

Center for Strategic and International Studies

**“A Discussion on National Security with CIA Director Mike
Pompeo”**

**Featuring:
Mike Pompeo,
Director,
Central Intelligence Agency**

**Introduction by:
John J. Hamre,
President and CEO,
CSIS**

**Moderated by:
Juan C. Zarate,
Chairman,
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*Transcript By
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(Applause.)

JOHN J. HAMRE: Thank you. I rarely get applause when I come out. I'm sorry, no, I – (laughter). Welcome. Thank you. We're delighted to have all of you here.

My name is John Hamre. I'm the president at CSIS. I told the director that we've got standing room only, and I said let's not wait another 15 minutes to watch the clock come; let's get going. And he said of course, let's do that. And typical of his character, he's always getting at it. And I want to say thank you for coming, sir.

When we have events like this, we always start with a little safety announcement. I am responsible for your safety, so follow my instructions if I ask you to do anything. I'm not worried about the director. He's got guys with guns here, so we're going to take it that's going to be OK. (Laughter.) But I am worried about you. And if I have to ask you to leave the room, the exits are right behind us. These three are exits. The stairs closest to the – or to the stairs going down is right through here. We take two left-hand turns. We're going to go over to the courtyard of National Geographic, I will order ice cream, and we'll sing a song of praise for our salvation, OK? (Laughter, applause.)

Anyway, everything's going to be fine. Just follow me if I have to ask you to do something.

We're very honored that Director Pompeo has chosen to come. When his people called and said he wants to come on Thursday afternoon before Easter weekend, I said, what the hell? Who is going to come to this, you know? (Laughter.) And lots of people are here, obviously, because this is an enormous opportunity to hear the director. We're very privileged to have him here.

I would say that we're very fortunate as a country that Director Pompeo is willing to serve at this time. His life has been about service. He was the highest-ranking cadet at West Point when he graduated from West Point, and his entire life, career has been about service. He's been in and out of government and private sector. Fortunately, at this hour he's willing to serve all of us as the director of the CIA.

Would you please, with your warm applause, welcome Director Pompeo? (Applause.)

DIRECTOR MIKE POMPEO: Well, good afternoon, everyone. Thank you all for coming to join me. I did pick this place. It's a very special place, and I wanted to thank CSIS for hosting me today. I'm honored to make one of the first public remarks I have made in now 10-plus weeks as the director of the CIA. Ten weeks. I know everything now. I've got it all figured out. (Laughter.) You laughed appropriately there. That's great.

Two, I want to say to – we have Bill Webster here. Godspeed. Thank you for being here. Appreciate it very much. (Applause.) It's an – it's an honor being in front of you. I'm a little bit nervous. So, here we go.

So I thought I'd start today by telling you a story about a bright, well-educated young man. He was described as industrious, intelligent, and likeable, if inclined towards a little impulsiveness and impatience. At some point, he became disillusioned with intelligence work, and angry at his government. He left the government and decided to devote himself to what he regarded as public advocacy: exposing the intelligence officers and operations that he had sworn to keep secret. He

appealed to agency employees to send him leads, tips, suggestions. He wrote in a widely-circulated bulletin quote “We are particularly anxious to receive – and anonymously, if you desire – copies of U.S. diplomatic lists and U.S. embassy staff,” end of quote.

That man was Philip Agee, one of the founding members of the magazine CounterSpy, which in its first issue, in 1973, called for the exposure of the CIA undercover operatives overseas. In its September 1974 issue, CounterSpy publicly identified Richard Welch as the CIA station chief in Athens. Later, Richard’s home address and phone number were outed in the press, in Greece. In December 1975, Richard and his wife were returning home from a Christmas party in Athens. When he got out of his car to open the gate in front of his house, Richard Welch was assassinated by a Greek terrorist cell.

At the time of his death, Richard was the highest-ranking CIA officer killed in the line of duty. He had led a rich and honorable life – one that is celebrated with a star on the agency’s memorial wall. He’s buried at Arlington National Cemetery, and has remained dearly remembered by his family and colleagues.

Meanwhile, Philip Agee propped up his dwindling celebrity with an occasional stunt, including a Playboy interview. He eventually settled down as the privileged guest of an authoritarian regime – one that would have put him in front of a firing squad without a second thought had he betrayed its secrets instead of ours.

Today, there are still plenty of Philip Agees in the world, and the harm they inflict on U.S. institutions and personnel is just as serious today as it was back then. They don’t come from the intelligence community, they don’t all share the same background, or use precisely the same tactics as Agee, but they are soulmates. Like him, they choose to see themselves under a romantic light as heroes above the law, saviors of our free and open society. They cling to this fiction even though their disclosures often inflict irreparable harm on both individuals and democratic governments, pleasing despots along the way.

The one thing they don’t share with Agee is the need for a publisher. All they require now is a smartphone and internet access. In today’s digital environment, they can disseminate stolen U.S. secrets instantly around the globe to terrorists, dictators, hackers and anyone else seeking to do us harm.

