to come and feel what it's like to do good for a living, as corny as that sounds, that's what we do.

Almost nobody leaves the FBI once they join. And our turnover is extraordinarily low. So our thinking is if we can get these kids in, men, women, people of color, all kinds of diverse backgrounds, get them in, they can see what we do for the American people, they will stay and grow into intelligence analysts and special agents.

MR. BLITZER: The mandatory across-the-board budget cuts that have affected the U.S. government -- it's called sequestration -- still in effect as far as the FBI is concerned, you have a major problem with this, don't you?

MR. COMEY: Well, that burden was lifted with the last year, I hope permanently, maybe temporarily, because it's supposed to come back in if Congress doesn't pass the budget this year -- it had a huge impact on the FBI. We were rationing gas, trying to decide whether we could go and meet with that victim or that witness and we weren't hiring, and so we lost 2,000-2,500 positions, which is a -- for obvious reasons, given our work, was a big problem.

MR. BLITZER: But it's still a potential problem out there. I mean, we are counting on you to keep the county safe, right.

MR. COMEY: Sure.

MR. BLITZER: And if you don't have enough

personnel or enough money to get the job done, that's a problem.

MR. COMEY: A very big problem. If it were to come back, that blunt axe that forces everybody to cut across the board, it would have a very bad impact on the FBI.

MR. BLITZER: And part of your job is to go talk to law makers in the House and the Senate and tell them this, right?

MR. COMEY: And I've done a lot of that.

MR. BLITZER: And what do they say to you?

MR. COMEY: They say, we get it. There's a political problem that's bigger than you, but both sides of the aisle actually have told me recently we're confident we're going to pass the budget.

MR. BLITZER: One of the things you need presumably are translators in the FBI. If you're monitoring sensitive conversations, do you have enough translators in some important languages like Arabic or some of the other, Farsi, some of the other languages that potentially you want to monitor?

MR. COMEY: I think not. I mean we're getting the job done, but people are working very, very hard, lots of long hours. So I could use more translators in all of those specialized languages that connect to our international terrorism cases. But we have adequate numbers -- that's probably the best way to say it -- we have adequate numbers, not as good as I'd like it to be. So that's something we focus a lot on.

MR. BLITZER: But this is a huge -- if you've got good translators, that helps a lot, right?

MR. COMEY: Oh, yeah. And we have hundreds and hundreds of them. That's something my predecessor turned around and hired either as employees or as contractors, hundreds and hundreds of language analysts.

MR. BLITZER: We're going to open this up to your questions and I'd like you if you have a question for the director of the FBI, please stand, give us your name, tell us where you're from and then we'll hear from you. Go ahead. Here's a microphone, wait for the microphone.

MR. ALSOP: Stewart Alsop, Alsop Louie Partners. The FBI traditionally did a lot with, you know, domestic crime, bank robbing, stuff like that. Do you still work on that and/or is it entirely focused on national security?

MR. COMEY: Thank you for the question. We still do a tremendous amount of that. We are a national security and law enforcement organization, so we do criminal fraud investigations, we do violent crime investigations, we do a lot of sex trafficking, human trafficking investigations, we touch child exploitation across the board.

In fact, the majority of our special agents work criminal work. The other big buckets are counterintelligence and counterterrorism, but the majority still work criminal.

MR. BLITZER: Walter?

MR. ISAACSON: Walter Isaacson here at the institute. You said something very interesting to me a few minutes ago, which is that if reasonable people got together, they could figure out the end-to-end encryption issue in a way to make it so that our security could be protected, especially with legal authority and judicial orders. And yet when the President went out to Silicon Valley, there were many companies that wouldn't even meet with him when he did that summit.

Do you feel that those companies, it's incumbent upon them to work harder to figure out a common ground and a strategy where with the proper judicial authority, there could be access to this. Could it be done and what would be the argument you would make to them to have them do that?

MR. COMEY: And my answer is I hope so, and I'm actually sensing a change and I don't know exactly what's driving the change. I think part of it is that folks are seen that the ISIL threat and this Going Dark problem are actually coming together, and so it makes it real. And so what I'm sensing from companies is we actually share the same values. I mean I hate this framework, people talking about the Crypto wars. Wars are fought between people who don't share the same values.

I talked to these folks who lead these companies. They all care about the same things I do. They care about security on the Internet, they care about public safety. So I'm hoping we can stop the war talk and just say, "Look, you have a business to run, but you love your country, you love your children, you love public safety. We share the same values. Help us figure out how to do it in a way that preserves innovation, that protects privacy."

Maybe it's too hard, but Silicon Valley, in fact, the whole country is filled with a lot of people who stood in their garage in flip flops 20 years ago, and someone said, "It's just too hard." Thank God for His goodness they didn't believe those people. So I think if well-motivated, innovative people -- and the FBI director should not be a source of innovation -- come together and say, "So how might we position our country so the judge's orders can be complied with, but privacy and strong encryption can remain a huge part of our lives?" But I'm optimistic that we can do something.

