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UNDER ASSAULT

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UNDER ASSAULT

(2:45 p.m.)

MR. FORD: Good afternoon. So I'm Dan Ford with Capgemini. I'm our Vice President for National Security and Defense at Capgemini, and I'm proud to have Capgemini here as a sponsor.

Our next session titled Under Assault features two distinguished panelists with storied experience in the White House Situation Room. Appropriately, our moderator is the host of *The Situation Room* with Wolf Blitzer. Without further ado, I'm honored to turn it over to Wolf for what should be an incredible conversation.

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: Thank you very much. (Inaudible). So nice to be here. I love the Aspen Institute. I've been coming here since 1983. And it's -- I only come in the summers, I don't ski, but it's really a pleasure to be here. And as I begin I'll just say the words that many of you often hear, especially those of you who have basic cable, I'm Wolf Blitzer and you're in *The Situation Room*. You're in my situation room, not their situation room. But as I've often said, whatever room I'm in there is a situation. And there is a situation going on right now. I'm looking forward to an excellent discussion.

General Clapper is with us. All of you know his most recent assignment was as the fourth U.S. Director of National Intelligence, a job that is critically important to our national security as we all know. Many of you probably don't know this, a little known fact by General Clapper, he began his military career when he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps Reserves back in 1961 but eventually joined the U.S. Air Force, retired as a lieutenant general, also served as Director of Defense Intelligence, the Defense Intelligence Agency. What made you leave the Marines and go to the Air Force?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I really wanted to special in intelligence and at that time it was very hard to specialize in intelligence in the Marine Corps, so. Air Force made me a -- yeah, I mean I get all the jokes about the Marines and intelligence is an oxymoron or, you know, no. I have a very soft spot in my heart for the Marine Corps, it's a great organization.

MR. BLITZER: Well, thank you very much for your service to our country. We're grateful to you for that.

And a Director John Brennan, most recently served for 4 years as the CIA Director. He was earlier the advisor at the National Security Council at the White House for Homeland Security. He served in the CIA going back to 1980 until 2005, that would be 25 years in the CIA. You want to share some secrets during the course of this next hour with us?

MR. BRENNAN: No.

MR. BLITZER: Okay. Let's begin, since I'm a news guy, with some news-of-the-day questions, and then we're going to back into some other substantive issues, and I'll start with you, General Clapper. The Special Counsel Robert Mueller is now asking the White House to preserve all documents related to that June 2016 meeting over at Trump Tower in New York City that included Donald Trump Jr., Jared Kushner, Paul Manafort, who was the Trump campaign chairman at the time with a Russian lawyer. What does that tell you about the focus of this investigation now?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I think it's -- the focus has been all along is was there collusion, was there some kind of cooperation between the Trump campaign and the Russians. And I think that's all part of it. And having been on the, myself, as John been on the receiving end of request to preserve documents, that's all part of our system and it's, you know, to get at the truth as much and as much documentation that may or -- may bear on it if there is any. So that to me is consistent. And for this sort of thing I think is kind of the standard thing you do.

MR. BLITZER: Director Brennan, what does it say to you?

MR. BRENNAN: That Bob Mueller is doing his job, I don't think anybody can do that job better than Bob Mueller. He has experience. And this was a counter-intelligence investigation that started off last summer and he's picking up now this effort and looking at what the Russians may have been doing to include with people associated with the campaign. That type of preservation order, that type of request for documents is wholly consistent with what his mandate is, and it shows that

there is a diligence that is underway and a rigor that Bob Mueller and his team are going to get to the bottom of the story.

MR. BLITZER: The Russian lawyer who was at that meeting, a woman by the name of Natalia Veselnitskaya, she met with Donald Trump Jr., with Jared Kushner, with Paul Manafort. We are now learning, thanks to Reuters, that she has represented a military unit founded by the FSB, that's the successor Russian agency to the KGB for a number of years. Here's the question from an intelligence perspective, General, how risky was it for these three Trump associates to meet with this woman during the campaign?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, understanding -- and I guess I'm old school Cold War warrior and all that so I have all of this truth in advertising, great suspicions about the Russians and what they do. And a lot of this to me had kind of a standard textbook tradecraft long employed by the Russians and or the Soviets and now into the Russians. So I don't find it surprising that these connections are trying to -- are coming out. It would have been a really good idea maybe to have vetted whoever they were meeting with.

I think the Russian objective here was, one, to explore, reconnoiter to see if there was interest in having such a discussion on offering up of course dirt on Hillary Clinton and somehow, you know, at least create the optic or the image of at least ostensibly plausible deniability, and this is typical Soviet Russian tradecraft approach to the soft approach, and if possible to co-opt -- and John has spoken to this previously in public about whether people are witting, the recipients of this are witting or not, maybe they aren't, and then but that's how the -- that's kind of standard stuff for the Russians.

MR. BLITZER: Director Brennan, how risky was it?

MR. BRENNAN: Well, aside from risky it was just profoundly baffling why three of the senior most members of a presidential campaign would jump at the opportunity to meet with individuals that were going to, according to what's been reports, provide information, dirt information on Hillary Clinton that was coming from the Russian government.

As Jim said, that's not something that, you know,

you get engaged in personally, if they want to find out what was involved at all you send a minion, you send someone else. But to go there with that, it just it raises a lot of questions, I think that's what the administration now is having to deal with, questions about what were the motives what were people thinking at the time. They should have known a lot better. If they didn't, they shouldn't have been in those positions because, as Jim said, the Russians operates in a very, very cunning manner and they will take and exploit any opportunity they get, and it seems as though some folks swallowed the bait.

MR. BLITZER: The Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has just said that the meetings that President Trump had with Russian President Putin that there may have been more than the meetings we all know about, what was your reaction, General Clapper, when you heard that they did, Presidents Putin and Trump, have this previously undisclosed rather lengthy meeting with only a Russian Government interpreter present. From the intelligence point of view, what was your reaction?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, it certainly raises a red flag, raises concern for me, that's -- it's, you know, dialoguing with any opposite member of head of state is a good thing and yes, I'm not a big fan of Putin, not a big fan of Russian, but it is important that there be dialogue. What really concern me though is not having a U.S. witness to it and certainly, very dangerous, not using a translator, his own translator --

MR. BLITZER: Why is that dangerous?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, first, I've had a lot of engagements over time with -- as John has with the foreign interlocutor, foreign colleagues, and if you don't have, for one just, you're not entirely confident unless it's a translator you know and whose loyalty you have no question about, is not involved in this because otherwise there's apart from, you know, nefarious aspects or the subtleties and nuances of language get involved here where you can completely miscommunicate.

