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DIRECTING NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

(1:15 p.m.)

MR. BERGEN: Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, we are about to begin the next session. So if you can suspend your conversations and we want to start on a timely basis. I am Peter Bergen and I'm a member of the Aspen Institute Homeland Security Group. The next session is with director of National Intelligence Jim Clapper and Jim Sciutto, my colleague at CNN, my friend will be introducing and moderating this session. The session is entitled Directing National Intelligence. Of course, we have heard so far today how complex the threat environment is.

Jim Sciutto who is CNN's chief national security correspondent has many sort of parts of his resume that are relevant to this discussion that include being chief of staff at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing at a very important moment in U.S.-Chinese relations when he was chief of staff to ambassador Gary Locke. Before he became CNN's chief national security correspondent, he worked at ABC News, he covered 60 countries, repeated trips to Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran. He found time to also write a book about the Muslim world in 2008. And so now I will hand it over to Jim.

MR. SCIUTTO: Thanks very much. Let me first thank the director for making yourself available for this and in other forums recently, just to thank you because for me and my colleagues who cover national security, it helps us to do our job better. So we certainly appreciate that accessibility.

MR. CLAPPER: Thanks Jim.

MR. SCIUTTO: Of course we will appreciate it more if you make some news today in this forum.

MR. CLAPPER: Right.

(Laughter)

MR. SCIUTTO: Throwing them out there.

MR. CLAPPER: Which, of course, I'm going to try very hard not to do.

MR. SCIUTTO: Small request. Well the news Gods have dropped into our laps.

MR. CLAPPER: Yes, as they always do.

MR. SCIUTTO: The perfect nexus of national security and politics with the hack of DNC e-mails and the alleged participation of Russia. So, my colleagues and I at CNN, but also at other outlets have been told by and you see in the reports by a number of officials who have pointed their finger without much hesitation at Russia; the official in the White House described -- said to me there is little doubt it's Russia. I just wonder does the intelligence community share that certainty?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I will just say that I don't think we are quite ready yet to make a call on attribution. I mean, we all know there're just a few usual suspects out there, but in terms of the process that we try to stick to, I don't think we are ready to make a public call on that yet.

MR. SCIUTTO: And is that because you haven't made a decision to publicly name and shame or because there's still some uncertainty?

MR. CLAPPER: Little both, little both.

MR. SCIUTTO: Good. Do you think that we in the media, but also some officials who have been speaking to us in the media have gotten ahead of the certainty on this?

MR. CLAPPER: Yes, I guess, yes.

(Laughter)

MR. CLAPPER: I did and frankly taken aback a bit by somewhat the, you know, hyperventilation over this.

I mean, you know, I am shocked somebody did some hacking, that has never happened before.

(Laughter)

MR. CLAPPER: So I just -- and I think it's a luster of the need for us as a nation, as a people to be the more to use the term resilient about these kind of things. I mean, we are in a different era now. I think we are going to be in a state of suppression of extremism and whatever manifestation, whatever form it takes, whether it's Al-Qaeda or ISIS or some other group that's spawned. This is going to be a long-haul proposition and I think the same is true in the whole realm of cyber security. We are, have been in I think somewhat a reactionary mode here and I think there is obviously, because of all these developments, a growing awareness, I think both on a personal level and on institutional level that this is a profound challenge for the country and I think we just need to accept that and not be quite so excitable when you have yet another instance of it.

MR. SCIUTTO: But what's different about this one was the timing of its release, right, and not just Russia, China, North Korea, there are multiple precedents, but the timing of the release on eve of the convention in light of their target, in light of the information contained in those e-mails, do you ascribe an intention to that either to Russian or to WikiLeaks?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, let's just say it's actor X and if it was a nation-state actor X, I think that's really the key thing, not so much the hacking took place as much as what was really the motivation. Was this just to stir up trouble or was this ultimately to try to influence an election and of course that's a serious proposition.

MR. SCIUTTO: Do believe that there is a good chance that that was the intend?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I can't say and we don't know, we don't know enough to say to ascribe motivation regardless of who it might have been.