MR. BLITZER: Ambassador Bernstein.

MR. BERNSTEIN: Thank you. Can you confirm -- Stuart Bernstein -- can you confirm that General Allen has been brought out of retirement to head up a coalition to train, get 50 countries to each put up a few thousand troops to go in and take out ISIS because I understand it's no more than 20,000-25,000 population?

MR. COMEY: I am both utterly unqualified to answer that and would never answer such a question. I see

that remarkable American in the audience. So I'm sure maybe he'll get a chance to talk about it.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: In the back, go ahead.

MR. WEIHER: Brian Weiher (phonetic) with Haystack Technologies. Director, you started earlier to say there were two challenges. And you talked about the encryption challenge, but I don't think you got to the second challenge.

MR. COMEY: I didn't, because Wolf was trying to find secret stuff out.

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: The second challenge is in nearly every case of a lone offender, homegrown, violent extremist, whatever you want to call the person, where there was an act of violence, someone saw something and didn't say anything. Whether it was a family member, whether it was somebody in a school, at a religious institution, online, someone saw something and didn't say something, and so people ask me sometimes, "So what can the American people do?" When the hair stands up on the back of your neck, just tell somebody.

We investigate in secret so that we don't smear innocent people, right. If there is no harm done -- there'll be no harm done -- but if there is someone bent on tremendous harm, you may have just saved a lot of lives. We as a country have gotten our act together since 9/11. If you walk up to a deputy sheriff or a police officer and say, "Hey, I saw this thing, it seemed weird," the right people will know about that within minutes and we will check it out. And if it is nothing, it will be nothing, but if it's something, you will have done a great thing.

MR. BLITZER: And if it's a family member, you've actually saved the life of a close loved one.

MR. COMEY: Of course you will.

MR. BLITZER: I want to get to your question. You're next. We will get her the microphone, but this sort of self-serving question. Why do you dislike the phrase, "lone-wolf terrorist?"

(Laughter)

MR. COMEY: Because to me the notion of a lone wolf can -- carries a sense of dignity that is utterly inappropriate. I mean I either say "lone offender" or privately I say "lone rat," but I just don't think -- again maybe I'm obsessing on detail -- but I don't like giving that label to someone who is going to run up on our marines and murder them, right? Or shoot people at a shopping mall or something. It's just they are seeking dignity and meaning in their lives in a misguided way and I don't want to be part of that.

(Applause)

SPEAKER: Hi. So it adheres to Aspen. I'd like to hear if you have an opinion or are willing to share your thoughts on gun control in the United States.

MR. COMEY: Yeah I don't -- I'm sure I have plenty of opinions. I don't want to share any of them and here is why. That's not the FBI's remit, and the reason I have a 10-year term is to keep the FBI outside of politics. It's to make sure the FBI is always in the executive branch, but not entirely of the executive branch, is never seen as this group or that group, is always seen as group of people want to find out what's true. And so even if it were within my remit, which is not, I wouldn't want to swerve into something like that unless I absolutely had to.

MR. BLITZER: He's got 8 years to go in the FBI.

MR. COMEY: Yeah.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: Yes.

MR. DUNLAP: Charlie Dunlap from Duke Law School. Mr. Director, you mentioned how Awlaki's material is still on the web. Should we not be systematically going after these websites and taking them down with national technical means or alternatively do you think there is any prospect for imposing civil liability on those who host them?

MR. COMEY: Two good questions. I don't think I either -- I don't think I've thought about them enough to give you an intelligent response, so I hope not to wing it. Yeah, I don't think I know enough to give you a smart answer, unfortunately.

MR. BLITZER: I'll take a question over here. Okay, over here. Go ahead.

MR. ROSSOLIMO: Alexander Rossolimo, Chairman of the Center for Security and Social Progress in Newton, Massachusetts. Last month in a speech to the New York Economic Club, Jack Ma, China's richest man, predicted a World War III. He said that it was not nations against nations, but instead we'll see countries like China and the United States get together to defeat infidels and the else. Now, keeping in mind what you just said about China being a major state actor in cyber terrorism, can you envision the possibility of a U.S.-China collaboration in the future to address major security challenges like terrorism?

MR. COMEY: Yes, yes. I mean we cooperate today -- I mentioned Russia as well -- we work together today with both aspects of the Chinese government and the Russian government to deal with common threats. We have a good cooperative relationship with parts of the Chinese government on various criminal actors, who flow back and

forth between our countries. With the Russians, we work together in various ways together to fight terrorism. So, yes, I can envision such a future.

MR. BLITZER: Yes, ma'am.