I spent 2 years in Korea with, you know, and did a lot of that dialogue back and forth with the Koreans, and I found out later that what I had said did not get conveyed accurately at all using a Korean, a well-intended Korean translator, I just cite that as one example. And so there is -- I'm sure they've gone away with a private meeting

like relying on a Russian translator and Putin's translator with an entirely different perspective of whatever was said. So to me is -- this is a very bothersome thing, and particularly just kind of do it completely unscripted.

MR. BLITZER: Director Brennan, have you in all your years in government heard of an American president speaking with a Russian or Soviet leader with only a Russian interpreter, government interpreter present, has that ever happened as far as you know?

MR. BRENNAN: I don't know of any other instances. There may have been some. And it wouldn't be surprising if a president pulls aside the British prime minister or, in this instance, Angela Merkel or something and had a one-on-one conversation, first of all you don't have a translation issue, as Jim said is very important. But for meeting with somebody like the Russian president in this environment right now you want to make sure that in order to protect the U.S. and protect the president you have someone there who has a record of the conversation and you can go back and make sure that in fact it was understood what was said. But to have this one-off and rely on the Russian translator -- and who knows what was said there, and quite frankly I think there are concerns that sometimes what Mr. Trump says happens is not exactly what happens.

And so you -- I'm not saying a translator would, you know, counter that. But I think it just raises again concerns about what else may be going on between Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin that is being held behind either closed doors or outside of public view.

MR. BLITZER: After that meeting, the meetings that the President had with Putin in Hamburg at the G20 summit, the president said that -- suggested they talked about creating a joint U.S.-Russian cyber security unit. Later the president seemed to back away from that. But now the Russian government is saying that those talks are under way, a special presidential envoy from the Russians on cyber security has been meeting with the Americans and "the talks are underway." Is that a good idea?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, we've all tried to have our dialogues with the Russians. I certainly did when I first -- when I served as DI Director my first engagements with a Russian counterpart is in 1992, and what I found is for dialogue for them is a one-way street, you know, give us

what you got. And they are not going to reciprocate and they're not going to do anything that in any way compromises them or gives us insight into what they're doing, and they will use it as an opportunity to gain intelligence on us. So I am very skeptical about this.

MR. BLITZER: You agree?

MR. BRENNAN: I've gotten burned many, many times by the Russians who would say one thing, promise one thing and do the exact opposite. That said, I do think it's important for us to maintain a dialogue with the Russians on counterterrorism and Mike Pompeo said that last night, fully agree. We did it during the Obama administration, and during the Obama administration we also had cyber dialogue with them but nothing along the lines of something that we're going to cooperate with them and, you know, guarding against cyber intrusions into electoral processes, that was just absurd. But I am with Jim as far as being mindful of what the Russians, you know, will not do and what they do. But I don't believe that we should shut down that discussion and dialogue. There are issues related to Internet norms and standards and other types of things that I think could be productive.

MR. BLITZER: Let's go back in history just a little bit, last year, Director Brennan, when you were the CIA Director you delivered what was described as an eyes-only message to President Obama that Russian President Putin was directly and personally involved in the effort to disrupt the U.S. presidential election. If you could walk us through that, what led you to that determination?

MR. BRENNAN: My intelligence experience and good counsel with Jim Clapper and my other colleagues the Intelligence Community that as was borne out by the Intelligence Community assessment that we put out in January. Underscored the Intelligence Community assessment, FBI, NSA, CIA and DNI that Mr. Putin had authorized this. And, as you can imagine, those types of assessments are built upon an array of intelligence sources, information as well as experience. And the expertise, and I will say, I know I'm biased, but CIA has the absolute best analysts in the U.S. government bar none especially on Russia, and they know exactly what the types of things are that the Russian intelligence service would do and what would require the authorization from Mr. Putin. So you put all that together and it becomes then crystal clear to us that Mr. Putin was the one who had directed

this to take place

MR. BLITZER: You had high confidence in that as well?

MR. CLAPPER: Absolutely.

MR. BLITZER: Because, as you know, the President, even recently, says you guys got it wrong, not just you personally, but the U.S. Intelligence Community got it wrong with weapons of mass destruction leading up to the Iraq War in 2003, so he's skeptical.

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I'll just say and John pick up the pieces for me here but. When we briefed then President-elect Donald Trump on the 6th of January, Trump Tower, my first and undoubtedly last soldier in the Trump Tower, the -- what we did do is to give him the benefit of the evidence, which of course we cannot share in public and haven't shared in public.

MR. BLITZER: You gave it to him though.

MR. CLAPPER: Absolutely. And which I thought was pretty compelling and we didn't get a lot of pushback and none of the 400-pound guy in a bed in New Jersey stuff, I didn't hear any of that at the time. Now, since then of course in public discourse, you know, he's discounted that and I was particularly distressed by a foreign country, in Poland, disparaging his own Intelligence Committee which I -- to me put him in a great disadvantage when he's a run up to his meeting with President Putin.

MR. BLITZER: Director, because he does not just once or twice but several times as General Clapper says disparages the U.S. Intelligence Community and brings up the weapons of mass destruction issue.

MR. BRENNAN: And we talk about the intelligence professional as people who bring inconvenient truths and facts and assessments to policymakers. We've had that experience for many, many years. And sometimes policymakers are rather selective in terms of cherry picking the intelligence they like and the intelligence they don't like.

Now, it's interesting that Mr. Trump and others will point to U.S. intelligence when it comes to North Korea or when it comes to Iran or Syria or other areas.