Our nation’s first line of defense against complicated and fast-moving threats likes these is the U.S. intelligence community. I feel deeply privileged, and still, frankly, a bit amazed, that as CIA director I get to be a part of this great group of men and women. I’m the son of a machinist from Orange County, California. I’d never been east of the Mississippi River before college, spending most of my summers working in Winfield, Kansas, on the family farm. To be entrusted with leading the greatest intelligence organization in the world is something I can’t still wrap my head around. And just as I did at West Point, I feel that I stand on the shoulders of giants atop a long tradition of courage, ingenuity, and dedication.

After I was nominated for this post by President Trump, I talked with nearly every living director. They spoke about the need to call things as you see them, and of the apolitical nature of the job. Above all, though, they spoke about the admiration they had for their time with this workforce. And for what I’ve seen so far, their assessment was spot on. I’m surrounded by talented, committed patriots. These are men and women who signed up for a life of discretion and impact, for a career in

service to their country. These officers, like me, have sworn an oath to uphold the Constitution. They've signed secrecy agreements. They quietly go about their work and try not to get too worked up over the headlines, including the fanciful notion that they spy on their fellow citizens via microwave ovens. (Laughter.)

But they're not at liberty to stand up to these false narratives and explain our mission to the American people. But fortunately, I am. In my first meeting with the CIA's workforce, I promised I would serve them and the American people, both home and abroad, with the same passionate vigor that I displayed as a tank platoon leader, as a business owner, and then as a member of Congress representing the 4th District of Kansas.

And that's why I'm here today. As a policy, the CIA does not comment on the accuracy of purported intelligence documents posted online. In keeping with that policy, I will not specifically comment on the authenticity or providence of recent disclosures. But the false narratives that increasingly define our public discourse cannot be ignored. There are fictions out there that demean and distort the work and achievements of the CIA and the intelligence community more broadly. And in the absence of a vocal rebuttal, these voices, ones that proclaim treason to be public advocacy, gain a gravity that they do not deserve. It's time to call these voices out. The men and women of the CIA deserve a real defense, as does our nation. I intend to do that today.

First and foremost, we should know that the intelligence organizations engage solely in foreign espionage. We steal secrets from our foreign adversaries, hostile entities and terrorist organizations. And we're damn proud of it. We analyze this intelligence so that our government can better understand our adversaries that we face in a challenging and dangerous world. We'll make no apologies for that. It's hard stuff, and we go at it hard. Because when it comes to overseas threats, the CIA's aggressive in our pursuit of information we need to help safeguard our country. We utilize our whole toolkit, fully employing the authorities/capabilities that Congress, the courts and the executive branch have provided to us consistent with our American ideals.

We do these things because it's our job. It's what we signed up to do. It's what our president needs. And if we didn't have a tough time justifying our budget to the American taxpayers, that too would be inappropriate. As the CEO of a security research firm recently noted, the CIA appears to be – CIA appears to be doing exactly what we pay them to do: exploit specific targets with limited attacks to support America's national interests.

Now, our mission is simple in concept, yet incredibly difficult in practice. I've seen that in just the few short weeks. We work to provide the best information possible to the president and his administration so they can advance our national interests and protect our country. It's a mission that the CIA has carried out for years, quietly and effectively. Accomplishments often remain classified and secret, but a few special ones are known to the world. The CIA was a crucial player in the global campaign against nuclear proliferation, and continues to be today. We helped unravel the nuclear smuggling network used by AQ Khan, assisted in exposing a covert nuclear facility in Syria, and gathered intelligence with the help of partners that persuaded Libya to abandon its nuclear program.

We've also been on the cutting edge of technological innovation throughout our history. The CIA led efforts to develop to the U2 aircraft and orbiting satellites – endeavors that allowed us to surveil activities in rival states that were closed to us. We've pushed the boundaries of the possible in ways that have benefited both security and the welfare of the American public.

More recently, CIA investment and technology venture in 2003 led to the development of what we know today as Google Earth. My first few months on the job have only reaffirmed for me that this innovative spirit and can-do attitude are much alive and well.

So now I'd like to talk about what the CIA does not do. We're a foreign intelligence agency. We focus on collecting information about foreign governments, foreign terrorist organizations, and the like – not Americans. A number of specific rules keep us centered on that mission and protect the privacy of our fellow Americans. To take just one important example, CIA's legally prohibited from spying on people through electronic surveillance in the United States. We're not tapping anyone's phone in my hometown of Wichita.

Now, I know they'll always be skeptics, and we need to build trust with them. But I also know firsthand from what I saw as a member of a congressional oversight committee, and from what I see now as the director, the CIA takes its legal restrictions and responsibilities with the utmost seriousness. We have stringent regulations, an engaged and robust Office of the General Counsel, and an empowered independent Office of Inspector General to make sure of that.

