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SECURING THE HOMELAND

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Speaker 1:

Good morning, everyone. We're going to get started. If I can get you to start quieting down, find your seats, please. Pardon my voice. Change in altitude affects us all in different ways, and that seems to be the way it affects me. Welcome everyone to the 9th Annual Aspen Security Forum. We're proud you're here and thank you so much for coming out. You are our largest, one of our most diverse, and you're also our fastest registering audience, so thank you for that. We had to close registration about mid-June, which is a bit unusual. But that to me just highlights the importance of this forum, the importance of the conversations we're going to hold, and the eagerness to have those conversations. So I welcome you all. Look forward to engaging over the next 72 hours. Enjoy yourselves as we dive into some of the most important topics of our time. You're here because you care about those. Look to your left and your right. There's a partner next to you who cares about those as well. I hope you build that partnership this week and find a way forward to work on these issues in a bipartisan, nonpartisan fashion, and work to solve the national security issues of the day.

We look forward to engaging in the dialogues both here on stage and, of course, around. We ask, though, as you see we are at capacity crowd. The air wall is open. If you do have a dialogue you would like to take offline, that's great. We encourage it. Please take it outside. We encourage you to go to the Deloitte base camp tent where all sessions will be simulcast and your conversations there would not interrupt the conversations here in the room.

Pardon me again. So shifting to the subjects at hand here, I'd like to highlight our media partnership this year. For the second year running, we're in partnership with NBC news and MSNBC. Here to talk a bit about that partnership is Ms. Dafna Linzer. She's the managing editor for politics for NBC news and MSNBC. She has done a national security survey with her team over the past 12 months and she's here to deliver some of those results. After that, we'll jump right into conversations with Secretary Nielsen. Dafna, welcome.

Dafna Linzer:

Hi. Good morning, everyone. We are thrilled to be back here again this year. Could not be more proud of our partnership between the Aspen National Security Forum and NBC news and MSNBC. I want to just take a second to thank Rob, and of course, Clark, who's been a tremendous advocate of this partnership, and his team. They have worked so hard all through the year to make this happen. As many of you know, NBC News is very committed to national security reporting. Our work is deep and rich, enriched by our talent, expertise, our journalistic integrity. Our work is essential at all times, but perhaps never more than now, when the truth is questioned from the highest office and efforts are underfoot to chip away at institutions.

In addition to our stellar journalism, as Rob mentioned, we've invested a lot in national security polling. We're the only ones who are doing national security polling in the country. We're doing it quarterly and we released the latest results in conjunction with the forum. I want to share some of those with you

today. The biggest takeaway for me, and hopefully this is something that will give some of you comfort in very divisive times, on most national security issues, Americans largely agree with on another, especially when it comes to the safety of the country and issues that they are concerned about. Let me take you some of the highlights.

68% of Americans consider Russia to be unfriendly and an enemy, and that number is up 9% from when we started this a year ago. There is no partisan divide here. 5% of Republicans or Republican leaners say Russia is an ally. 4% of Democrats do. More importantly, a plurality of Americans think Russia, more than any other nation or group, currently poses the greatest immediate threat to the United States; more than North Korea, more than ISIS, more than China or Iran. For those of you working on safeguarding the integrity of the US election system, and I know the secretary will talk about this, fewer Americans are confident today than they were a year ago that the federal government is doing enough to prevent foreign influence in future elections. It's something Americans care deeply about. 45% of Americans told us that cyber attacks pose the greatest immediate threat to the United States; more than terrorist attacks, more than nuclear attacks, more than a conventional military attack. And that number is also up 10 points. Since we're coming off the NATO summit, let me share with you how Americans feel about this alliance. 8 in 10 Americans think being a member of NATO is good for the US. Only 15% think it's bad. Those numbers are unchanged, and there is complete shared sentiment across party lines.

You're about to hear from my colleague, Peter Alexander and Secretary Nielsen. As you listen to them, know that on immigration, there's wide agreement in this country as well. 70% think most undocumented immigrants working in the US should be offered a chance to apply for legal status. On the president's proposal for a border wall 53% of the country believe a wall along the entire border with Mexico is not a good idea.

I'm very proud of our work, our ability to share it with you all. Before we start, please help me welcome Jose Freig. He's the managing director of International Government Affairs and the Chief Security Officer for American Airlines. They're an important underwriter of this forum. And more importantly, he is a friend of Aspen and a member of Aspen Institute's Homeland Security Group. Please help me welcome Jose. Thank you.

Jose Freig:

Good morning. Thank you, Dafna, for that introduction. I really appreciate it. So I was really secretly hoping I was going to look out to the audience today and I would see every one of you in the American Airlines pajamas that we handed out in the back. I'm actually kind of disappointed. I was hoping to see some of the distinguished forumers wearing these pajamas. So look, from American Airlines's perspective, we're really happy to be here and certainly a proud underwriter, as Dafna mentioned.

At American Airlines, we are obviously the world's largest carrier. We have approximately 6,700 flights a day. We're really proud, frankly, of the relationship that we have day in, day out with the men and women at the Department of Homeland Security. And under Secretary Nielsen's leadership, we work very closely with our colleagues at the Transportation Security Administration, with Customs and Border Protection, and in the audience today, obviously TSA Administrator Pekoske is here. We thank him for his partnership with American. And Commissioner McAleenan, who is not in the audience today, but we thank CBP for their partnership. To that point, summer travel has been ... we have record number of travelers, and many of you are out at the airports, which is good for business, but certainly a challenge for our friends at TSA and CBP. So I just want to certainly give kudos to our friends at DHS for a very smooth summer thus far, and really helping us move passengers through the ecosystem that is a challenge at times, as we all want to travel, as we're all very impatient at times and we want to get through this security system. So thank you.

As far as new technology ... and in fact, just this morning, American continues to be forward leaning in this space. Just this morning we announced that we're in partnership TSA. We actually just employed new computer tomography technology at the checkpoints, which frankly, the way of the future. This technology will not only help our partners of TSA to be able to identify risk and threats and evolving threats as we go forward, but also help the industry move passengers through the ecosystem in a much faster fashion. So we're really proud of the fact that we're able to gift some of that technology. This morning we deployed that in New York's JFK terminal eight for American Airlines.

Lastly, on the CBP front, I just want to mention that we continue to work very closely with CBP, with Commissioner McAleenan and the leadership there. We're working very closely to look at the federal inspection services area to make sure that we're getting customers through the process as quickly as possible.