But when it is inconsistent with what I think are some preconceived notions as well as maybe preferences about what the truth would be, then the intelligence community assessments, the workforce and the profession are disparaged, and that's when Jim Clapper's blood and my blood boils because we feel a particular affiliation and for the hard working women and men throughout the intelligence community who labor every day and sacrifice in ways that the fellow citizens will never know. And when someone at that level takes shots at them unfairly Jim and I tend to speak out.

MR. BLITZER: You want to elaborate on that?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I was kind of hopeful that after you got rid of the two chief Nazis, John and me then maybe, you know, things would have improved.

MR. BLITZER: Well, let me --

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: For those of our friends here and our viewers here in the United States.

MR. CLAPPER: It is liberating to be a former, you know.

MR. BLITZER: This is what he said in a tweet, and I'll let both of you respond, on January 11th, this is then president-elect of the United States. "Intelligence agencies should never have allowed this fake news to leak into the public. One last shot at me. Are we living in Nazi Germany." When you heard that --

MR. CLAPPER: Well, that prompted me to call him, what did I have to lose at 9 days left, but I couldn't let that reference pass for exactly the reason that John said. I mean, that was a terrible insulting upfront, not just -- not to me or John or, you know, the seniors, we get paid the big bucks to take that, but I'm talking about the rank and file, people in the trenches, men and women, the patriots in the intelligence community, and that was completely inappropriate and over the top and I had to do something about it.

I was amazed he took the call. And I was actually hopeful after that when I learned that the first place he decided to visit after the inauguration was CIA.

I thought maybe I got through, naive me. And, you know, he was okay for a couple of minutes, then got off on, you know, the size of his crowd in the mall (phonetic) and all that, and to me having spent 34 years in the military it would have been exactly the same had he gone out to Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington and stood in front of that hallowed place and said the same thing.

And, by the way, if John and I are being too subtle here, let us know.

(Laughter)

MR. BLITZER: You know, it wasn't just that tweet because he also said this subsequently, this is the president-elect, "It was just disgraceful that the intelligence agencies allowed any information that turned out to be so false and fake. That's something that Nazi Germany would have done and did do." So it wasn't just once he was bringing up Nazi Germany, it was at least twice.

MR. BRENNAN: Yeah, he was alleging and claiming that it was intelligence professionals that were leaking this information.

MR. BLITZER: He was talking -- we're talking about that dossier that was unsubstantiated.

MR. BRENNAN: Yeah, and -- on no basis. And to another point as far as the continued disparagements of the profession and the workforce, what message does that send to people overseas when the United States has to go to our partners and allies and say U.S. intelligence has this information and has this assessment and we're looking for their support. What does it say as far as, you know, when we have something about our adversaries that our adversaries can say, well, that's U.S. intelligence, you already say that it's not worth, you know, the paper it's written on. And look at what happened in the Cuban Missile Crisis how U.S. intelligence was so important be able to have the stare down with the Russians. And over the course of all our history U.S. intelligence has provided policymakers what they need in order to push back against our adversaries as well as to get the support we need. And so these types of comments are just disgraceful, never should have happened, and the people who and the person who said that should be ashamed of himself.

MR. BLITZER: What was his reaction when you called him?

(Applause)

MR. CLAPPER: Well, his reaction was thanks but, you know, his main interest, and I think the reason he took the call was he wanted me to put out a statement rebutting the contents of the dossier, which I couldn't and wouldn't do.

MR. BLITZER: Why? Why couldn't you do that? Why couldn't you put out a statement?

MR. CLAPPER: The whole point of the dossier by the way was we felt an obligation to warn him to alert to him to the fact that was out there. That was the whole point. We didn't -- you know, and some of the difficulties of the tradecraft issue here was the inability to corroborate all of the second, third order assets that were used to collect that information. So we did not include it as a formal part of our assessment because we didn't because of that reason. And that was the main point of the dossier, but it certainly wasn't in a position to corroborate or not what was in it.

MR. BRENNAN: The dossier wasn't used at all to undergird the analysis and the assessment. And Jim Comey presented it separately. So again it wasn't an Intelligence Community document.

MR. BLITZER: You created, convened a secret task force to deal with the Russian meddling in the U.S. presidential election, but a former senior Obama administration official widely quoted as saying that the administration choked and didn't do enough. Did you do enough with the information you had in telling the Russians not just to stop it but issue some major retaliatory action given what you believed was Russian interference in the US democratic process?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, was that for me or John.

MR. BLITZER: Either one of you.

MR. CLAPPER: Well --

MR. BRENNAN: -- first.

MR. CLAPPER: I'm sorry. It's always easy to do the coulda woulda shoulda after the fact. And in thinking back over my career I've had other cases, I did Khobar Towers investigation, I did Hasan shooting at Fort Hood, and one thing I've learned from doing things like that post-event critiques, you can never ever go back and recreate exactly contemporaneous environment that led people to make the decisions they made. I feel we did a lot, yes, you could always say we should have done more earlier. I thought it was very important that the statement of J Johnson and I put out on the 7th of October was a fairly direct scription done before attribution, done before a month before the election.

Unfortunately that got overtaken by the Access or Excess Hollywood, as I call it, revelation on the audio tape of then Candidate Trump. And that came out the very same day, so that emasculated what was really an important message to the American electorate. And the reason we felt so strongly about that is sitting on this and not allowing, not sharing to the extent, the maximum extent we could with the public.

I think John has pointed out, and rightfully so, we did see reconnoitering, if I can call that, in voter registration systems of some -- of at least 21 states, I think it got up as high as 39, you might wonder what they had planned to do about that. John spoke to his opposite number, President Obama, pretty (inaudible) exchange with Putin about cutting it out. And of course we did do the sanctions on the 29th of December which I always considered a good first step, and we were all hopeful that the next administration would pick that up and follow up on those -- on the measures we took, John.

MR. BRENNAN: I thought Avril Haines did an excellent job this morning articulating the different types of things we we're doing to try to protect the electoral infrastructure in the states and Jeh Johnson in Homeland Security working with state and local officials also sending clear signals to the Russian that this is unacceptable. I spoke to Bortnikov, Alexander Bortnikov, the head of the FSB in early August and threw a hard high one at him and saying that if in fact you're doing this there is going to be serious consequences and then the president -- and then speaking to Putin.