MR. SCIUTTO: Big picture and I know this is as far as you can go both in terms of timing and of course there's a whole host of classified aspects of this, but big picture, let's talk about Russia for a moment here. They have attacked White House e-mails, State Department e-mails. They have a view that the U.S. has attempted to influence Russian political process or the political process in, for instance, Ukraine, Georgia, et cetera. They look at the battlefield as having an information space and that this kind of thing is fair game to big picture. Is it your view that Russia has the intention of if not influencing this election, undermining confidence in the U.S. political process?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, they are trying to look at things from their vantage I think and they are paranoid and Putin is personally about color revolutions and a potential for color revolution to occur in Russia and of course they see a U.S. conspiracy behind every bush and ascribe a far more impact than we are actually guilty of, but that's their mindset. And so I think that their approach is they believe that we are trying to influence political developments in Russia, we are trying to effect change and so their natural responses is to retaliate and do onto us as they think we've done onto them and so I think that's again not surprising that they would behave that way.

MR. SCIUTTO: Now that, you know, I know --

MR. CLAPPER: And by the way if I could add, of course, the cyber realm opens up a whole range of possibilities for them.

MR. SCIUTTO: While cyber attacks are older, at least not new, that aspect is new and worrisome, isn't it, that a foreign power would use enormous cyber capabilities, propaganda, et cetera, to try to undermine our political process?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I mean, this is not -- I don't believe this is terribly at least philosophically is terribly different than what went on during the heyday of

the cold war. It was just different, it was different modality. We didn't have this cyber business as a part of this, but I think as far as their approach and their philosophy to this, you know, cyber just represents another tool.

MR. SCIUTTO: You have heard Donald Trump's comments about this. Now he today has walked back his reaction and said that he was being sarcastic. I just wonder from your perspective, I know you can't weigh it into the political sphere, but you're a man who takes your job very seriously and intelligence work very seriously. Are public comments like that whether they were sarcastic or not, are they damaging?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, you are right, I won't comment on that.

(Laughter)

MR. SCIUTTO: I came at it cleverly though, right, did I a little bit?

(Laughter)

MR. SCIUTTO: Well, let's -- okay, let's expand beyond that one comment because you have had in this political race some very aggressive and unusual comments about for instance whether or not the U.S. would come to the defense of NATO allies, whether the U.S. should nuclearize Asia, right, Japan. These are things that I know and you know better than me, but I know that from speaking to diplomats in those countries that our allies take very seriously and with concern.

MR. CLAPPER: Yeah.

MR. SCIUTTO: Are those kinds of public statements inherently -- well, destabilizing is too strong a term, but damaging, worrisome?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, rather than rendering a personal opinion, I can say with some authority that such statements, such rhetoric are very bothersome to our

foreign interlocutors, our foreign partners and I hear that from my counterparts, intelligence and security colleagues in many other countries who take very, very seriously and study very, very closely what the political figures in this country say and it is a worry to them, it really is. So, I'll just let it go with that rather than rendering any kind of personal opinion, but I think it's legitimate for me to report what I hear from many, many foreign partners and interlocutors.

MR. SCIUTTO: So, what do you tell them when they come to you with those concerns?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I tell them that I appreciate they're sharing their concerns and that's our process in the United States. And hopefully it will all come out right.

(Laughter)

MR. SCIUTTO: I am just going to let that hang out there for a moment.

(Laughter)

MR. SCIUTTO: You have the intel briefings coming up for both nominees, it's now officially they are both the nominees. I know you have a protocol and you are going to deliver on that protocol, you have chosen the people, you got a job to do, that's the way it works. Is there any hesitation in the intel community to brief either of these candidates or both?

(Laughter)

MR. CLAPPER: No, there isn't and the reason for that is of course this is a long-standing tradition, our system goes back to Harry Truman as when this process of briefing candidates for the presidency started. There is a long tradition that intel's community at the appropriate time and now is the appropriate time since both candidates have been officially anointed that both camps will be reached out to and offered briefings and it will be up to them to decide, A, whether to accept them and what the

location and all of that we will have to work out logistics and we have got a team all prepared and have had for some time really to do that.