The threat obviously to global aviation is real. We will continue to hear that today from multiple speakers and distinguished panelists. All of us at American really appreciate the value and the partnership that we have with DHS and the rest of the agencies in the intelligence community to secure our skies.

Now, I have the pleasure of introducing someone that many of you know well and you see quite often on NBC and MSNBC, Peter Alexander. Peter is NBC's national correspondent and White House correspondent. He has been with NBC since 2004, and he has covered the White House since 2012. Peter was also instrumental in NBC's coverage of the 2016 presidential campaign. Peter has covered numerous breaking news events, from Afghanistan to Baghdad and others. A note for Peter that is really near and dear to his heart, Peter also regularly reports on a deeply personal story of his sister, Rebecca, who has Usher syndrome type 3. It's a rare genetic disorder robbing her of her vision and

her hearing in her mid-30s. So without further ado, help me introduce Peter Alexander. Thank you.

Peter Alexander: Hello, everybody. Thank you guys for being here. Good morning. Madam Secretary, thank you for being here as well, as we plug you in. Obviously we understand the critical mission the Department of Homeland Security has, a broad mission. Beneath you, the Secret Service, TSA, as we've been talking about. Homeland Security has a critical responsibility, so we're grateful for you spending time. And hopefully today we can peel back a couple leaves, peel back the curtain here and get a little inside take on what goes on behind the scenes at DHS and some of your thinking.

Let me start if I can, today, as we're here enjoying a little bit of breakfast, with what happens in your morning each day, what the morning update looks for you. What your morning briefing looks like. What the most pressing issues are facing the country that show up on that briefing list for you that you're told about, ones that require you to act on a daily basis.

Kirstjen Nielsen: Sure. It's a good question. I'm kind of laughing because sometimes they call that the Debbie Downer part of the day. We go through intel. We have a morning tempo where each of the components briefs out new emerging threats, or a different ... actually, we do both. We do the bad news and the good news. So we do the take down, we do the captures, we do the interdictions. But mostly we're focused on the emerging threats and then figuring out what we need to do to change our posture to mitigate it. We also have a couple operational VTCs we have a couple time a week with the component heads ... many of them are here today and I thank them for joining us ... to just make sure that we're synced. That's the opportunity to sort of raise those yellow flags, red flags. I like the yellow flags better because hopefully it gives us the opportunity to prevent the red flag.

Peter Alexander: So DHS, of course, now 15 years in. It was created after 9/11. I think there's an assumption among a lot of Americans right now that a 9/11 type threat is behind us. The assumption by a lot of people right now is that the biggest terrorist threat to the homeland is a homegrown lone wolf actor. Do you agree with that? First of all, is a 9/11 threat mostly behind us? And is the largest terrorist threat to the homeland right now a homegrown lone wolf type actor?

Kirstjen Nielsen: So I guess what I would say is I think there are still those who would like to have a big attack, a big phenomenal attack to promote their ideology, to promote their capability and ability. So I wouldn't discount that possibility, whether it's WMD or, as Jose mentioned, we still worry very much about aviation. We continue to see those perfecting their opportunities to attack us through aviation. What I would say is the threat has changed a lot. I worry a lot about cyber. I think the cyber attack surface is much bigger than the physical attack surface. It affects all of us, from a mom in a kitchen teaching her kids through a computer to a very advanced financial system. I think what we've seen with

terrorists is they have spread out. We've had a lot of success [inaudible 00:12:34]. The downside of that is the caliphate disappears. We see them reconstituting in other places, but mostly online. So what we see is them instructing followers online, bring your own device, grab any common element, do-it-yourself terror. So I think terror's gone viral in that sense.

I think the third big thing we're seeing that's different is nation states. We have a re-emergence of a nation state threat, which we haven't seen for quite some time at the extent that we have now. So DHS, what that means is we have to go from counter-terrorism to counter-threats. It's a much bigger panoply of personal threats. We've still got the bad weather, the bad bugs, the bad things, everything else that we work on. But from a people perspective, I think the terrorist threat has changed and expanded, and now we have different threat actors.

Peter Alexander: So let me ask you about some of the news of the day, since obviously people are waking up to the headlines surrounding the president's recent trip. We saw earlier this week President Trump met with Vladimir Putin. How'd he do?

Kirstjen Nielsen: You know, I think it's important to have that engagement. I think he's interested in continuing engagement. When we think about nation states, there are things we can work with them on, and things that perhaps we will disagree on. But I do think the engagement and finding a way to have a productive conversation is very, very important.

Peter Alexander: So how did the president do? America watched. He's clarified multiple times since.

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think he continues to work on the relationship. I mean, I think he's continuing to think about strategies, what's important, what is most important on the list to work with Vladimir Putin. Putin has a particular way in which he communicates. He has a particular goal in mind. He's very interested in being a strong power in his region, in his sphere, to counter American power. I think our motivations are slightly different. So I think it's ongoing. I think it's too early to tell, was it a good.

Peter Alexander: Let me ask you just for some clarity on some things. The president has cast doubt, as we've seen, on the intelligence community's conclusion that Russia interfered in the 2016 election. Even in his clarification this week, I was in the cabinet room, he accepted the finding but he said, "Could be other people also." So can you say definitely that during the campaign, Russia, at the direction of Vladimir Putin, launched an attack on our country, and that it was done to favor the election of Donald Trump?

Kirstjen Nielsen: What I would say is I don't think there's any question in the intel community or at DHS that Russians attempted to infiltrate and interfere with our electoral system. They have the capability. They have the intent. What we're doing at

DHS is to work with states to prepare on that election infrastructure piece. That's the piece we have lead on. But I don't think there's any doubt that they did it, and I think we should all be prepared, given that capability and will that they'll do it again.

Peter Alexander: But the question of it being at the direction of Vladimir Putin. Last ... I guess we're in July; in May, you said, "I don't believe that I've seen that conclusion" about the idea that Vladimir Putin directed it and that it was done with the intention of favoring Donald Trump. Do you want to clarify?

Kirstjen Nielsen: Well, sure, because just not to quibble, that wasn't exactly the question that was asked. It was one of those specific to the intel assessment, whether the president believed one part or another. What I would say is it's government actors, Russian government actors. I think we can all draw a conclusion what that means.

Peter Alexander: But the question specifically was, do you believe that it was done in favor of Donald Trump?

Kirstjen Nielsen: Oh, I see what you're saying.

Peter Alexander: The question was that it was done to favor Donald Trump. So do you want to clarify what you had said then? You said, "I don't believe that I've seen the conclusion that the specific intent was to help Trump win."