Moreover, regardless of what you see on the silver screen, we do not pursue covert action on a whim and without the approval or accountability. There's a comprehensive process that starts with the president, consists of many levels of legal and policy review. Let me assure you: When it comes to covert action, there is oversight and accountability every step of the way. And I inherited an agency that has deep respect for the rule of law and the Constitution. It's embedded in the very fiber of the people that work at the CIA.

And despite fictional depictions meant to sell books or box-office tickets, we are not an untethered or rogue agency. And so while we have some truly – excuse me – some truly awesome capabilities at our disposal, our officers do not operate in areas or against targets that are rightfully and legally off-limits.

At our core, we're an organization committed to uncovering the truth and getting it right. We devote ourselves to protecting our trade. We work hard to maintain truly global coverage. We spend hours upon hours collecting information and poring over datas and reports.

And we also admit when we make a mistake. In fact, because the CIA is accountable to a free and open society we help defend, the times in which we have failed to live up to high standards of our fellow citizens have been catalogued well over the years, even by our own government. These mistakes are public. They're public to an extent that I doubt any other nation could ever match. But it's always our intention and our duty to get it right.

And that's one of the reasons we at CIA find the celebration of entities like WikiLeaks to be both perplexing and deeply troubling because while we do our best to quietly collect information on those who pose very real threats to our country, individuals such as Julian Assange and Edward Snowden seek to use that information to make a name for themselves. As long as they make a splash, they care nothing about the lives they put at risk or the damage they cause to national security.

WikiLeaks walks like a hostile intelligence service and talks like a hostile intelligence service and has encouraged its followers to find jobs at the CIA in order to obtain intelligence. It directed Chelsea Manning in her theft of specific secret information. And it overwhelmingly focuses on the United States while seeking support from anti-democratic countries and organizations. It's time to call

our WikiLeaks for what it really is, a non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia. In January of this year our intelligence community determined that Russian military intelligence, the GRU, had used WikiLeaks to release data of U.S. victims that the GRU had obtained through cyber operations against the Democratic National Committee. And the report also found that Russia's primary propaganda outlet, RT, has actively collaborated with WikiLeaks.

Now, for those of you who read the editorial page of The Washington Post, and I have a feeling many of you do, yesterday you would've seen a piece of sophistry penned by Mr. Assange. You would've read a convoluted mass of words wherein Assange compares himself to Thomas Jefferson, Dwight Eisenhower and the Pulitzer Prize-winning work of legitimate news organizations such as The New York Times and The Washington Post.

Assange claims to harbor an overwhelming admiration for both America and the idea of America. But I assure you, this man knows nothing of America and our ideals. He knows nothing of our third president, whose clarion call for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness continue to inspire us and the world. And he knows nothing of our 34th president, a hero from my very own Kansas who helped liberate Europe from fascists and guided America through the early years of the Cold War.

No, I'm quite confident that had Assange been around in the '30s and the '40s and the '50s, he would've found himself on the wrong side of history. We know this because Assange and his ilk make common cause with dictators today. Yes, they try unsuccessfully to cloak themselves and their actions in the language of liberty and privacy. But in reality, they champion nothing but their own celebrity. They currently is click-bait, their moral compass nonexistent, their mission personal self-aggrandizement through destruction of Western values. They do not care about the causes of the people they claim to represent. If they did, they would focus instead on autocratic regimes in this world that actually suppress free speech and dissent. Instead, they choose to exploit the legitimate secrets of democratic governments, which has so far proven to be a much safer approach than provoking a tyrant.

Clearly, these individuals are not especially burdened by conscience. We know this, for example, because Assange has been more than cavalier in disclosing the personal information of scores of innocent citizens around the globe. We know this because the damage they have done to the security and safety of the free world is tangible. The examples are numerous. When Snowden absconded to the comfortable clutches of Russian intelligence, his treachery directly harmed a wide range of U.S. intelligence and military operations. Despite what he claims, he was no whistleblower. True whistleblowers use well-established and discreet processes in place to voice grievances. They do not put American lives at risk. In fact, a colleague of ours at the National Security Agency recently explained that more than a thousand foreign targets, people, groups and organizations, more than a thousand of them tried to change how they communicated as a direct result of Snowden's disclosures. That's a staggering number.

Bottom line is that it became harder for U.S. intelligence to keep Americans safe. It became harder to monitor communications of terrorist organizations that are bent on bringing bloodshed to our shores. Snowden's disclosures helped these groups find ways to hide themselves in crowded digital forests.

And even in those cases where we're able to regain our ability to collect, the damage has already been done. We work in a business with budgetary and time constraints. The effort to get back access we had previously possessed meant that we had less time to look at new threats.

And as for Assange, his actions have attracted a devoted following among some of our most determined enemies. Following the recent WikiLeaks disclosure, an al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula member posted a comment online thanking WikiLeaks for providing a means to fight America in a way that AQAP had not previously envisioned. AQAP represents one of the most serious threats to our country and around the world today. It's a group that is devoted not only to bringing down civil passenger planes but our way of life as well. That Assange is the darling of these terrorists is nothing short of reprehensible. Have no doubt that the disclosures in recent years caused harm, great harm, to our nation's national security, and they will continue to do so for the long term.