There is no stipulation anywhere that requires a security clearance for any presidential candidate, that's not the factor a candidate qualifies them. And I will tell you really, it's not up to the administration and certainly not up to me personally to decide on the suitability of a presidential candidate. In essence what the process is going on here is the American electorate is in the process of deciding the suitability of these two candidates to serve as commander-in-chief and they will make that decision to pick someone who will be cleared for everything and neither I as DNI or anyone else in the administration doesn't make that determination, that's the determination made by the electoral. So, we will brief both candidates if they want it.

MR. SCIUTTO: Okay, so with great relief to you, I want to move on from U.S. politics.

MR. CLAPPER: okay, yeah.

MR. SCIUTTO: Do you want to stick on it for a little longer? Big picture just on Putin, you have said before to me and I imagine to others that Russia is an existential threat, that's by nature, it's a nuclear power, we have these other lower level disputes, you have that kind of secret or not too secret, war in Ukraine, you have the cyber attacks. Do you think from Putin's perspective, he is fighting a low level undeclared asymmetric war with the U.S.?

MR. CLAPPER: I think that's a fair ascription. He very much wants to be seen as and considered as a leader of a great power co-equal with the United States and that's I think a lot of, not the only motivation, but a lot of the motivation for the Syrian expedition is. And the Russians desperately want to be seen as cooperating with us on an equal basis. And in the meantime though, particularly in the environs of the former Soviet world, the Russians will push to exert influence, will attempt to influence political processes in these countries as we

have seen them do.

So, again to me it's not a great leap that they might be similarly motivated to try to do the same thing here because that's kind of the part of their tools in their kitbag. And so as I have said in other forum, I think for me Putin is somewhat of the throwback not to do communist there, but more of a throwback to the tsar era and I think he thinks in those terms. And so the Russians have, are now and will continue to employ methods and approaches and techniques below direct military confrontation to fulfill that vision of being a great power on a co-equal basis with us.

MR. SCIUTTO: So, let's turn that around, if Putin sees himself as fighting this sort of low level war, in your job do you look at yourself as at war to some degree with Russia?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, that's the nature of the intelligence business. I guess if you want to put it in that context, I guess we are at war and we are doing an operational mission 7/24 365 against a number of known adversaries or potential adversaries. So, I guess in a sense that's our version of war.

MR. SCIUTTO: He is an opportunist, you even said this to me before, not necessarily a strategist, an opportunist. You have divisions within the EU right now in Europe, Brexit. You have real divisions within Turkey, right.

MR. CLAPPER: Yeah.

MR. SCIUTTO: And therefore then divisions within NATO, you have this perception of U.S. weakness in Europe, what's your level of concern that Russia takes advantage of that and goes after the Baltics?

MR. CLAPPER: You know, whenever I see intelligence piece which has the phrase "we are concerned about", I always have that stricken because that suggests some sort of emotional commitment to the issue at hand. And again in the purest sense of being objective, if I

really did concern myself with all these issues, I wouldn't have lasted this long.

So, that said, I think Turkey right now is a living example of the opportunism that Putin will I believe and already is, that he will try to leverage. I think there will be the kiss and makeup after the shoot down of the Russian fighter last November is underway. I think the Russians will resume Russian tourism to Turkey and many of the economic levers that the Russians exerted will be turned back, will be turned off and again I think Putin being the opportunist that he is and if he can see a way to drive a wedge between Turkey and the West, specifically Turkey and NATO, he will.

Right now it's my judgment that I don't think Turkey will do that, I think they find the safeguards and protections that NATO membership gives them as trumping that and so at least I certainly hope not, I think that would be -- I think it's vital that Turkey remain a part of NATO.

MR. SCIUTTO: So, how about the effect on the fight against ISIS, of internal divisions in Turkey, the purge following the coup attempt? You have said, we heard General Votel say that for instance some of our military contacts are now currently in jail.

MR. CLAPPER: Right.

MR. SCIUTTO: CT contacts currently in jail, we had the issue over (inaudible) no power for a few days.