Kirstjen Nielsen: Right. So I haven't seen any evidence that the attempts to interfere in our election infrastructure was to favor a particular political party. I think what we've seen on the foreign influence side is they were attempting to intervene and cause chaos on both sides, whether it was in Charlottesville where we saw them on both sides, whether it's in Syria, both sides. So no, I would not necessarily say that was the purpose. I think the overall purpose is to sow discord and get us all to fight against each other, rather than understand who the enemy is.

Peter Alexander: But for clarity, the intelligence community did that have finding, right? Their finding was that it was in an effort to favor the president.

Kirstjen Nielsen: It was in an effort to attack certain political parties that we know about more than others. And so I think we'll continue to look and see what that means, and be prepared for the next time.

Peter Alexander: The president, as we noted, said that it could be other people also. Were other people responsible for that attack in 2016?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think what we look at, DHS, when we're looking at this year and then 2020, there are unfortunately other nation states that have the capability.

Peter Alexander: But for that attack, were the others involved in that attack, or was it Russia?

Kirstjen Nielsen: We have seen other nation states in foreign influence. We did not see other nation states involved in the election system meddling.

Peter Alexander: So that was Russia, we can agree?

Kirstjen Nielsen: Russia was absolutely attempting to interfere in our election systems.

Peter Alexander: The president was asked yesterday if Russia is still targeting the United States. A lot of people are concerned about the midterm elections coming up. So I guess a simple question is, is Russia still targeting the United States?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think we would be foolish to think they're not. They have the capability. They have the will. We've got to be prepared.

Peter Alexander: You told some state election officials a couple days ago the following: You said there are "no indications that Russia is targeting the 2018 midterms at a scale or scope to match their activities in 2016."

Kirstjen Nielsen: Yes.

Peter Alexander: Should Americans take assurance for that? And how can you judge intent, Russia's intent?

Kirstjen Nielsen: Well, I think we know their intent. Their intent is absolutely to interfere in our democracy.

Peter Alexander: But intent that it wouldn't be to match what they did two years ago.

Kirstjen Nielsen: I wouldn't say that. The question in that context was, what do we see today? It's July. We still have August, we still have September, we still have October. We have November. I think we should be absolutely prepared do assume that they will try to interfere in all 50 states.

Peter Alexander: So what are we doing about that right now? What can the DHS do actively to help stop that? And has the president, has he met with you personally and given you the directive to make sure that the US is preparing itself for an attack in the midterms from Russia, like the last one?

Kirstjen Nielsen: Yes. We have had meetings with the president. We have another one coming up. DHS plays a supportive role. We have a federal lean, but we play a supportive role with state and local election officials and secretaries of state who have the overall responsibility. I could go on and on in everything we do. We have a whole handbook of different services that we offer. But at a very high level, we're information sharing. We're giving them intel they need, technical assistance. And then we're helping them be prepared for instant

response. I'm happy to report, and was on Saturday, that all 50 states are now working with us. In some cases, they're using our services extensively. In other cases, they're growing capability organically. And in some cases, they're hiring outside expertise. But it's a complex system. The key is really to be very clear what the vulnerabilities are and to make sure we have redundancies built into the system.

Peter Alexander: We were talking about some of the new polling today that Dafna was saying before we got here. The latest polling from NBC just released says that 59% of Americans tell us they are not confident that the federal government is doing enough to prevent foreign countries from influencing our elections. That's a worse number than it was a year ago, in terms of confidence. So what's missing? What are Americans missing that's happening? Why should they take reassurance from what they've heard right now, that it's not going to be as bad as before?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think there's an important distinction there. One is the attacks on the critical [inaudible 00:20:03] systems, which is what DHS has led on, and that's the votes. We have no evidence votes were changed in the last election. That would be a marked increase in aggression from a foreign nation.

Peter Alexander: When you say change, you mean physically, numbers change? So not influence perhaps.

Kirstjen Nielsen: Not physically, but virtually, sure, sure.

Peter Alexander: But change in terms of the tally would change.

Kirstjen Nielsen: So you voted one way and it's changed to another way. We saw no evidence of that. And actually, our goal and all of our efforts working with state and locals is that every American's vote is counted and is counted correctly. I think that's important, both counted and counted correctly.

But on the CFI, it's a much broader conversation. It's not just in elections that they're meddling within our society. We see that through trade. We see that through diplomacy. We see that through academic institutions. It's a broad campaign to influence our democracy and set a discord.

I think the good news about that stat is to me, what it says is that Americans are hip to this campaign now. They understand that this is a partic- ...

Kirstjen Nielsen: This campaign now. They understand that this is a particular and very specific campaign against our democracy. So I'm actually encouraged by that number. I do think we need to do more as a government. It requires a whole of government because it's not just the elections, but I do think generally, you know, the way I look at it, Americans have a right to know who's saying what. The what is usually protected under the first amendment. This again is also

different than terrorists use of the Internet, but if your neighbors tell you five things, you're probably going to think differently if I tell you it's five Russian bots, right? So how do we unmask and how do we figure out what are those authentic sources for information.

Peter Alexander: On cyber, the cyber element of this, Vladimir Putin said just this week that he wanted to have a joint investigation effectively of cyber attacks in the US election. President Trump said he found that to be, in his words, an incredible offer. Is that a good idea?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I would just direct you to what Director Ray said last night. I think he said it quite well. There's a process that the special counsel will go through, the indictments will be carried through and that makes sense to me.

Speaker 2: For clarity for those who weren't here yesterday, Director Ray said that it was not high on his list of investigative tactics.

Peter Alexander: I want to ask you if we can about immigration. Obviously it's an issue that you have been prominently associated with in the course of the last several months. The president's zero tolerance policy. Did you know about the policy before Jeff Sessions announced it?

Kirstjen Nielsen: So it's, you know, this is one of the conversations where words actually matter. So bear with me for one second. Just to give a perspective, what I would say is our immigration system, border security system, unfortunately are just broken. So the ideals and the empirical truths that we have as Americans in this current system cannot be true at the same time. So kids should be with their parents. Countries should be able to protect borders. Governments should be able to protect communities. We as Americans believe we should protect those who are vulnerable populations, but the system is so broken you can't do it all at the same time. So the policy wasn't a policy in the sense that we have a law that says that if you come to our country illegally between ports of entry, you've broken the law. So it wasn't as much a policy as a decision to enforce the law across the board to encourage immigrants to go to ports of entry where that's a legal entry.