They also threaten the trust we've developed with our foreign partners when that trust is crucial currency among allies. They risk damaging morale for the good officers at the intelligence community and who take the high road every day. And I can't stress enough how these disclosures have severely hindered our ability to keep you all safe.

No, Julian Assange and his kind are not the slightest bit interested in improving civil liberties or enhancing personal freedom. They have pretended America's First Amendment freedom shield them from justice. They may have believed that, but they're wrong. Assange is a narcissist who has created nothing of value. He relies on the dirty work of others to make himself famous. He's a fraud, a coward hiding behind a screen. And in Kansas, we know something about wizards hiding behind screens. (Laughter.)

But I'm not the only one who knows who Julian Assange really is. Even those who often benefit from Assange's leaks have called him out for his overblown statements. The Intercept, which has in the past gleefully reported unauthorized disclosures, accuse WikiLeaks in late March of, quote, stretching the facts in its comments about the CIA. In the same article, The Intercept added that the documents, quote, were not worth the concern WikiLeaks generated by its public comments.

So we all face a crucial question: What can we do about this? What can and should the CIA, the broader intelligence community and the United States and our allies do about this unprecedented challenge posed by these hostile non-state intelligence agencies? There is no quick fix, nothing foolproof, no instant cure. But there are steps we can take to undercut the danger.

First, the days like today where we call out those who grant a platform to these leakers and so-called transparency activists. We know the danger that Assange and his not-so-merry band of brothers pose to democracies around the world. Ignorance or misplaced idealism is no longer an acceptable excuse for lionizing these demons.

Second, there are steps that we have to take at home. In fact, this is a process that we have already started. We've got to strengthen our own systems, secure of our own stuff. We've got to proof our internal mechanisms that help us on our counterintelligence mission. And all of us in the IC had a wakeup call after Snowden's treachery. Unfortunately, the threat has not abated. And while I can't go into detail about the exact steps, I can assure you our defenses will not be static. Our approach to security must be constantly evolving, and we will. We need to be as clever and innovative as the enemies we face because they will not relent, and we will not either. We can't truly eliminate the threat, but we can mitigate and manage it. And this relies on a defense in depth, which we are preparing. It depends on a fundamental change in how we address digital problems, understanding best practices that evolve in real time.

Third, we have to recognize that we can no longer allow Assange and his colleagues the latitude to use free speech values against us. To give them the space to crush us with misappropriated secrets is a perversion of what our great Constitution stands for. It ends now.

And finally, and perhaps most importantly, we need to deepen the trust between the intelligence community and the citizens that we aim to protect. And CIA can assure you that we're committed to earning that very trust every day. We know that we can never take it for granted. We must continue to be as open as possible with the American people.

As the CIA director, it is my sworn duty to uphold the Constitution and defend our national security. And as somebody who practiced law, built businesses and ran for public office to represent my neighbors and fellow citizens, I understand why nobody should have to blindly place their trust in government.

Granted, the intelligence arena can never be as transparent as other parts of our government. Secrecy is essential to the tasks that we undertake. But we can do better than we have. And even if we can't share everything with the American people, we can share it with the president they elected and with the Congress that oversees our work.

Having served on that committee myself, I am a CIA director who fully understands the imperative for oversight. Doing right by the American people is as important to me as carrying out our agency's mission. And I'll hold all of our officers to the same standards.

The men and women I work with at Langley are patriots, and I'm honored beyond imagination to lead them. They have my trust. They have my faith. And as long as I am lucky enough to have the best job in the world, I promise you that the CIA will be tireless in our mission to keep America safe.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

MR. HAMRE: Director, thank you for saying what we all wanted to hear.

I forgot to say this at the beginning. Undersecretary Juan Zarate, who is a senior adviser with us, is going to lead in the questioning. We're going to take cards from people. And I ask you to hold up the card. We've got people who are going to collect them. And then we're going to start assembling them. And so just hold up your cards, and you've got people walking around. Zack, let's get them collected.

Thank you, Director.

JUAN C. ZARATE: Thank you, Dr. Hamre.

Let's not hold these up like penalty cards, though, OK? (Laughter.)

Director Pompeo, what a privilege it is to be with you, a privilege for me to be able to moderate this discussion, your first public discourse. It was a privilege for me to sit on your transition team and to help you as much as I could. You didn't need it, frankly. So, full disclosure, I'm a fan of the director's. I'm not here as an unbiased journalist.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: We'll see if that holds true after today.

MR. ZARATE: Yeah, we'll see. We'll see.