We also then were preparing for what we could do to retaliate against them, but don't forget, we're in the

middle of a rather contentious election and we were trying to monitor what the Russians were planning and doing because we wanted to keep a sense of what it was that we needed to frustrate and thwart. And, you know, people have criticized us and the Obama administration for not coming out more forcefully in saying it. Now President Obama would beat his chest and say the Russians are trying to get Mr. Trump elected, I don't think that would have went over well in many areas because he is the head of the Democratic Party. So trying to balance this and trying to prevent the Russians from doing what they were trying to achieve. And I do think a number of things we did made the Russians take a pause and not do all the things that they could have done.

MR. CLAPPER: Another point I would add is, another thing that weighed on us a bit was if we make a big thing of this, making a big thing, or the President making a primetime address or something, a television address to the nation about it, would that only serve to hype, magnify or amplify what the Russians were doing or dignify it, and there was the concern of course about putting a hand on the scale that if such a statement would put the hand on the scale in favor Hillary Clinton as opposed to Donald Trump.

MR. BLITZER: But the argument has been made, you guys didn't do more because you simply assumed Hillary Clinton was going to be elected and then the country would move on. You've heard that?

MR. BRENNAN: I've heard it.

MR. CLAPPER: Yeah, I've read it, yeah.

MR. BRENNAN: As intelligence professionals we had a job to do, we had to continue to monitor what the Russians were doing and how we could stop them and frustrate them, bringing things to policymakers. I brought it to the Gang of Eight right away, we kept the Congress informed, so there was ongoing interaction with the senior most levels of government. But also remember, this is a counterintelligence investigation, we were trying to find out who the Russians might been working with within the United States in order to realize their ends.

So there's -- there were lot of sensitivities to this. And one of the things I hope that the intelligence committees in both the Senate and the House do is take a look at what happened. We had to figure all this out.

There was no playbook for this. What do you do as far as public announcements? What do you do as far as congressional notifications, what do you do as far as pushing back against adversaries. One of the things I've recommended to the Senate Intelligence Committee is that maybe there should be a requirement in the future that before all presidential and congressional elections, 120 days before, the director of National Intelligence and a director the FBI should say exactly what's the state of cyber intrusions that are designed to compromise the integrity of the electoral system. I think that will help in terms of making sure that there's going to be a rigor and a process in order to deal with what I think is going to be a phenomenon that we're going to be facing.

MR. CLAPPER: And another benefit of doing that is that it would no longer be a matter of discussion, it would simply be mandatory. If the intelligence community, law enforcement community detected evidence of any interference whatsoever that would mandatorily be a law that required that to be reported rather than getting involved in these arguments about the politics and trying to keep things bipartisan, doing all these kind of things and not putting your hand on the scale, not amping up or down or not doing this. And as John said, this is new territory, new uncharted seas here that we were trying to navigate. And you can fault us all I guess again in the coulda woulda shoulda department.

MR. BRENNAN: I think we did pretty damn well, and I think a lot of that is due to the tremendous leadership of Jim Clapper who is the epitome, for me, of a Director of National Intelligence who has the breadth of experience, the wealth of knowledge as well as just the ability to engage with the executive branch, legislative branch and others. And I think in a very difficult period of time we were able to do whatever we could in the manner that we thought was most appropriate.

MR. CLAPPER: Thanks.

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: You said that there was evidence that the Russians were also fooling around in various states.

MR. CLAPPER: Right.

MR. BLITZER: Is there any evidence that even one ballot was changed as a result of that?

MR. CLAPPER: So I'm glad you asked that question, thanks to the questions we'd like to say on the Hill. Very important distinction here. We saw no evidence from our sources of messing with voter tallies which we made clear in both the classified and the unclassified version of our report that we put out to the public on the 6th of January. We had no way, we had not the authority, the expertise, the capability to gauge whether that had -- whether the Russian interference had any impact on the election at all, that's not a charter for -- something for the intelligence community do. And it will be pretty hard unless you go out and, you know, how individual voters made decisions or made a decision about whom to vote for and whether any of the multi-faceted things the Russians did. And it wasn't just the hacking, the social media trolls, fake news, the very aggressive sophisticated propaganda efforts by RT, the totality of this and what impact that actually had on the election we had no way of gauging that.

MR. BLITZER: You want to add anything?

MR. BRENNAN: No.

MR. BLITZER: You spoke earlier about your blood boiling. You also said --

MR. BRENNAN: -- temper.

MR. BLITZER: Also said earlier in the week that it made my blood boil a bit when you heard the President say it was a great honor for him to meet with Putin. Would you like to elaborate?

MR. BRENNAN: Well, this was in the -- just a photo op basically before Mr. Putin and Mr. Trump had their meeting and exchanging pleasantries, which is fine, you do that. But then when I saw Mr. Trump lean over and say to Mr. Putin it's a great honor to meet you, and this is Mr. Putin who assaulted one of the foundational pillars of our democracy, our electoral system, that invaded Ukraine, annexed Crimea, that has suppressed and repressed political opponents in Russia and has caused the deaths of many of them, to say upfront, person who supposedly knows the art of the deal I thought it was a very, very bad negotiating tactic. And so I felt as though it was not the honorable thing to say.

I served for 6 presidents and had tremendous respect for all of them in terms of trying to do what's right for this country. I think Jim served for 25, 26 president, is that right, Jim?

(Laughter)

MR. CLAPPER: It was tough with U.S. grant, yeah.

(Laughter)

MR. BRENNAN: But -- and I disagree with some of the policies, but I was the intelligence professional. But I must say that there are disappointments that I see in terms of what Mr. Trump is doing on the international stage that I think does pose a serious question about how he is keeping safe our national security.

MR. CLAPPER: I will say, you know, actually speaking I like this, but actually speaking publicly is actually kind of painful for me, I've served every president in the trenches of intelligence ever since and including John F. Kennedy, I've been a political appointee in both Republican and Democratic administrations, spent 34 years in military, two tours in -- combat tours in Vietnam. So my instincts are, professional instincts are loyalty to the president's commander in chief.