Now, that doesn't mean they have a right to stay in the United States if they don't have an asylum claim or other reason, but it was to try to discourage the trafficking, the smuggling, the TCOs, all the dangers on this journey. I mean, we have both a security mission here, but a very important humanitarian mission is, you know, we have 10,000 unaccompanied children right now in HHS care. That's 10,000 children whose parents sent them on this journey without any parental supervision, with smugglers, with traffickers, with other adults. They have no advocates, they're here alone. HHS is taking care of them, so we have to fix the system. I've been very closely, as you know, ad nauseum with Congress on a skinny bill, a big bill, a this this, a this bill to try to get them to fix the system because all of these things have to be true at the same time.

Peter Alexander: So in terms of the policy, I know you say the law that was announced the way it would be sort of acted upon in simple terms again though, did you know that there would be this new announcement that the White House, the administration would be acting on this policy when Jeff sessions announced it?

Kirstjen Nielsen: We, I think in the DHS community and DOJ community for many years, it had been discussed. What's not well understood is-

Peter Alexander: Did you get a heads up?

Kirstjen Nielsen: Well it's yes and no because we had always done this at DHS. In other words, we had always enforced the law. So the last administration enforced the law, which meant they also enforced the law against families. The administration before that enforced the law against families. So that part wasn't really new. So to the extent that the AG made that determination, what he was saying is, let's not exempt any class from prosecution that's coming here illegally.

Peter Alexander: So did you express concerns that young children would be separated from their parents? Was that something that you communicated?

Kirstjen Nielsen: We have to protect children. We have to make sure that the system allows us to keep children and families together. Right now, under the law and court cases, we cannot do that.

Peter Alexander: Did you express concerns at the time [crosstalk 00:25:19].

Kirstjen Nielsen: I have. I have testified seven times that they need to change the laws so that parents and children can be kept together.

Peter Alexander: Help me out here. Everybody knows it's hard to do your job. You're working in administration for a president who can make policy sometimes by Twitter, sometimes he just makes comments by Twitter that puts pressure on what you do on a day to day basis. I understand and know that you support his agenda, but what are the American people supposed to think when initially you say publicly that only Congress can fix the family separation policy and then days later the president signs an executive order that fixes it.

Kirstjen Nielsen: Well, if you remember the executive order, and I forget the exact title, but the title was, you know, giving Congress an opportunity to act. So it was trying to freeze the situation. So that, and I think at the time we were all very hopeful that Congress actually would act to enable us to keep families together under the law. What we're currently doing as you know, is there is no family separation occurring for the last four or five weeks since the president issued [crosstalk 00:26:19].

Peter Alexander: So no kids are being separated from their parents at the border at any point right now.

Kirstjen Nielsen: The only time kids are separated from the borders, three instances, and these have always been the instances where they've been separated. When we cannot guarantee that a parent or an adult is their in fact parent or legal guardian. When the child is in clear danger, sometimes, unfortunately, kids are traveling with adults, you can see visible abuse. We do take the time to make sure that they are okay. Then the third one is when an adult has to go to a criminal detention setting and this is why when we enforce the law against those illegal entries, they go there. So if you happen to fall in one of those categories, the last two, you will still be separated for the protection of the child, but we are no longer prosecuting at this time families who choose to illegally enter.

Peter Alexander: Can you understand the frustration though for Americans because the line that you communicated among others was that only Congress can fix this and the effort, but it's, as you just say, it's been fixed in the absence of Congress acting.

Kirstjen Nielsen: But which part is fixed? We have no border control now.

Peter Alexander: The families are not being separated. People were asking if family separation can be fixed.

Kirstjen Nielsen: But that's only one part of the puzzle. That's why it's complex. So what we do see in this recent court case, for example, with the children under five, 20% of the adults that came to the border with them were determined not to be fit to be reunited with those children,

Peter Alexander: Some of the parents it was simply because they had a DUI on their record. Is a DUI sufficient for an adult not to be with their child?

Kirstjen Nielsen: You know, I'd refer you to the court filing, but the vast majority of those 20 adults were either not parents, they were smugglers or traffickers. They were kidnapers. There was a murderer, there was a child exploiter, there was someone who was convicted of child abuse. So these are adults who in American society we would never place with American children. We owe the same protections to children from anywhere as a vulnerable population.

Peter Alexander: I know you've been down there, you've certainly seen the pictures on TV of these children that are being held in what appear to be like chain link cages. You've heard the audio played of some children that were crying behind closed doors. Was there ever a moment where you said to yourself, what are we doing here?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I say all the time, the system is broken. I do and I think Congress is a part of it, but I don't want to lose the push factor part.

Peter Alexander: Let me ask you about, but as it relates to the kids though, you've been down there, you've made trips to the border. I want to ask you if you've been

specifically to McAllen, Texas to the Ursula Patrol Processing Center where most of the family separations took place. You're there, you've seen this. You're a human. When you see that, did you think to yourself, this is not the way America acts. Did that ever cross your mind?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I say, this is crazy. This is a system that, look, we have a constitutional imbalance right now just to be clear. So if we back up, here's what's happening. We have Congress telling the executive branch, don't enforce the laws we passed. We don't have courage to fix them. We have the judicial branch who is neither operational nor legislative body saying, this is how we want you to enforce the law in a very tactical way, thereby making the law. How this should work is Congress should make the laws, the law enforcement bodies should enforce the laws, the judicial branch should interpret them. It's broken, but as I said at the beginning, these empirical truths, these values should all be true at the same time. We should be able to keep families together. We should be able to secure our borders. We should be able to protect our communities, but unfortunately with these five, you know we have 50,000 people coming into the country illegally each month. You know this last month was a little bit down from that, but what that means in there is we're not able to take care of those who are seeking asylum, right?

From a humanitarian mission, because we have such an incredible backlog. We're not able to protect those 10,000 new ACs that come here. We put them in the care of HHS, but then we have to find a sponsor for them. Make sure that it's a sponsor that's going to take care of them. We also are not addressing the push factor, which is what I've been spending a lot of time doing.

Peter Alexander: Just back from [crosstalk 00:30:17].

Kirstjen Nielsen: I've been to Guatemala twice, I've met with President Pena Nieto five times. I've met with the new incoming president in Mexico personally. I've really been trying to work with them on what is the strategy that we can help stabilize your country, do development, and make it a place where your citizens want to stay in so they don't feel that they're forced to flee and migrate. Oh, by the way, how can we work with the international community to provide asylum opportunities along the way, because if you're truly seeking asylum, I want you to be safe as soon as possible. I don't want you to have to pay a smuggler to get to the United States.