I want to thank you all for attending. Just to go through the ground rules again, we'll have about half an hour of discussion. Then, by 4:00, please have your questions submitted. Then I will take those questions and ask the director. At the end of that, at 4:30, I ask that you remain seated or standing so the director can move out safely, and then we'll conclude the event. OK? Thank you.

If you don't know, I'm Juan Zarate, senior adviser here at CSIS.

Director Pompeo, it's quite a declaration on your part in terms of not only an indictment of WikiLeaks, but also a declaration that there are non-state intelligence services, you know, actively working against U.S. interests and working with our adversaries potentially. Why – in your first remarks, why talk about this? Are you worried that this is kind of the new phase of counterintelligence and intelligence work? Are you worried that the Russians are continuing to exploit WikiLeaks? Are you worried that other adversaries, like the Iranians or the North Koreans, are beginning to look at this model as an effective model? Why focus on this issue?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: So I had intended to make my first remarks sometime in June of 2019. (Laughter.) That's one of the great graces of this new role. But having now had the chance to observe the risk that is presented by these non-state hostile intelligence agencies, I wanted to make sure that the American people understood the threat that they pose to us.

They may be small – and I mentioned one particular character a few times – but it's much bigger than that. It's much broader and deeper than that. And frankly, I think the United States government has not done nearly enough to protect our nation, our cyber infrastructure, all the things that are at risk from those threats.

We have spent a lot of time looking at hard targets, nation-state actors, but now have this new threat sitting out there, which behaves in a slightly different way but has as its motive the destruction of America in the very same way that those countries do. And they have now found, as you suggested, a model, a model that says we will actively go out and work. We will recruit. We will do all the things that intelligence agencies that are hostile to us do, and then align ourselves with other nation-states that might well have a vested interest in that.

It is dangerous. And I wanted to make sure that I clearly articulated that the intelligence community, and I think the United States government in its entirety, have an obligation. And I'm confident this administration will pursue them with great vigor.

MR. ZARATE: Director, we can have an around-the-world discussion in 60 minutes. We can do sort of topic of the day. We can do what's your top 10 threat list. You know how these discussions go. Let's do a little bit of a mix of all of that, because I know there's a lot of interest in the room on a whole host of topics.

But let's take this idea of non-state actors. And you mentioned al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, the al-Qaida affiliate in Yemen, learning from WikiLeaks. What are you most worried about in terms of terrorist adaptation? And what can you tell us about the fight against ISIS? And, frankly, what comes next? We know that we're preparing to attack the capital in Syria, Raqqa. We know – we've seen the attacks in Europe, most recently in Germany, St. Petersburg, Stockholm.

Where is the terrorist threat going? And what's our strategy to go after it?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: So they – the threat from radical Islamic terrorism is real and continuing and going to be around certainly for as long as I'm in this position. We've made great strides in Iraq, taking back a great piece of the physical caliphate, so-called caliphate. We're making great strides in Syria collectively, not just the United States. But this threat continues to change, to transmogrify in ways that are difficult.

We've seen it in their cyber operations. We've seen it in their capacity to inspire threats here inside our own country. We frankly spend a lot of resources attacking this problem and have made great progress, frankly, in the 15 years, 16 years now on, from 9/11. There's no doubt about that. We have the capacity to identify these in many, many instances. But you've got to achieve perfection to keep people safe, and that is an enormously challenging goal.

I do worry about what comes after, where these terrorists will go. The Europeans – I just literally returned from London this morning early, and our European colleagues are very worried about where these folks go to. They're much closer to them and much easier place to travel. And so we collectively – not just the United States, but all of our allies – have to continue to stay one step ahead of these terrorists. We're making progress, but the fight is continual.

MR. ZARATE: Director, do we have the allies on the ground to do this work? The question in Syria whether or not we've got the right partners, whether or not there is even the relevant force not only to take on ISIS but to deal with the reconstruction afterward, what happens in Iraq. Do we have the partnerships that you, as the CIA director, need, but also as the country needs, to deal with these non-state actors?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah, I appreciate the question. I tend not to focus just on ISIS. They are – they're important. They are big. They had a good run, almost up and through Baghdad and Irbil. But this threat is so much bigger than al-Qaida. You saw what happened today in Afghanistan against the ISIS-Khorasan threat. We have to actively engage it everywhere, and I think we do. I think we have a good set of partners.

And I think, frankly, this administration has done a pretty good job of encouraging our Gulf state partners to work alongside us in ways that they have not previously been prepared to do. And that will provide an important bulwark for us as we begin to fight what will be the next phase against al-Qaida and ISIS and the Taliban in the places we find them.

MR. ZARATE: Director, your first trip abroad was to Turkey and to the Gulf. Why did you go there first, and what did you hear?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: We have important intelligence partners there who help America each and every day stay safe. And I wanted to thank them for that. But I wanted to talk to them about the fact that I expect more, that we need increased assistance in those pockets still that remain in those places that are funding terror, who are educating terrorists in their mosques. I wanted them to know that this was an administration that wanted them to think about that differently and to be true partners in this defeat of terrorism in the Middle East.