MR. CLAPPER: Yes, it is having a bit of effect on because it has affected all segments of the national security apparatus in Turkey and so many of our interlocutors have been purged or arrested. So there is no question, this is going to set back and make more difficult cooperation with the Turks because of that and that's certainly true in our realm of intelligence and specifically counterterrorism.

MR. SCIUTTO: That's horrendous timing for that, I mean, you have the assault on Mosul, the assault on

Raqqa planned coming up.

MR. CLAPPER: Right.

MR. SCIUTTO: You have got concerns about the border. That's pretty bad timing for that kind of --

MR. CLAPPER: Yes, that's right.

MR. SCIUTTO: Okay.

(Laughter)

MR. CLAPPER: Not good.

MR. SCIUTTO: Leave it at that. On ISIS, there has been a spiked attacks and you have, in particular you have the directed attacks like Istanbul, you have the middle little ground ones that were somewhat directed, but a little bit more freelancing, you have the real freelancers like this guy in the east it seems. You speak to people about how one fuels the next one, you have got guys who might have been thinking about it, they watch one and then they go and they try to won-up each other. Is it your view that we -- I mean, people talk a lot about the new normal, right, but I wonder if it is worse than that, right, should the American people, should all of us be bracing ourselves for a new wave of terror in the West particularly as ISIS has squeezed on the battlefield?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I wouldn't be quite so dramatic about it. I think that the phenomenon we've seen will continue. Certainly ISIL aspires to stirring, inciting people on so-called lone wolf basis to do what they can with the resources they have available, whether it's, you know, getting a truck and move down a bunch of people, get a weapon or get a rifle and shoot people.

MR. SCIUTTO: Kill an 84-year-old priest with a knife.

MR. CLAPPER: Exactly, so and I think a more brutal and a more mindless perhaps the better in their mind. So, the notion that they would orchestrate an

attack of the magnitude of 9/11, I don't think that's in the cards. Too many signatures that would give it away, but these smaller attacks which have way more psychological impact, disproportionate psychological impact and you're right, they do have a contagious effect, that helps incite others to do the same thing.

So, the problem that poses for us in intelligence since we have to draw the bouts between doing what we can to keep the nation safe and secure on one hand and protection of privacy and civil liberties on the other and typically when something happens, we are critique because we weren't invasive enough and on other occasions we are accused of being too invasive. And so that's the challenge for the intelligence apparatus is under our laws bringing to bear the maximum that we can for those signatures, those behaviors that are detectable by the tools that we been given by the people of this country through the Congress and exercise those to the maximum extent possible. But that doesn't mean that we are going to be perfect every time and I think that's a new normal, it's a fact that it is just very difficult unless we want to impose a lot more draconian measures to prevent every one of these.

MR. SCIUTTO: I wonder if it's a sad irony of the progress on the battlefield against ISIS, is that you know it's sort of like busting the hornet's nest, right, you are going to have those fighters, the Aspera from there going into Europe plus you are going to have ISIS warning to show its relevance and power by trying to grab every nut job in every country they can.

MR. CLAPPER: Right.

MR. SCIUTTO: Is it the sad irony that as they are weaker on the battlefield, they are oddly more of a terror threat?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I think what this gets to is the -- we have made a lot of progress against ISIS on those things that you can measure. They have less territory, we have taken thousands of fighters off the battlefield, we have killed many, many dozens of their

leaders, we are impacting their source of revenue, notably oil, the number of foreign fighters, the flow is, the trend is slowly but downward. Where we have had the challenge of course is in measuring progress on curbing the ideology and the attraction that it seems to have and the very skillful sophisticated slick use of the Internet by ISIL, whether it's for recruiting, proselytizing or for that matter command-and-control and that has been a challenge. And so until such time as we can both do counter the message in ways that appeal to and don't offend a wide target audience, we are going to continue to have this sort of phenomenon that we are seeing.

MR. SCIUTTO: I want to go to questions. Before I do, I just would to take a little bit of a turn. You often say that today in your job that the U.S. faces a greater variety of challenges from a greater --

MR. CLAPPER: Right.