You know, the step that I have used recently just because it's so heart wrenching, this journey, I mean smugglers are not humanitarians. We cannot have a system that encourages smugglers. We give a pregnancy test at DHS to every girl over 10 to provide for their medical care. That is how dangerous the journey is. It's just one data point. For privacy of the children we rarely give case after case of specifics, but I can guarantee you this journey is terrible. It's in everyone's interest to get the smugglers out of the way and from a regional approach, which is what I've been pushing when I've met and called this

ministerial recently. We've got to protect these vulnerable populations, but we have to do it in a way that where we can all abide by the law.

Peter Alexander: Just to get back to the children in this. A lot of child psychologists have said publicly, they say this amounts to child abuse. Is this child abuse being imposed enforced by the American government?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think that we have 2,000 children who need our care in terms of being reunited with their parents and we're working very hard on doing that. We have 10,000 children that have no advocates for them whatsoever, and then we have a lot of children whose parents when they receive final orders of removal, decide to leave their children here. All three of those groups of children I worry about and I think we need to do more to protect them.

Peter Alexander: You talked about the young children. Let me just ask you quickly, there's a deadline for those who aren't aware that a week from today, July 26th, the court has mandated this deadline for the US government to reunify. Government lawyers just gave the number 2,500 children with their parents by next week. Will you meet that deadline of one week from today?

Kirstjen Nielsen: We will do our best, but we will not cut corners. Again this is about the protection of the child. We had a 315% increase in fraudulent families presenting at the border. So I just, you know, this point is lost, but we need to protect the children. Most of these, you know, a good portion of these adults showing up are not their family.

Peter Alexander: I guess people think I'm a dad when their kid comes out of the hospital, they have their bracelet on their wrist. A parent is easily connected with their child, so nobody gets dispersed, or lost, or sent home with the wrong family. Why didn't that happen here? It seems like this shouldn't have been so difficult that you all of a sudden have parents who are stuck in detention at the border and children that are in Michigan or Washington State or Maine.

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think the dispersion is simply one of just resources. So HHS has a facilities throughout the country, so that is the logistical challenge. We normally have adults in detention facilities that are closer to the border. That is the easiest and fastest way to get them through immigration proceedings, but what I can tell you now is every parent knows where every child is. We know where every child is, but we do want to make sure that that adult that presented with the child is safe for the child so we continue to work with the court on that.

Peter Alexander: And how are you going to connect those children whose parents have already been deported to other countries?

Kirstjen Nielsen: We'll work to refine them. So we'll work with the consulates, we will do everything we can to expeditiously reunite-

Peter Alexander: How long, we say expeditiously, but how long will that take for some of these kids still under the age of five?

Kirstjen Nielsen: It's complicated because remember all of these adults who left without their kids left based on a decision to leave their children. So now we're saying to them, no, no, no, you have to take the children. So we have to have that and then we have to involve the other countries. You know, one of the northern triangle countries when I just met with them, said to me, it's not appropriate for DHS or the United States government to determining what's in the best interest of the child. We in our courts will determine what's in the best interest of the child. So it's very complicated, but we are working very closely with the judge to make sure that they understand all these complexities, where the parents are and how we can best do this.

Peter Alexander: ICE falls beneath, falls within the DHS.

Kirstjen Nielsen: It does.

Peter Alexander: Obviously, a lot of people have seen headlines lately where some on the left in particular are saying abolish ICE. Even if you concede that abolishing ICE would be going too far, even if you acknowledge, agree. We would agree that abolishing ICE as many people say, if that's going too far, do you concede that ICE has worked to do, to build trust with those communities in this country?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think that ICE does so many, many missions and I think we forget about that. I think they, you know, they do anti-smuggling, anti-trafficking, they do child exploitation. They have an amazing cyber crime center, they're forefront on the opioid crisis, they return foreign artifacts to foreign countries. They do enforcement of IP theft, part of their mission is immigration enforcement, but they do it professionally every day.

Peter Alexander: For so many folks, why has this become such a moment where so many in those largely immigrant communities are anxious about ICE? There's a concern that they'll go under ground, which doesn't help your efforts in trying to crack down and keep the homeland safe if the people in those communities aren't helping you provide information.

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think there's just a lot of misinformation out there. What I do you know is that both ICE and CBP work very closely with the communities. We have almost everyone at CBP that deals, for example at the border are bilingual. In many cases they speak many other languages in addition to Spanish. We do see most of the illegal migrants coming up speak Spanish. You know, I think they continue to work with the community and they continue to do it with all professionalism. They put their lives at risk to protect our communities. I mean they, they're the forefront of MS13. MS13, as you know, motto is rape, kill and control and that's not a something they throw in that is what they live by.

Peter Alexander: Isn't MS13 though, sort of focused on smaller communities, or largely hitting immigrant populations in certain areas throughout the country as opposed to the president has suggested, MS13 is everywhere, but the facts are there [crosstalk 00:36:44].

Kirstjen Nielsen: Well I think we've seen in Long Island and other communities that MS13 is attacking outside of immigrant communities, but what you just said is exactly why many immigrant communities welcome ICE, because ICE is protecting them from MS13.

Peter Alexander: Let me ask you about the president. Tell me if you can, you know, what's your working relationship like with President Trump?

Kirstjen Nielsen: Very professional. I'm always fascinated by the fascination around this question. We work well together. I give him my honest opinion and honest assessment.

Peter Alexander: Does he take it?

Kirstjen Nielsen: He listens, he loves diverse voices. You know, I think you know, that, you see that in briefings. He will talk to a variety of experts. He'll talk to a variety of people who have seen it from different views. He craves those different insights before he makes decisions. He knows I'll give him my honest assessment. He knows I'll also give him my honest assessment about expectations. There is a lot that takes awhile in our government particularly when it comes to Congress. So I think it's important to give him my advice, but also to explain to him the difficulties and challenges inherent in reaching that goal.

Peter Alexander: You've seen the headlines about the president berating you. Is any of that true?

Kirstjen Nielsen: The president's frustrated, you know, in that particular meeting, that was why they reported. He was frustrated, I was too. Look in his mind-

Peter Alexander: Was he frustrated with you?