And I got a great reception. I had good conversations with my colleagues from the Gulf states, the intelligence chiefs from the Gulf states, who redoubled their commitment to helping the United States achieve what's frankly in all of our joint best interests.

MR. ZARATE: Are you worried about developments in Turkey? Obviously, they have a very big election there this coming weekend.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yes.

MR. ZARATE: (Laughs.) What worries you? What worries you in Turkey?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: So they're a NATO partner, and we need them to behave as such. We need them to be a partner. And there's lots of dimensions, right. You think about issues that are related to intelligence, but more broad – finance flows. They frankly have done better work as of late in preventing foreign terrorists from going to Syria, although it's a lot less exciting to go there these days than it was for a couple of years too. So there have been pockets where they've helped us, but there have been places where they've not always been the most productive ally. They're great. They let us – they let us participate in exercises that are very, very important. But we need them to be full-fledged partners against this threat.

MR. ZARATE: With respect to the Gulf partners, certainly I've heard, I know others who have, you know, relationships and contacts in the Gulf, have sort of been thirsting for a resurgence of American leadership and strength in the region. Is that something that you heard in the Gulf when you met with your partners there?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yes. And I would say that I wouldn't confine it to the Gulf.

One of the things that has surprised me in my new role is how much time I spend with our liaison partners. It consumes a good deal of my day, often. And what they all are demanding is American leadership. It's not – they're not looking for the 82nd Airborne, right? They're not – they're not looking for us to invest enormous amounts of American treasure. But it is often the case that in a dangerous world America is the only country that can present the leadership that can solve many, many problems, and they are – they are thirsty for that. And I fully expect this administration can deliver that leadership.

MR. ZARATE: Let's turn to Syria, because in some ways Syria represents a change, perhaps, in the foreign policy of the administration. You may argue differently. But at least the perception of a change, and certainly the perception that the U.S. is willing to enforce red lines in the context of the use of chemical weapons. I'm going to ask you a couple questions here, but I think one interesting question that hasn't been commented on too much is the speed and rapidity of the – of the assessments that were made. With some much baggage with the intel community around past failures and the need to get the assessments right, how was this done? I mean, take us – take us behind the scenes, if you can, around the intel assessments and how that played into the decision-making of this administration.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Well, so – (chuckles) – let's see, where to begin? You can – you can imagine that the very first minutes the question was: What happened? To the extent we know what happened, who did it? Can we prove that? How confident are we the scope of nature of what it was they undertook, and under whose authority they took it? I may have missed a question in there, but there were a series of questions that immediately came to the intelligence community.

And in remarkable order, one of the most impressive things about the place that I work is we were able to develop several hypotheses around that, and then to begin to develop fact patterns which either supported or suggested that the hypothesis wasn't right. And we were in relatively short order able to deliver to our president a high-confidence assessment that, in fact, it was the Syrian regime that had launched chemical strikes against its own people in Idlib.

It took I don't want to say exactly how long, but we were good, and fast. (Laughter.) Not me, our team. And I don't mean just the CIA; the entire intelligence community was good and fast, and we challenged ourselves. I can assure you we were challenged by the president and his team. We wanted to make sure that we had it right. And there's not much like when the president looks at you and says, Pompeo, are you sure, when you know that he's contemplating an action based upon the analysis that your organization has provided. And we got it right, and I'm proud of the work that the team did to help the president have the opportunity to make a good decision about what he ought to do, again, in the face of this atrocity that took place.

MR. ZARATE: What do you – what do you then make of the Russians' disputation of those conclusions? Bashar al-Assad just now – you know, in the last 24 hours – calling this a fabrication, the entire event. What do you say in those terms? In part because it's a – it's a battle of legitimacy and of proof.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah.

MR. ZARATE: How do you – how do you deal with that?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: So, there are challenges. There are things that we were able to conclude – or use to form the basis of our conclusion that we can't reveal, so that's always tricky. But we've done our best, and over time I think we can reveal a bit more. Everyone saw the open-source photos, so we – (chuckles) – we had reality on our side, too.

You know, Russia has – I think they're on their – I can't remember, it's their sixth or seventh story now, none of which have an ounce of truth to them. And I would – for anyone who for a moment thinks that this is a credible man, I'll remind you what he said about the airplane that was shot down, the Malaysian airplane. Go look at his initial quotes. Go look at what he said about the fact that there were no "little green men" in Ukraine, and the fact that he later actually said himself that, in fact, it was his team. And I think to this day he continues to claim that there are no Russians in eastern Ukraine. This is a man for whom veracity doesn't translate into English.

MR. ZARATE: Do we think the Russians knew about the chemical attack or maybe even were complicit in it?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: So I don't have much to add. The White House put out a statement. I don't have much to add to that today.