And I try to impress that upon him when I spoke with him. I said you are inheriting a national treasure in the form of the Intelligence Community and the tremendous capability, the dedication, the patriotism, men and women who serve every day, many of whom in harm's way. And, you know, you stood in front of a place honoring those who paid the ultimate. So it's very hard, very, very painful for somebody like me to speak like this. And I think that in itself is sad commentary.

MR. BLITZER: Director Brennan, the president's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner, failed to disclose several meetings with Russians and others, for that purpose he's now corrected the records. Some have suggested he should have his security clearances at least suspended if not revoked. How do you feel about that?

MR. BRENNAN: Well, he's had obligations to report those meetings. Whether or not he either misunderstood the questions or have gotten -- I don't know,

I don't want to pass judgment on that. But that's the type of thing that if there was somebody in CIA that did not disclose those things you would review it and you would talk to the person and try to then adjudicate it. And depending upon the seriousness you might separate them from access to classified information or not. But, you know, it raises questions about what was the motivation behind or was there motivation behind not disclosing it or was it an oversight. Again I don't prejudge it.

MR. BLITZER: General.

MR. CLAPPER: Yes, I agree with what John said.

MR. BLITZER: You don't see a problem there?

MR. CLAPPER: With what?

MR. BLITZER: That he didn't disclose all those meetings.

MR. CLAPPER: Well, yeah, I do see a problem with it. I'm not just concurring what Johnson. I think at a minimum you would -- if it were just an employee in the workforce you would at least suspend the clearance until you've had the opportunity to investigate, adjudicate what the circumstances were. I mean, some of these failures, you know, are memory failures or, I forgot whatever, okay, you have allow for that. But I do think the appropriate thing here is take a pause and at least suspend clearance until you've had the opportunity to investigate and decide whether the clearance should be restored or not.

MR. BLITZER: Director Brennan, you said -- used the word, the tough word during your testimony, treason. Explain what you were referring to.

MR. BRENNAN: I was asked the question, I forget who on the House Intelligence Committee, about Soviet intelligence MO activities. And I was talking about how they cultivate relationships. And frequently they will do it under the guise of some other cover, whether it's be business, you know, commercial or, you know, diplomatic, whatever, and they try to establish a rapport with an individual. And sometimes people will cooperate with them, may not even be a Russia, might be something else. And then they get individuals to go beyond what they should in terms of either what they discussed or maybe documents they share. And the Russians do that not just with, you know,

U.S. government targets but also in business, going after intellectual property rights and other things. And a person frequently will be fooled then by the Russian overtures and they get down a path and all of a sudden they have this relationship with this individual that has gone beyond what was appropriate for their position.

And so I was trying to explain that people will sometimes go down that treasonous path doesn't mean that they commit treason, it's just that they're along that line. And thankfully the smart people when they realize that they say, wait a minute, I need to report this to the authorities of my agency, or to the FBI, whatever else. But some will just continue along it. And I think that's what the FBI investigation is looking at, who was going along the path wittingly or unwittingly and what they might have done to compromise the security of this country as well as to violate U.S. law.

MR. BLITZER: How vulnerable is the U.S. right now to Russian cyber attacks going ahead in future elections?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I think we have a problem here. There's a real concern on, and believe me, the Russians are not going to just do this is a one-off, they are going to be emboldened now to push the envelope even further. For them this is an symmetric weapon they can use to undermine us and undermine our -- the foundations of our system. So they're going to be back, election. And next time they don't care, it could be the Republicans next time, that's why this is -- and this to me is the big story here and a thing that as a nation we should be concerned about. I don't care democrat, republican, doesn't make any difference. We need to defend ourselves against these assaults on our system. And I was frankly taken aback during the course of the run up here when we were starting to see this activity, the pushback that Jeh Johnson got when here engaged with state election officials about hey we don't want any help from the feds. And so that attitude has got to be overcome. And the voting apparatus at large in this country needs to be a part of the critical infrastructure and the protections that that entails.

MR. BRENNAN: Russian interference in our election or others' interference in election really has two principal dimensions, one is in the cyber realm, and that's why there are a lot more opportunities now to do things in a nefarious way in that cyber domain to try to influence

elections or influence political developments. But the Russians also are experts in active measures and trying to co-opt members of the media or try to support political parties with (inaudible) other types of things. What we have seen them do in the European theater for many, many years. And so one of the things that the intelligence community was worried about was are we going to be seeing other types of Russian efforts to exploit the election season and using some of these other traits and not just in the cyber realm. So this is something that I think we have to be vigilant about and put up safeguards to protect the foundations of our democracy.

MR. BLITZER: Yesterday we heard your successor, CIA Director Mike Pompeo really go hard in condemning what the Russians are doing. Russia likes to stick it to America. He said -- here's the question, General Clapper, do you believe that President Trump takes this threat from Russia seriously enough?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, it's hard to tell, you know, I sometimes wonder whether we're even what he's about is making Russia great again, you know. I really wonder about that sometimes, whether he does take it as seriously as clearly I think Dan Coats and Mike Pompeo both do. And that's a real concern.

Now, again truth in advertising, long history of -- with the Russians, none of which has been positive. So maybe I'm not the most objective observer here but I think Russian is an existential threat to this country. What we don't mention very often is the very aggressive modernization program they're embarked on with their strategic nuclear capability, some of these exotic weapons they're pushing. Their very aggressive counter-space program. And, by the way, just for good measure, they've in violation of the INF treaty. So Russia is an adversary, that's all there is to it, and they are going to do everything they can to undermine us.

MR. BLITZER: You rarely -- the President rarely criticizes Russia, why?

MR. BRENNAN: You have to ask him, but when I think about all the negative things he said about the intelligence community and I think about the things that he said about Putin and Russia, that seems to be incongruous as far as what the President of the United States should be saying and doing at this time.

I'd like to think that the intelligence community, in fact I'm confident that they're continuing to highlight the risks associated with the Russian behavior around the world and what we need to do to counter it. I think Mr. Putin has a rather simplistic prism, zero-sum game, and that's why when Mike Pompeo said, yesterday they tried to just stick it to us I think they see that if the U.S. is weakened or has diminished influence in certain parts of the world it just accrues to their benefit, and that's why I think when -- when they see what's happening now in the United States here, that we've become, you know, so consumed obviously with this issue about what the interference was in the election and how it's making our system of government in some respects dysfunctional because we can't pass legislation, we can't do other things, I think Mr. Putin probably is crowing that it had an effect on this country that is hurting us which only accrues to their benefit.