Kirstjen Nielsen: He was frustrated because he wants to secure communities. He wants to secure our borders and the frustration is without congressional action, what else can we do as an executive branch within our authorities to protect American communities and that frustration shown through, but it wasn't anything that I hadn't been frustrated about and I'm frustrated about now. You know, while I'm waiting to try to get Congress to do their part of this, I'm really working on the push factor. So I've been to Guatemala twice as we said, I've been to Mexico. A lot of this is helping on both sides. So we've got the pull factors that incentivize it. Let me just give you another example. There are billboards in Central America and the northern triangle countries advertising how to grab a kid to get into the United States illegally because that loophole is so big. Billboards. So part of my interaction with the northern triangle countries, take the billboards down. Let's talk about increasing your border patrol. Let's talk about increasing your silent

capacity. Talk about campaigns and awareness about the dangers of the journey, but it's gotta be both. It's a comprehensive approach.

Peter Alexander: So back to your working relationship with the president. So has he ever berated you? The answer to that was yes or no?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think he just, if you were there, I think he just expressed why can we not secure our borders today.

Peter Alexander: We heard from secretary, excuse me, we heard from FBI Director Ray yesterday, suggested that he didn't deny reports or suggestions that he has considered resigning. We've seen resignations and firings. Have you ever considered resigning in the time you've worked as the [crosstalk 00:39:46]?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I will continue to work as hard as I can, as long as I can support the men and women of DHS.

Peter Alexander: Did you ever consider it?

Kirstjen Nielsen: You know, I think that when I've heard those suggestions, they're in situations I would never consider resigning. I will continue to do my job every day to support the men and women of DHS. It's a privilege and honor to do so as long as I can help America, I will continue to do my job.

Peter Alexander: How's your friend John Kelly?

Kirstjen Nielsen: He's well, he's kind of busy.

Peter Alexander: How's it going for him?

Kirstjen Nielsen: It's well. It's well, I think, you know, we continue to refine processes in the White House. Make sure that the policy positions that go to the president are full rounded. Do you have those different voices that he craves? He brings a wealth of experiences, as you know, to the job, and I know he would say it's an honor to serve.

Peter Alexander: We've seen his frustration on his face. He doesn't hide it, as you know. Well, most recently when the president was in Russia where John Kelly put his head in his hands for a little bit and the White House, later explained that he was frustrated that they hadn't served croissants and fruit at breakfast.

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think it was bacon.

Peter Alexander: Bacon.

Kirstjen Nielsen: Yeah they share a love of Bacon. So I think, no, I think...

Peter Alexander: I guess the question is, is this working? I'm in the White House every day. I have private conversations and what I hear from people in the West Wing who will tell me not on background, they don't want their name being shared will say that he's in his own world now. The president doesn't rely on his guidance or his counsel anymore and he's sort of been marginalized here. Is that what's happened behind the scene to your friend John Kelly?

Kirstjen Nielsen: Well, I am not in the White House anymore.

Peter Alexander: You're there often.

Kirstjen Nielsen: I am, but I would just defer those questions. I've not seeing anything like that. Every meeting I'm in a with the president General Kelly is usually there. He speaks his mind, he gives us advice. He makes sure that the president knows the relevant facts. I just, I haven't seen that personally.

Peter Alexander: You and I are both traveling back to Washington today. So you in your past life helped develop the program where put your little toiletries in your Ziploc bag and you know, you're under four ounces deal. Are we any closer to getting rid of those limits?

Kirstjen Nielsen: And I will just on the administrators benefit over there, just plug for those of you who came up to me last night and complained about taking off your belts

Kirstjen Nielsen: Plug. For those who came up to me last night and complained about taking off your belts still, during pre check, during pre check. We can get you through faster, it's much easier for you. You know, I'll think we'll continue to take the threat very seriously. I'm never gonna compromise the security of the American public against their convenience. So we want to be very clear on how to make it as expeditious as possible to get through the travel. But if we believe there is a threat, you better believe we're gonna do everything we can to prevent that threat from manifesting.

Peter Alexander: The white house finally got its travel ban, the third go, the supreme court ruling recently. Do you think it will materially making America safer, and has it disrupted any terrorist plots to this point?

Kirstjen Nielsen: So this is actually an area where we've done a tremendous amount of work at DHS and I'm quite proud of. So as this process, this concept has matured of what is the information sharing that's required for Americans to know who's traveling here and if they intend to do us harm, we really have raised the base line across the world, literally across the world. So DHS has looked at every single country and determined, "Do they meet the information sharing requirements to give us assurance that we know who's traveling here?"

Then the travel restrictions that follow when needed are very tailored. They're not a ban. They're, "Okay, this country is either on a path to meet this-"

Peter Alexander: The president calls it a ban.

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think what he is talking about is the very original, right now, there is no ban. Even the countries who are on the list, it's travel restrictions. That's what it is.

Peter Alexander: So should he call it something different than a travel ban?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think the president can call it what he thinks is appropriate. From our implementation perspective, what we do is we tailor it. It's very important to do so. Some of these requirements are things that should have been required a long time ago. For example, could you tell us when you have a lost or stolen passport? Could you tell Interpol so that when someone arrives on that passport, we know it's not you? Could you share your known and suspected terrorist watch list with us?

And this is important because you know what, many Americans might not know is, we still see 10, DHS prevents 10 known and suspected terrorists from traveling to the United States a day. This concept of information sharing is vital to our national security.

Peter Alexander: Is the biggest concern of terrorist coming through the borders or is it by air to the country right now?

Kirstjen Nielsen: It's probably both. And I think that's because we don't know what we don't know. So we do we apprehend-

Peter Alexander: So if we say it's both, then that means that we do know it's happening both ways. Or is it that we just can't rule out that it could happen both ways?

Kirstjen Nielsen: So all of the above without getting into classified areas. But just think about the unknown. So the border figures are always interesting because the number represents the number of apprehensions, not the number of people coming here illegally. So you know what you know, but we don't pretend to say that that 50 thousand, as an example, is indicative of every person that is getting into the country illegally. So we worry about that.

Air, we happen to know a lot more information because of how people travel. They give us their travel information in advance. If we have a data base that is appropriate we can check against, we do. And people who present it ports of entry, we can also do a check.

Peter Alexander: So going back to that question, we don't have to call it a travel ban for the sake of this conversation, but have the travel restrictions been successful in foiling any terrorist plots?

Kirstjen Nielsen: So again, I think the intel community, we all share this struggle. Sometimes we're not able in an unclassified setting to talk about specific plots.

Peter Alexander: Without specifics, has it done one or two or none?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I believe it has tremendously increased our security without question.

Peter Alexander: Let me ask you, next month we are approaching the one year anniversary of Charlottesville. I guess the question is, what is DHS doing to address the threat of white nationalists and has President Trump made this a priority?