MS. DOZIER: Thank you, Kim Dozier, The Daily Beast and CNN. Terrorism in this country is a relatively rare occurrence. There have been fewer than a dozen attacks over the past year. Do you see a time when we could see a doubling or a tripling of that?

And, if not, are we making too much of the ISIS and al-Qaeda threat? Do we spend too much of our national security dollars on it and too much of our time in the media on it?

MR. COMEY: You know, the second part of that question, I don't think I'm qualified to answer. The first part, I am. I think Wolf's first question is what worries me most. What worries me most is that -- and particularly ISIL's investment in social media, which has been blossoming in the last six to eight weeks in particular. We've arrested quite a few people in the last six to eight weeks -- will cause a significant increase in the number of incidents that we see.

That's one of the things I worry about all day long. Whether the media worries about it too much or the American people, I don't think I'm qualified to answer that.

MR. MONTGOMERY: Scott Montgomery from Intel. In the Boston Marathon bombing and the 9/11 bombing, commercial communication networks were immediately saturated, preventing criminal justice and first responders from being able to communicate effectively. Department of Commerce's FirstNet initiative is focused to state and local emergency first responders, fire, police, emergency medical technicians, national guardsmen. Do you see the FBI utilizing FirstNet as a criminal justice mechanism for communications?

MR. COMEY: I don't know. I don't think I know enough about FirstNet to say. I know that was a problem after both of those, and I know we as a government have invested a lot in enhancing our capability in event of an emergency to communicate, but I don't know the details well enough to tell you.

MR. BLITZER: Yes, back there, the woman.

MS. DALLAS: Barbara Sibal Dallas (phonetic), just as a follow-up to the gentleman, will you be looking into how we could close down the websites of the people that you said you didn't have an answer for that?

MR. COMEY: Yeah. Part of my non-answer was I think there are probably people thinking about that challenge and working on it that I just don't know enough about. So what I am going to do is find out what we're doing after I leave here and get smarter, so I can answer better next time.

MR. BLITZER: And we have time for one more question. Yes, go ahead, please. Hold on, wait for the microphone.

MS. HARRIS: Thank you. Gail Harris with the Foreign Policy Association. You talked about terrorists using the Internet to spread their disgusting message. Could you comment on terrorists planning or have we seen them plan to use cyber as a weapon to attack?

MR. COMEY: Yeah, that's a great question. The answer is some. And we're picking up signs of increasing interest. And logic would tell us that as we've made it harder and harder for human beings to get into our country to do bad things, that they will hit upon photons entering our country to do bad things, but not in the main. So it's a small but potentially growing problem.

MR. BLITZER: Last April, you were the keynote speaker. I was there in Washington at the U.S. Holocaust

Memorial Museum dinner, and you delivered a brilliant speech. But one of the things that stood out in my mind, you explained to everyone there why every FBI agent, every FBI intelligence analyst has to go visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and study it. I want you to share that story with our friends here.

MR. COMEY: They go for two reasons. First, we want them to see in a gut-wrenching, nauseating way what the abuse of power on an almost unimaginable scale looks and feels like, because we're about to give them extraordinary power. And then as a second reason, that is I want them to see what we are capable of. I want them to understand what human beings are capable of, that we are - - one of our greatest strengths is our ability to convince ourselves of the righteousness of our own cause and one of our greatest weaknesses is our capacity to surrender our moral authority to the group, so it can be hijacked by the least common denominator.

I want them to stare at that and understand the weaknesses that we all share, because they're about to have tremendous power and I want them to have a sense of that in a way that will last with them their whole career.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: And I just want to remind everyone that this notion of going too far, police power, law enforcement power, FBI power, that hit very close to home to you when you were the Deputy attorney general of the United States and you had to tell the White House Chief of Staff, the White House Chief Legal Council that they can't go that far because that would be an abuse of federal power, right?

MR. COMEY: Yeah. I mean there was a very difficult moment when the Justice Department concluded, reached a legal conclusion that produced a conflict with the White House.

MR. BLITZER: And you had to rush to the hospital where the Attorney General, John Ashcroft, was in horrible shape and the White House guys, they rushed to the hospital to try to get John Ashcroft who was, you know, very, very sick to sign off on something you thought would go too far as far as the Justice Department, the federal government infringing on the rights of the American people.

MR. COMEY: Correct.

MR. BLITZER: And you made the right decision?

MR. COMEY: I hope so, hope so.

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: I think it should give all of us confidence that you are the FBI director right now at such a sensitive time, and you're so sensitive potentially in abuse of power. At the same time, you want to make sure that all of us are safe, as safe as we possibly could be. So on behalf of all of us, I thank you for coming here today, director. Thank you for all the work you're doing on behalf of all of us.

MR. COMEY: Thank you.

MR. BLITZER: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

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