MR. BLITZER: I raise the question because Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leader in the House, a member of the what we called the Gang of Eight who's briefed on the most sensitive intelligence information she said this and it really, you know, startled me. She asked this question, what do the Russians have on Donald Trump politically, personally or financially.

MR. CLAPPER: Well, hopefully Special Counsel Mueller will get to the bottom of that.

MR. BRENNAN: Yes, I agree. I would like to think that we all, all Americans want to get this behind us because it is hurting us. I like to think that Mr. Trump and other people in the White House would like to get this behind us. The best way to do that is to have as much transparency as possible. If there is nothing to hide there then they should cooperate fully in an accelerated fashion with the special counsel and others. But I think time after time after time one only comes away with the impression that there is a resistance to having more information come out, and that just feeds suspicions. And I do think -- I'm hoping that this is going to, you know, be addressed sooner rather than later in terms of what is there. If there's nothing there, let's move on. But this is where the work of Robert Mueller is critical to our future as a country because, you know, in some respects we're a government and a nation in crisis right.

MR. BLITZER: You have confidence in the special counsel?

MR. BRENNAN: Absolutely.

MR. BLITZER: You both worked with him for a long time when he was head of the FBI.

MR. CLAPPER: Absolutely, that was a inspired choice.

MR. BRENNAN: They don't come any better.

MR. CLAPPER: And nobody better than Bob Mueller who is a straight shooter and will not be intimidated by any --

MR. BRENNAN: And if he's any fired by Mr. Trump or attempted to be fired by Mr. Trump, I hope I really hope that our members of Congress, elected representatives are going to stand up and say enough is enough and stop making apologies and excuses for things that are happening that really flout I think our system of laws and government.

(Applause)

MR. BLITZER: When you say enough is enough what will -- if he's fired and he's the President of the United States, he could tell Rosenstein to fire him if he wants, but if he's fired what would you want Congress to do?

MR. BRENNAN: First of all, I think it's the obligation of some executive branch officials to refuse to carry out some of these orders that again are inconsistent with what this country is all about. But I would just hope that this is not going to be a partisan issue that Republicans, Democrats are going to see that the future of this country is at stake, and there needs to be some things done for the good of the future.

MR. BLITZER: We have limited amount of time and we're going to have some questions from the audience as well. But let's get through a few other issues right now.

When you were Director of National Intelligence what kept you up at night the most? What did you worry about the gravest national security threat to the United States?

MR. CLAPPER: The Congress.

(Laughter)

MR. CLAPPER: Only kidding, only kidding, only kidding. I think the biggest thing rather than a particular -- I'm just kidding, I see Chairman Thornberry out there doing daggers there, I'm just joking.

I think the thing that to the extent that I didn't get that much sleep and I realize I'm making up for it now but is what I didn't know. If you're on to a, let's say a terrorist plot, invariably you're not going to know everything there is to know, but at least if you've got a start on it you have some insight that you can turn resources, more collection, whatever it takes, to gain more insight, more information on what that particular threat is.

And the one -- the thing I always worried about, what is it they don't know, what is it we have no clue about. That's I think more than any particular -- I mean, you can conjure up all kinds of scenarios --

MR. BLITZER: Well, let me ask Director Brennan. Is North Korea the greatest threat to the United States right now?

MR. BRENNAN: Well, as was said, I think there is a need to be able to address the North Korean problem this time. And there is competition for what's the greatest threat. You know, those are things that need to be taken care of in the near term, the terrorist threat, thing that would worry me a lot is the increasing dependence of everyone on the digital domain and how increasing dependencies we have on it and the vulnerabilities that are there and all the actors that could try to bring that down. Biological agents are something that I'm concerned about as well. But in addition I think there are things that are over the horizon. The wave of automation in the coming years is going to have a profound political, economic, social, cultural impact on all of our lives. And I don't think we're ready for the disruptive impact of that automation. And it's around the globe.

So I think we have to be anticipating how the technological, scientific and other developments are going to affect our lives. And it's not just, you know, the latest threat from a terrorist group or a nation state,

it's a societal and global changes.

MR. CLAPPER: Those may be contrarian view but I actually don't consider North Korea yet an existential threat in the same way that Russia is. I mean, neither they nor we know whether these long-range missiles will work or not, it almost doesn't matter. We have to take them seriously. And I do worry about some of the rhetoric sometimes because one of the things I learned, I followed Korean Peninsula for a long time, ever since I served there is a J2 in early '80s. And then when I got to go there in November 14 I was blown away by the magnitude of the paranoia that exists in North Korea. And everywhere they look they see enemies. And so conclusion, I came away with one, they are not going to give up those nuclear weapons, that was my first White House issue talking point, was denuclearize. Well, that was a non-starter for them.

Secondly, I think we all look to the Chinese and the leverage that they can exert on the Chinese -- on the North Koreans. Chinese will do so much, they don't like Kim Jong-un, they don't like the missile tests, they don't like the underground test, they don't -- and they certainly don't like the THAAD deployment. But what they dislike more is the thought of North Korea imploding and they lose their buffer state, which for them is a strategic imperative. So the Chinese will do some, they will put pressure on the North Korean, some, but not as much as we might like.

MR. BLITZER: With ISIS losing now in Mosul, increasingly in Raqqa, what's the impact on the ISIS threat to the U.S. homeland? This is for Director Bernnan.

MR. BRENNAN: The ability of ISIS to continue to support its external terrorist operations continues. The taking away of the territory that they had seized in Iraq and Syria certainly reduces the resource they have, the following they have, but they have been very sophisticated users of the Internet, being able to reconnoiter and to recruit and to incite and encourage. So I think there's going to be some latency there between the setbacks in the battlefield for ISIS and the ability for us to really stop a lot of these external efforts. But I must say there is tremendous work that is being done day in and day out by the police, intelligence, security other services. But ISIS is I think going to be determined to continue to explore and pursue those external operations.