MR. SCIUTTO: One of those being just instability in places, certainly the Middle East, but surprising places, Turkey included and I know you have metrics for measuring instability. I just wondered if I can ask you to turn your eyes to the U.S. and you look at the challenges we face today, you have racial tension, we have an epidemic of gun violence and then the intersection of those two issues and danger to cops, you have declining confidence in institutions, political, media, for some law enforcement. Are you concerned about stability here?

MR. CLAPPER: Let me answer that as speaking just as a private citizen, not as the I or the government position and it does worry me and here's why. We pride ourselves in this country on the institutions that have evolved over hundreds of years and I do worry about the fragility of those institutions. There is not a lot of margin there between preservation and the thriving those institutions, our legal institutions, the rule of law, protection of citizens' liberty and privacy, et cetera, et cetera and I do worry about that being somewhat under assault in this country. And that's not being helped by a lot of the rhetoric that we are hearing and again I say that as a private citizen, not in my official capacity.

MR. SCIUTTO: It's alarming because I don't think folks -- I mean listen, you ask some people, they talk about particular problems, but they also have this on the other side, well, checks and balances, things will be fine, this sort of if this ends well, I can go back to my life and I could ignore that. That's to me personally it's -- I know it's a private citizen's judgment here, but you're a knowledgeable private citizen, that's alarming.

MR. CLAPPER: Yes, well, if we use the same gauge and you're right, we do have a sort of empirical methodology for trying to assess levels of stability throughout the world and there are probably two-thirds of the countries in the world that exhibit one or more characteristics in varying degrees obviously of instability. And I guess if you apply that same measure against us, well, we are starting to exhibit some of them too.

MR. SCIUTTO: Goodness. With that, we would love to go to the audience.

MR. CLAPPER: On that happy note.

MR. SCIUTTO: On that happy note, please the bar is open now in the back.

(Laughter)

MR. SCIUTTO: Maybe if I can right here, I don't where the mikes are -- well, actually there is one right behind you.

MS. HARRIS: Hi General. Gail Harris, Foreign Policy Association and retired naval intelligence officer. My question concerns education, I was wondering particularly for the military side of the house, have you made progress to allow the young military officers to take time off to work on advanced degrees so that they can develop area of specialties. As you know one criticism of us on the military side is we don't know enough about the economic, political and social issues?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, in the military and I'm speaking now from my prior incumbencies in the DoD, one of the greatest programs the military has is foreign area officer program which does exactly that, allows officers to continue their advanced education, spend a year in the country or area of their intended expertise and then have an assignment pattern that capitalizes on that investment as (inaudible), as security systems officers, as international political affairs officers, whatever. And those people are worth their weight in gold, it is a phenomenal program.

Throughout intelligence community, we have placed a greater emphasis on advanced education on allowing our people which is painful because you end up sending your best people, the people you can least do without, but it's an investment in the future and so we do expend a lot of effort at that. Within the intelligence community, we have what's called the National Intelligence University which is as a degree granting institution in which our IC employees, both military and civilian, can obtain an advanced degree and do their studies in a classified environment. And so I think we can always do more, but I think we have a lot of excellent programs to educate not only advanced education and career development not only for military intelligence cadre, but our civilian employees as well.

MR. SCIUTTO: Over here. I will let him fight over it, maybe one after you and then behind you.

MR. MAYBURY: Director Clapper, Mark Maybury, chief security officer at MITRE and director of the National Cybersecurity FFRDC. Sir, we have heard Russia with the declaratory policy of escalation to deescalate, we have heard that terror groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIS exhibit aspirations to get a hold of chemical, nuclear, biological weapons. What's your assessment of the threat of WMD either by nation states or by others and importantly our preparedness for that?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, what I have (inaudible) so when I get a question like that is, we are in a somewhat fortunate happenstance that the entities which have the

greatest capability in the WMD, weapons of mass destruction arena which are nation states have the much less intend to employ them and conversely the non-nation state entities which have a much more nefarious intent don't have the capability. So, with respect to nation state entities, we are trying to watch that very carefully, that is a tough collection problem for us, so I'll be candid with you, because the notion, the idea or the thought that ISIL would obtain and then employ weapons of mass destruction is pretty fearsome, particularly you say in BW arena.