MR. ZARATE: OK. Maybe one more question on Russia and Syria. Do you think the Russians feel cornered at this point? Are you – are you assessing that the Russians are more likely to lash out? Or is this a moment of opportunity for diplomacy, perhaps, given what's happened?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Well, as the intelligence provider, we've presented the president alternative scenarios for how lots of parties there might respond – the Russians, the Iranians, the Syrians themselves, the Syrian chemical weapons program more particularly, what other options folks might take there in Syria. I don't know what the Russians will conclude. I've had a chance to see a little bit about how the meetings when there in Russia yesterday. I certainly hope it's the case that the Russians join the rest of the world community in condemning the attacks that took place there. We haven't seen that yet, but as a CIA director, one has to live in hope.

MR. ZARATE: You mentioned Iran. Iran, obviously a player in the Syrian context, but more broadly a concern to the United States. When you were a congressman you talked critically about the JCPOA. During your confirmation hearings, you talked about moving away from the role of being critical and more as an assessor of whether or not Iran was complying with the terms of the nuclear deal. What's your sense of both that – is Iran complying with the terms of the nuclear deal – and more broadly, how do you see the Iranian threat on a regional or even a global basis?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: I don't want to say much about their compliance with the agreement. I'd prefer to present that to the president. I'll let him communicate that. You should know, we're actively engaged in a lot of work to assist the president, making sure he has an understanding of where the Iranians are complying and where they might not be. We should all be mindful, given what took place in Syria, and go back and read that JCOPA and what it talks about in terms of the declared facilities and undeclared facilities and how much access the IAEA will have to each of those two very distinct groups. And so that might suggest to you whatever level – what level of certainty we could ever hope to present to the commander in chief.

And with respect to the Iranians, they're on the march. Whether it's enormous increased capacity to deliver missile systems into Israel from Hezbollah, their increased strength in and around Mosul with the Shia militias, the work that they've done to support the Houthis to fire missiles against the Saudis – the list of Iranian transgressions has increased dramatically since the date that the JCPOA was signed.

MR. ZARATE: And do you see the Iranians trying to use non-state proxies as a force of influence?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Certainly, in each of – in each of those places. Yeah, right, the Shia crescent is close to being developed. And that is not in America's best interest to permit that to happen.

MR. ZARATE: What do we do to push back or to deal with that?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: So I always start with making sure that we understand that we have to have our partners be enormous assets in assisting us in doing that, whether it's the work that the Emirates can do in certain pockets, the places that Israel can help us, the places that the other Gulf states can provide assistance. Not always simply focused on kinetic assistance. When people think of assistance, they often think of can they put a battalion or two in the field. These are – these are nations with great treasure and great wealth and great capacity to reach into places that America can't always reach. And we also have other allies, the Europeans, for whom the threat from Iran is great. And I'm confident that they can assist us as well. I would also argue that something like the activity that was undertaken last week in Syria would have to have been noticed by the Iranians.

MR. ZARATE: Very good. (Laughter.) Let's also talk about another party that may have paid attention to that, North Korea.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: I want to clean that one up a little bit. (Laughter.) But not much. I may double down into trouble, so here we go. (Laughter.)

What I mean by that is this was a decision-making process that was decisive, thoughtful and truly based on a factual understanding of the geostrategic importance of the things that are facing our nation today. We had someone violate the chemical weapons treaty, right? This is – this is not insignificant. And so I do think the Iranians ought to take note of the fact that this administration that is prepared to engage in activities that are different from what America has been doing these past few years.

MR. ZARATE: Director, was there a calculus to do this at a time when there was a meeting with the Chinese leadership at Mar-a-Largo? (Laughter.)

DIRECTOR POMPEO: (Laughs.) You know, how much more time do we have? (Laughter.) No. No this – I'll be honest, the decision-making process, it takes a little bit. It took – it took the intelligence community a little bit to develop its assessment. And so, no, I think – I think that's a too cute. I think in fact, this was – this was something that we worked as quickly as we could to respond in a way that was connected to the threat that had been presented. I think both in the trimming and in the target selection, were all intrinsically connected as both a tactical, operational, strategic matter to the threat we were attempting to push back against.

MR. ZARATE: Shifting to North Korea, the administration has talked about the strategy of strategic patience being over. Concerns about the development of the ballistic missile program, continued development of the nuclear program, the potential – as we're reading in the press – of another nuclear test based on the anniversary – 105th anniversary of the founder of North Korea's birthday. What concerns you most about North Korea? And why has that become such a hot-button and central issue for the administration?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah, it's just progress, right? Multiple administrations have tried to deal with the threat of a(n) intercontinental ballistic missile capable of putting a nuclear warhead into the United States, and we're simply closer now than we have ever been at any time in North Korea's history. And so if you said what's different, what's unique, what's new, maybe nothing other than each step along the way – each test, each effort – as the knowledge base increases and the capacity to deliver that increases and draws closer, it both reduces the option set to prevent it and makes more likely that you get a bad decision on a tough day from the leader of North Korea.