MR. BLITZER: Do you believe there could be another 9/11?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I'll go on record and say no, I don't think an attack of that magnitude and complexity is possible. I think, you know, we're smarter than we were prior to 9/11 but that's not to say we don't have a concern here from two standpoints, one, what John talked about, the ideology which is still there. And as Tony Thomas mentioned, made a lot of progress on attacking the attributes or (inaudible) of ISIS as a nation state, its physical dimensions. But that ideology is still out there, and that's what's had an impact in this country.

And the other thing of course are the simplicity of the weapons, using trucks, knives, whatever is available to westerners, that's going to continue to be a challenge -

MR. BLITZER: We're going to take some questions, but do you believe there could be another 9/11?

MR. BRENNAN: It's much more difficult for terrorist groups to operate here today than it was prior to 9/11 because of the great work of people like Mike Hayden and Mike Chertoff in the aftermath of 9/11 to make this a much less hospitable environment for them. So I don't believe -- although anything is possible, carrying out an attack of strategic consequence, not like 9/11, that -- is really going to be much more difficult for them today, that's not to say they are not still going after it, they have a fixation on aviation Al Qaeda as well as ISIS. They want to bring down an airliner, they want to bring down an airliner over U.S. airspace. But because of the great work that has been done, the safeguards that have put in place, the prophylactic measures, I think that this country has a lot be proud of --

MR. BLITZER: And what startled me here in Aspen is the Secretary of Homeland Security, General Kelly, saying that they are developing these new technologies for these laptops to get through security at airports, and if they blow it up at 35,000 feet it's going to blow up that plane.

MR. CLAPPER: Well that's underscore the need for vigilance and to try to stay a step ahead of them, well, particularly with all the technological opportunities they would have to exploit.

MR. BLITZER: Any questions from the audience? Please stand. Go ahead. You got a microphone. Go ahead, you go first.

MS. BRENNAN: Margaret Brennan, CBS News. I would like the question to go to both of you gentlemen, the Trump administration has talked about potentially what to do with those compounds that were seized by the Obama administration that belong to Russia. They've talked about either allowing the Russians to sell them, there's this idea that possibly even giving them back could be on the table, the Russians want them.

I'd like to know, since these compounds were ransacked, according to reports, before U.S. officials got there, what was happening there? What would giving them back to Russia actually mean? And should the Trump administration be considering this at all?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I'm not sure I understand why we're even having this dialogue because, you know, what have the Russians done to deserve getting it back. The (inaudible) on the Eastern Shore of Maryland is just a intelligence collection facility, that's all it is. And so I don't see any reason as a freebie to even talk about giving them back. Why?

MR. BRENNAN: I agree, that's what -- for what purpose? And at this stage, you know, maybe in the future if we're able to get on a better track with Russia over time, but at this time now I don't see any earthly reason to do that.

MR. BLITZER: Go ahead.

MS. SPAULDING: Suzanne Spaulding, former DHS, former CIA, former House and Senate Intelligence Oversight Committees. I want to start by thanking both of you for your long and distinguished careers in public service.

(Applause)

MR. BRENNAN: Thank you. You're longer.

MS. SPAULDING: And for having the courage to be here today. I want to ask you about the tension between the Intelligence Community and the White House, we've seen this before in the Bush administration with that mistrust

between the Intelligence Committee and the White House led to the creation of a parallel intelligence effort both analytic and operational in the Defense Department, outside of the normal oversight, outside of the normal legal framework for the Intelligence Community. My question is do you see that level of mistrust either today or in the future and what are the things that we as citizens and that our members of Congress in their oversight role should be on the lookout for?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, we may not be the right ones to comment on how it is now, so I do know that both DNI Coats and Director of CIA, Pompeo, spent a lot of time in the White House in the oval, and hopefully -- and I'm sure they're sensitive to that, to prevent it. But I really can't -- I suppose that's a possibility. I'm not aware of it and I certainly hope that doesn't happen again.

MR. BRENNAN: Intelligence professionals are a special breed, they really are. They serve selflessly, they do remarkable work, and they don't expect a lot of public recognition and accolades and ticker tape parades. But at the same time they like to think that the work that they're doing is appreciated and recognized and that they're making a difference as far as national security. I have no doubt that despite the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that they might have had over the last number of months that they continue to do their job to the best their ability, and they are some of the most talented and courageous people that this country has.

My concern is though that, you know, it's having an effect I think on some the families of intelligence professionals, you know, the wives or the husbands, the children who don't see their loved ones come home because they're working so hard, and they wonder why are you doing that if it's not be appreciated. You could make twice or three times the amount of money. The young college graduate who is thinking about going into law enforcement or CIA or intelligence and now has another offer and they say, well, if it's not being recognized or appreciated at least, has been disparaged, why should I go there?

So I think there are second and third order effects here. But I know that the CIA officers and NSA and others and FBI are continuing to do their work because they believe in the mission, they believe in keeping their fellow Americans safe. But over time this can have a very corrosive effect on the broader environment.

MR. CLAPPER: I think the men and women in the Intelligence Community will continue to convey truth to power even if the power doesn't necessarily listen.

MR. BLITZER: Go ahead.

MR. IOFFE: Hi. Juli Ioffe of the Atlantic. I've heard people in the intelligence community kind of buzzing about, I mean Wolf asked you what keeps you up at night, these people seem to be kept up at night by their Commander in Chief, the President, and see him as one of the main national security threats. Do you agree with that? And if so why and how? Thank you.

MR. BRENNAN: I can't speak to how they think. And I wouldn't -- you said -- characterized the president as a national security threat, no, there's lot of concern, I think we all want the administration and the president to succeed. But when we see things happening that really are, I guess, inconsistent with what it is that we have always ascribed to the office of the presidency as far as honesty, as far as integrity, as far as support for Intelligence Community folks, I think it does diminish in the eyes of many the credibility of that individual.

MR. CLAPPER: We are blessed in this country with, you know, three coequal branches of government and, you know, the national security apparatus is bigger than one person, even the President. So there are a lot of constraints happily built in to our system. But some of them are, as I said, are under assault. And so I just think it's bothersome to me personally.

MR. BLITZER: Go ahead. You have a microphone? Yes. Andrea.