We don't see that. Other than aspirationally, they have used of course industrial chemicals, chlorine and the like on the battlefield, so they are clearly thinking about it, aspirationally I think they are very interested and this is something we watch very carefully. So to my point about intend and capability, I do worry about the trend where those who have the most nefarious intend may obtain the capability.

MR. SCIUTTO: Just because I promised over here, then I'll go to this side of the room.

MR. KUPCHAN: Cliff Kupchan with Eurasia Group. To shift a bit, Europe is clearly in crisis from Brexit to Orban to Kawczynski, AFD, Sweden Democrats, we know the list. Does this pose a greater challenge to U.S. interests than common wisdom would dictate and does it necessitate a greater shift of U.S. intelligence assets to Western Europe than we might think?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, yes, there is a lot of political turmoil in Europe just as there is here. I don't know that there's that much difference and of course I think the other thing, I think there is somewhat risk here of generalizing trends in Europe because I find differences as I travel around from country to country about the general political climate in those countries.

So if the question is, are going to spy more on Europe, probably not, then there's all kinds reasons for that, not the least of which is we have to prioritize resources against where is the greatest threat. Right now

we are on a bilateral basis probably the most robust intelligence sharing that I've seen in my time in intelligence over the last half century. And of course there's an obvious reason for that as when you are impelled by the threat, particularly terrorism, that tends to bond. So what we are focusing on is trying to promote more sharing between and among the countries in Europe. And so while we have this very robust sharing on a bilateral basis with just about every nation there, getting them to share among themselves which has particularly given the migration crisis, they need to do and they realize that and they are working toward it, but there are ways behind us and we've made a lot of improvements since 9/11.

MR. SCIUTTO: Moving over to this side, Peter (inaudible).

SPEAKER: Thanks yourself for doing this and thanks Jim for the interview. Today we have heard the announcement that the most virulent and successful Al-Qaeda affiliate, the Nusra Front which controls up to a third of Syria has announced that its splitting off from Al-Qaeda. Is that a blow to Al-Qaeda, why would Nusra Front do this, what does this mean?

MR. CLAPPER: I think to some extent, it's a PR move. I think they would like to create the image of being more moderate and in an attempt to unify and galvanize and appeal to other oppositionist groups in Syria. I think they are concerned about being singled out as a target particularly by the Russians, so I think this is much more as I say a PR move and whether or not they actually are separating from Al-Qaeda, I think that remains to be seen.

MR. SCIUTTO: Andrew here at front and Kimberly back here.

MR. BERIN: Andrew Berin (phonetic) with IBM, good to you see you sir and thanks again for joining us. My question is both presidential candidates have talked about -- Hillary Clinton talked about the need for an intelligent surge to combat ISIS, Donald Trump has

certainly made a lot of references to the need to figure out what's going on with ISIS. My question is, is there a need because a surge sounds like a temporary solution and if this is a protracted conflict and we have these emerging threats all over the world, is there a need for either increased manpower, budgets or increased legal authorities across the IC at large to meet that demand for a new surge?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, this is not just an issue with the candidates, it's an issue frankly with our policymakers and this week we need to surge on this problem, we need to surge on Libya and this week need to surge on Syria and this week we need to surge here and we need to surge there. So, I guess, that's one of the reasons we have a DNI is to try to prioritize and keep some balance among all the competing demands that are placed on us because in the end, there is a finite resource here. Every year the Congress, well some years, the Congress gives us so many dollars and so many people that's appropriate to us. So, then those are numbers and we have to allocate those across a whole variety of threats and concerns that people have.