Kirstjen Nielsen: So DHS has made a priority to focus on all forms of violence. We obviously have what we had traditionally been looking at out of radical Islam, we have the homegrown extremists, whatever camp they fall in, but we also have white supremacists and other groups that self profess that their purpose or motive is violence.

Peter Alexander: So how are we combating that?

Kirstjen Nielsen: So partnership. We look at it from a couple different perspectives. We look at counter messaging, we look at ways to do what I call off ramping and know that somebody has now self affiliated with a radical extremist group, but how do we provide them a different way to communicate and get their message across in a non violent way?

Of course it involves law enforcement, but frankly, it also involves social services. It involves the social psychology community. And the reason for that is because what we see particularly in the US is some of these groups, some of these individuals are motivated by violence. They then find the group where they can find a community where they can be violent. So sometimes it's less about the ideology and we have to track down the motives for the violence.

Peter Alexander: Has the president made this a top priority?

Kirstjen Nielsen: We have talked to him about this. He has made it clear that as a homeland priority, he expects DHS in conjunction with law enforcement and the FBI to prevent Americans from any form of violence. It's not acceptable, we will continue to work with anyone who will work with us. It does need to be a broader conversation. I think we've seen this in school safety. It needs to be much broader a conversation. But yes, it's a priority.

Peter Alexander: But in the comments, they were also highly publicized, when he placed blame, in his words, on, "Both sides," does that make your job harder when the president says things that, at least in those communities, are viewed as, "He's got our back."?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think what's interesting about that is we saw, and I think we continue to learn, maybe there was different, whether it was foreign influence or different purposeful attempts to get both to get both sides, if you will, aggressively pitted against each other. I think that what I see DHS's role in, again, we work with the

larger community, DHS is the largest law enforcement agency. That's not well known. We have 66 thousand sworn law enforcement officials. But we have to work with everyone to help communities understand what are the warning signs, what are the ways in which we can prepare? And that's, no matter who it is, I think what's important about that conversation is, it's not that one side is right, one side is wrong, anybody that is advocating violence, we need to work to mitigate.

Peter Alexander: We have about 15 minutes late. We have a hard out at 10 O Clock. So I'm gonna let everybody get some questions in in just a moment. But let me ask you one last one, as we're now in the middle of hurricane season, there was new reporting out of Puerto Rico within the last several weeks as the season began. There's still 11 thousand people there, at least as of June 1st, I checked this morning, I didn't see a more recent number, that said 11 thousand people were still without power. In retrospect, and you weren't the head of DHS obviously, the secretary of the department of homeland security at the time, but what should the administration have done differently as it relates to the hurricane that hit specifically Puerto Rico?

Kirstjen Nielsen: Good question. So as you know, we have recently completed a DHS lessons learned, a FEMA lessons learned-

Peter Alexander: And you did this back in the day following Katrina as well, some of these lessons.

Kirstjen Nielsen: Yes. DOD has done one as well as well as our inner agency partners. I think the three main lessons that I would draw from that that we will incorporate to do for future storms that are similar, one, we had just been hit by two major hurricanes before Maria. So this concept of how are you prepared as a federal government when you have simultaneous major events is very important because it goes to capacity and it also goes to, "How do we preposition?" So what you'll see this year are FEMA integration teams out in the regions now, preparing, building capacity on the incident management side. What you'll also see is additional work with states on modeling. So, what is it that you have that is a particular vulnerability in your area? The infrastructure in Puerto Rico pre storm has been widely discussed, but they're also an island. So this was the largest logistical mission in FEMA's history, just getting aid there.

Peter Alexander: Was the response satisfactory?

Kirstjen Nielsen: We can always do better. I'm never gonna answer that question on anything that we do yes or no-

Peter Alexander: The president said it was a 10 out of 10.

Kirstjen Nielsen: We can do better. So maybe we need to do an 11 or 12. I think we always learn lessons, we learn how we can work better. Communication is always something that bedevils the government because we're so big, so making sure we have

that common operational picture and continue to strive forward. The only thing I would say, at DHS, most of our mission, we tell our viewers at home if you will, "Don't attempt this at home." But community resilience is one where we encourage everyone, this has to start-

Peter Alexander: It's well preparedness.

Kirstjen Nielsen: Has to start that way.

Peter Alexander: Hopefully you guys have had some time for some personal preparedness, you have some of your own questions. So I think there's some mics out there. We'll take some questions if I can, sir.

Kirstjen Nielsen: They do have pajamas already.

Peter Alexander: Yeah, exactly. A microphone's right behind you, she's right behind you. Thank you.

Chris: [inaudible 00:51:21] thank you. Chris Miller from the Air Force Academy. You referred to evolving from counter terrorism to counter threat increase in cyber attack surfaces. As you look at the way the federal government is structured to deal with that evolving threat, do you think the organization and ethos of all the national security organizations is right or do you see a need for change?

Kirstjen Nielsen: That's a great question. I think from my perspective, it's a change in posture, at least at DHS. So we need to be much more on our toes. I tell my component heads to zoom out and lean in. In other words, we have to be looking at the horizon. We have to be very aware of what those emerging threats are and then double down on the threats we know to make sure we have the capability and capacity. On emerging threats, an example that we've been very focused on lately in addition to [inaudible 00:52:14] was drones. DHS does not currently have the authority to identify or monitor [inaudible 00:52:21] drones.

But that threat is real now. We see them dropping drugs over the border, we see them surveilling sensitive locations, we see them disrupting the communications of law enforcement. So this is not a question of if, this is happening now. DHS has no authority to combat this threat. So what we need to do is become much more nimble, flexible, dare I say, work with congress to have a better organization so that we don't have to go to 80, 90 committees to get the authorities that we need.

But I think as threats advance, we need the authority and then we can build the capacity. So it's a change in posture and it's change in how we look at the threat. But we have to be very aware that the threat is changing very quickly and we have to adjust accordingly.

Peter Alexander: Other questions? Yes please, you right here in the middle, young lady. Tight quarters.

Gail: Hi, Gail Harris with Lima Charlie Media. I'm glad you talked about drones, that was gonna be my initial question. My backup is, how well is this cyber incident information sharing program going with industry? If not well, why and how can we do better?

Kirstjen Nielsen: Yeah, thank you. So this one, I could talk about for hours. I'll try to talk about it for a minute. As you know, we have a series of information sharing and analysis centers, the ISACs. We have, what we do is we share in a hub model. The information sharing is greatly approved. We also continue to recognize that should the intel community ever have specific credible threat information about any particular sector or particular company, institution, we will share that information. We won't let the bureaucracy of security clearances hold us up. Security clearances, they're very important because they allow everybody to have the conversation on a steady state basis, but we do understand that that can never be a reason why somebody didn't get information that they need.