MS. MITCHELL: Hi. Andrea Mitchell, NBC News and MSNBC. Thank you both for their -- everything that you've done. I'm wondering, looking back, whether you think that we could do more for Americans missing and held captive in places like Syria and whether you think there is prospects for getting Austin Tice out. There's a lot of talk because his parents are in the region right now. If there's anything more that CIA could do.

MR. BRENNAN: When I was at the White House as well as at CIA, I spent a lot of time, as Tom Bossert was mentioning yesterday, trying to what do we could, working

with our partners, working with our clandestine sources, trying to find out the location, the whereabouts, the well-being of Americans that have disappeared or were being held captive. We always need to do more.

The situation of Austin Tice is a very, very sad one, someone who is trying to give some insight to the world about what was going on inside of Syria and then he was seized. And I had talked with the Austin's parents several times, and they are devoted to their son. And as mentioned yesterday or this morning about Bob Levinson, former FBI agent whose whereabouts is still unknown, who was seized by the Iranians. We have to continue every day to just increase our efforts because we should leave no American behind, and this is something that I think this administration from talking to Tom and others they take very seriously and we just wish them success.

MR. GHETTI: Just seconding Ms. Valding's (phonetic) comments. I'm much appreciative of your services over the years. Adam Ghetti with Ionic Security.

On the topic of voter integrity and voting integrity, you both hit on it pretty clearly where it's really two separate issues, you can't determine why somebody voted one way but we can determine whether or not the vote was altered, the tallies were altered. The state-level collection of those tallies, I've been very involved with in Georgia as of late where a coalition of us got together, academics, industry and government to try to offer our services for free to help audit the systems before the election after the election. The state officials wanted no interest in that and gave us a letter back saying 6 months later from now let's have this conversation.

For you-all's professional advantage and in your experience is there any downside to there being a national level cryptographically assured audit trail to the vote such that it doesn't have the attribution of the voter and the attribution to vote but can guarantee that the votes that were placed were placed and unaltered.

MR. CLAPPER: Well, that's kind of a take-home question I think, I want to think about the implications of that. But I think as a general rule, general commentary that anything we can do to, you know, have some uniform standards of security across all 50 states and all the entities where there, voting activities go on, the fact that the very diffusion and diversity of our system

actually turned out to be a strength because it's been very hard to co-opt at least electronically or from cyber the votes in this country.

But I think DHS did a lot of great work on conveying to all of the states best practices the should be followed in securing our voter apparatus.

MR. BRENNAN: I think you want to leave with the states the responsibility to oversee the voting process, it's I think an inherent state right. I think what the national and federal government should do is to make available to those states the best tools, the best systems, the best capabilities that will safeguard and protect their voting systems as opposed to the federal government taking over it.

We already see a lot of tension right now as far as the federal government's request for voter information. There really is a fair amount of tension on this issue, but I do think that the federal government can assist and facilitate and even help to provide the types of capabilities, expertise, tools technology that is needed so that we have that confidence in the integrity of the voting process.

MR. BLITZER: Elise?

ELISE: Thank you. And to echo what everyone said about thanking you for your service. General Raymond Thomas, the head of U.S. Special Operations Command confirmed what some have been reporting for days that the president has decided to end the CIA program of training moderate rebels in Syria. I'm wondering what you think of the decision. I'm not sure how much you can say about the program. But does this signal the kind of final death in the coffin of efforts to support moderate opposition in terms of getting President Assad out? And do you see a scenario where there would be stability in Syria as long as President Assad stays? Thank you.

MR. BRENNAN: Well, just speaking broadly, it has been the U.S. government's position over the last seven years or so to support what's called the Free Syrian Army, the moderate opposition. The State Department provided assistance to it. It was the policy of the U.S. administration. And if there is a pulling back from the support to those Syrians who have fought and lost tremendous blood and treasure at the hands of Assad, if

they see that the United States is pulling back from them, what are their options, are they going to then gravitate toward the more the terrorist and extremist elements? These are individuals who had defected from the Syrian army, they are fighting against Assad who rained down chemical weapons on their families. And so I think it would be a mistake in terms of an abandonment of them. Hopefully that has not happened.

But I do think that there is a segment of the Syrian opposition that deserves support, deserves protection from the United States and the international community. And I do not believe that you're going to see any stable and secure future in Syria unless Assad passed the scene. There is a sequencing issue and I think that's what was talked about earlier. You know, you need to try to make sure you crush and destroy ISIS as well as Jabhat al-Nusra. But there's no way that Assad, the butcher of Damascus, should stay in power.

MR. BLITZER: We are all out of time but I have one -- time for one final question and both you can answer it if you want, serious question even though I use the word tweet. The president likes to tweet a lot on international issues, various global issues, what challenges, if any, does all of his tweeting, using this platform pose for the Intelligence Community?

MR. CLAPPER: Well, I think the practice of it is itself, opens up the possibility as a, you know, a counterintelligence vulnerability. And I do think it kind of wreaks havoc on the government trying to stay up with, you know, with the tweeting. And I also am beginning to believe that more and more people are getting jaded to it. You know, it's more for comic relief than a serious thing, which is bad. I got a tweet after Sally Yates testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee and the President said we choked. And, you know, if President Obama said to me after a congressional hearing you choked, I'd have been devastated, but this one, I didn't care.

MR. BRENNAN: And on a related point, over the course of my professional career I had a lot of beefs with the press, journalists in the media, there were things that I thought misrepresented what the facts were, and I had some lively and animated conversations and even raised voices. But part of what the Intelligence Community's mission was was to make sure that this great country can have a free and open press. And something that we have

fought for and many people have died for. And the effort to delegitimize the press and the media, so many of you here represent it, is something that we should not ever allow. And I know that as Americans we're not going to allow that effort because that is the beacon, that is one of the real foundational pillars of our free, open and democratic society, is to make sure that the American people can hear from those who have a responsibility, professional responsibility to call it like you see it. And so I just want to be able to say thank you for keeping up this effort and this fight because I think a lot of our country's future depends on your ability to do your job and do it well to the best of your professional standards. So thank you.

MR. BLITZER: Thank you. Let's give them a big round of applause. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

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