So, it is not a trivial proposition to surge from this issue this week to surge that one the next week and forget work and ISIL and next week you are the Brazilian navy analyst, it doesn't quite work that way and so one of things I try to do is kind of be the corporate jiminy cricket I guess and maintain some balance and sense here because there's just so much resource and we have to attend to all of these threats, we can't neglect them and everything is zero-sum. So, if you move resources and the intelligence community from one product to another, there's no bullpen of relief pitchers waiting to go in the game here because everybody is occupied. The Congress doesn't give us extra bodies, just sit around and wait till the next surge.

MR. SCIUTTO: Kim.

MS. DOZIER: Kimberly Dozier with the Daily Beast and CNN. General Clapper, you spent some quality time in North Korea negotiating to get some people out. I

might be catching you a little bit unawares, but a top North Korean official has just told the AP that the U.S. has crossed a red line by putting their leader on the list of sanctioned individuals and they have threatened a vicious showdown if the U.S. goes ahead with war games with South Korea next month. Are we taking North Korea as seriously as we should as a threat or is this just rhetoric?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, that's an excellent question and we do take seriously the rhetoric. I served on the peninsula, it's amazing, 30 years ago I was at J2, director of intelligence (inaudible) Korea and I learned very quickly in that job that you do need to pay attention to North Korean rhetoric as inappropriate and sometimes amusing as it is as we translated. And so I think and then when you do that, when you hear the rhetoric and you also have to assess what are they actually doing, what is the state of readiness of their military and you have to look at both the outward rhetoric which can be done for an effect for PR purposes or whatever and is that compatible with or congruent or consistent with what the state of readiness of their military or any part of it to actually do something. And so that's one of the challenges that we have in intelligence, but we do analyze that very carefully, what the actual verbiage, the actual language and also who issues these pronouncements and look at that in the context of what they're actually doing.

MR. SCIUTTO: Margaret and then we will probably have time for one more, we are down to just below five minutes.

MS. WARNER: Thank you. Margaret Warner from the PBS News Hour. You spoke about briefing the candidates and you made the point that neither of them is required to have a security clearance. Can you give us some idea about at what level of confidentially you share information, for instance, is it the kind of discussions we are having here, does it go deeper, more into where you got the information, can you help us out on that?

MR. CLAPPER: During the candidate phase, the briefings are necessary -- the way they are built is

fairly general. So it could be on ISIL or Syria or whatever the problem is, but to classify nonetheless and they would be somewhat along the lines of what we have talked about here except it would be a little more fulsome. Once the president-elect is known, then we get into again depending on the president-elect's interests, it gets more comprehensive and more detailed to include enterprise, intelligence enterprise capabilities that a president-elect needs to know about.

MR. SCIUTTO: We have time for just one more last word. Catherine?

MS. HERRIDGE: Catherine Herridge, Fox News. Just in that topic, if you are sitting down with the president-elect, what would be the three top line issues that you would brief and is there anything on that list that we might have avoided or could have been mitigated by a different strategy?

MR. CLAPPER: A different strategy for what?

MR. SCIUTTO: A different strategy --

MS. HERRIDGE: A different strategy for approaching that threat.

MR. SCIUTTO: That he would brief the candidate on?

MS. HERRIDGE: No, the question is what are the three top -- sorry.

MR. SCIUTTO: Three top line issues.

MS. HERRIDGE: Yes, three top line issues and is there anything on that list with hindsight that might have been mitigated by a different strategic approach?

MR. SCIUTTO: I see.

MS. HERRIDGE: Okay.

MR. CLAPPER: I have to take the last one, let's

take on to a question I guess.

(Laughter)

MR. CLAPPER: I think probably cyber threats in general, both nation state capabilities and non-nation state capabilities and the threats they pose to the United States and the West, clearly ISIL I think in terms of a non-nation state entity that probably deserves focus and then Russia as a nation state entity, so you are going to limit me to three of those, probably the three I would pick.

MR. SCIUTTO: Director Clapper, on the occasion of what is your last as Director, your last Aspen Security Forum, let me thank you unless you are called to service by the next president which is -- tell us what your thoughts about that about that would be.

(Laughter)

MR. CLAPPER: I have 176 days left.

MR. SCIUTTO: Fair enough.

(Laughter)

(Applause)

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