I'm happy and excited about a cyber summit that we are pulling together later this month. We'll have a variety of CEOs from fortune 100, fortune 50 companies. We'll be making a major announcement there on additional ways we're gonna work with the private sector to really understand the risk and to be able to share it real time in a tailored and specific way.

As you know, I think the challenge over the years has been some of the information sharing has not been tailored. So I'm trying to move away from telling the private sector, "Hey, there's a cyber threat," to, "Here is how the threat indicators will manifest within your systems," you know, "Here is how your system is configured incorrectly given the latest malware," to try to help them really mitigate and respond to the threat.

So what I would say is it continues to improve. We hope that it will continue to improve even more. But we're working very closely with the private sector right now and so I think the partnership is strong.

Peter Alexander: Kevin Baron.

Kevin: Hi, I'm Kevin Baron, executive editor of Defense One. The president continues to say that part of the border security threat is the rival of potential terrorists from the middle east, Islamic groups. What evidence is there of that? Can you tell us what's the current status? Is it a real threat, is it just a scare talking point? Is it old news, is it new news? Give us an update.

Kirstjen Nielsen: Yeah. When I was last and I called this minister on Guatemala, the way that I talk to my counterparts is, "We have a common enemy. The common enemy are the TCOs, are the smugglers, are the traffickers, are the child exploiters, but

are also the terrorists." We have seen open source, both ISIS and Al Qaeda advertise how to use both our refugee and asylum process and the southern border to get into the United States to attack Americans. So the threat is real. As I mentioned before, we prevent 10 known or suspected terrorists traveling a day. Those are the ones we know about. Some of those are presenting at ports of entry. So the threat is real. The threat has not diminished. In fact, I would say on the TCO criminal drug trafficking, it's increased in the last three to four years. So those partnerships are extraordinarily important to take that regional approach as to how we can combat that.

Peter Alexander: About five more minutes, hopefully we can squeeze in a few more questions. Sir in the back.

David: Good morning. My name is David Reed. I think we share a common goal of ultimately stopping the northward flow of children, of families, and it seems to me that requires building peace and democracy in the region, particularly in the northern triangle. As you have alluded, you visited the region several times. In the latter part of the Obama administration, they launched their Alliance for Prosperity and committed 750 million dollars to that endeavor, exactly trying to educate young women and strengthen judicial systems. Yet, one of the first acts of President Trump was to reduce that financial commitment by 60 percent and further excluded El Salvador from the recipient of those funds. It seems to me that's moving exactly in the opposite direction. Shouldn't we be dramatically increasing our development assistance to try and stabilize those judicial systems, trying to protect the young women and give them hope for the future?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I think it's a different combination of different pockets of aid. So I've been working with OPIC, I've been working with the inter development [inaudible 00:57:59] bank, I've been working with the UNHCR, with ICRC. I think it's capacity building is what we're really after. There's different ways to do that. Some of it is direct aid, some of it's information sharing, some of it is through helping train border patrol, helping train marines in Mexico as you know the USG has done. So I think it's a fully comprehensive approach that's needed. I am actively working with the state department, I'm actively working with Mexico, other countries in the region, with Canada, to make sure that we balance this.

We'll have a major summit in September, I might've mentioned a little bit earlier, on security and prosperity. And the prosperity piece is matching, taking what we as a region can give from a governmental perspective, both in terms of capacity training, information sharing, and aid, but also, how can we bring in the private sector, the foundations, the NGOs, to help match that and really tailor programs that spur that development and help stabilize the region? So we have to do that. Until we address the push factors, there will continue to be that irregular or illegal migration.

Peter Alexander: The young lady right here. We have time to ask her one, maybe two more. We'll try to go quick.

Julia: Hi, Julia Ioffe from GQ. I have a question, you seem to be really kind of parsing and ducking the question about Russian interference in the election and what the goal was, which was to sow discord, as you said, but also to help elect Donald Trump. Do you disagree with the intelligence assessment of all the countries' intelligence agencies which seem to be pretty unanimous?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I do not disagree, I agree completely. I've said that many times with the intel assessment. What I'm trying to focus my comments on is the fact that they had the capability and the will and what the role of DHS is is to prepare for them to continue to try to use both foreign influence and direct attacks on infrastructure to affect the results of our election. And that's what we'll continue to do.

Peter Alexander: Please.

Dina: Hi there. Dina Temple Raston with National Public Radio. I wonder if not braceleting the kids at the border was also part of a deterrent strategy and to send a message. Can you comment on that?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I missed it.

Peter Alexander: She's asking if the strategy of family separation at the border was in part deterrence.

Kirstjen Nielsen: So, the strategy, again, is to enforce the law. I wouldn't call that a strategy.

Peter Alexander: Did deterrence play a role? Jeff Sessions himself said, "This is deterrence," in his public comments.

Kirstjen Nielsen: So it might have that effect. From a DHS perspective, when I have been presented with the option to separate all families, which would mean those at ports of entry or all of those who illegally enter whether or not there's judicial capacity to prosecute, I have continued to say no. So all I can say is, when presented with the option, are you willing to do this, to separate families for the purpose of deterrence? My answer has continued to be no.

Peter Alexander: I think we probably have time for one more. Jim.

Jim: Not to belabor the point, but I just want to follow up on Julia's question because you seem to contradict yourself. Because earlier, you said you have not seen evidence of a specific assessment that the interference was intended to help Trump win, which not only did January 2017 assessment found, but charges issues since then against co conspirators also presented evidence that their intention was to help Donald Trump. So when you just said in an answer to Julia's question that you agree with the intelligence community's assessment, are you saying that you agree with not only the assessment that it was Russia that interfered, but that their intention was to help Donald Trump and

disadvantage Hillary Clinton? And can you just say those words very simply and directly?

Kirstjen Nielsen: I agree with the intel community's assessment full stop. Any attack on our democracy, which is what that was, whether it's successful or unsuccessful is unacceptable. It is an attack on our democracy. Election security is national security. The intel community is made up of professionals who do this for a living, they're dedicate public servants. I absolutely believe their assessment. I think what we need to do at DHS is take the information they provide us and make sure that the states have it and that they can prepare and prevent any Russian interference in our election systems.

Peter Alexander: Madame Secretary, everybody. Thank you so much Madame Secretary, thank you for your time.

Kirstjen Nielsen: My pleasure.

Peter Alexander: We appreciate you being here.