MR. ZARATE: What are intelligence gaps? Is it largely about intent? Certainly, we're witnessing capability. What concerns you about intelligence gaps as you try to provide the best intelligence to the president?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah. You know, I don't want to speak about that specifically.

But, boy, I spend a lot of my time worrying about exactly that. Indeed, it's great. We'll produce great product. We'll provide really good, sound information to the president. But I worry every day about something we miss, something we didn't have access to, some pocket that we didn't go pick. And so, yeah, it's that – it's that we don't have a complete enough understanding of all that's

taking place, and I wouldn't limit that to North Korea. I would put that in all of the activities that we undertake.

MR. ZARATE: The Israelis talk about this a little bit in the context of the Iranian nuclear program. This was during the negotiations. They talked about a zone of immunity, a concern that the Iranians would reach a certain degree of capability and a point at which nothing could be done about the program, in a sense. Are we reaching a zone of immunity with respect to North Korea?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Look, it's certainly the risk. We have to all keep in mind, as an intelligence matter, we understand that this is not only a nuclear threat, right? It's not unidimensional. You might have a nation that developed an intercontinental ballistic missile that has been developed in a way that could deliver a nuclear weapon. Well, we're talking about a pretty significant military, conventional forces, that can do enormous harm to a major city in the world that's not very far off from the place they have their weapons systems. So it is a very complex problem. It's the reason it's such a hard nut to crack and why previous administrations have, frankly, not done so. But it's fallen to us that we're at this time where they're close, and President Trump has said very clearly we have an obligation to prevent that from occurring.

MR. ZARATE: Let me – this is kind of the final call for questions, by the way, so if you –

MR. : We'll come to the side.

MR. ZARATE: OK, got it. So I'll take those in just a second. But let me ask kind of a series of three questions that are more sort of Washington-centric.

First, I just came from a panel earlier today talking about the tension between the White House and the intelligence community, and where that's going. You've obviously been a very important bridge and a leader, obviously, at the CIA, but a trusted member of the White House team in the early days of the administration. How do you describe where the relationship is between the White House and the intelligence community?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: It's fantastic. (Laughter.) No, don't laugh; I mean that. I can only give you my observations. This morning at 10:30, I was in the Oval Office presenting the president his daily brief. I do it nearly every day. When I'm out of town, my deputy is there. The team's there. The vice president, there almost every day, too, when he's in-country. They are voracious consumers of the product we develop. They ask really hard questions. I think that's the sign of a good relationship. I always remind people that when you stop talking it's not a good thing. So we get lots of hard questions about the product, and how we developed and how we sourced it, and are we sure. That seems completely appropriate. I literally just left another gathering where there were lots of activities underway, but almost all of them hinged on our capacity to deliver the president the intelligence that he needed. And he asks me all the time, and we do our best to deliver against it.

The relationship is, in my sense, fantastic, the word that I used, because the president also is completely prepared to hear things that run counter to the hypothesis. You should know that happens to me, too. I have a hypothesis about a situation, and my team presents data, and I ask really hard questions before we deliver it. It seems quite natural in the intelligence process that this would happen. And so we see that. And, I don't know, we deliver to him each day our best analysis of what it is he's most interested in on that given day and the things that we think he needs to know.

MR. ZARATE: There's a lot of interest in Washington about how he consumes information, the president that is. Does he like more visual information? Does he like videos? Have you adapted the way he consumes information? Everyone, you know, consumes information in different ways, right?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yes. This issue consumes Washington too. (Laughter.)

MR. ZARATE: Yeah. (Laughs.)

DIRECTOR POMPEO: So I – it won't surprise anyone that after my nomination I spent a fair amount of time trying to understand how you deliver that product to that various audiences. It's not just the president. Certainly he's our first customer, but we deliver information to the Department of Defense every day, their most senior leaders, and to H.R. McMaster and his team. So it a broad audience that is reading the product that comes off the press each morning at 3:30 and is delivered throughout the day as well.

And so what we have – so my reading made very clear to me that every individual, including every president, has consumed their information in different ways. They've taken it different times, for different durations, with less or more consistency than other presidents. You know, I guess I'd just say this: So we deliver the president his product each day. He consumes it. There have been days when I thought we were there, ready to give the brief. I thought there's no a chance we're getting in today. It was a very busy day on a subject unrelated to national security. And you know, each day we're there.

It's like clockwork. It's – and it's important, because sometimes we only need just a few minutes, and sometimes we need a great deal more of the president's time. And in every case, he has permitted myself and the DNI and all of the intelligence community to have the window we needed to make sure that we were broadly able to help him understand what was – we thought was going to be very important to him.

MR. ZARATE: Right. You mentioned the DNI, the director of national intelligence, Senator Coats. He's now on board.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Praise the lord.

MR. ZARATE: Yeah, how do you see that relationship? There's a lot of controversy.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah. I was the second-happiest person when he was confirmed. His acting director was the most happy, I think. (Laughter.) Look, I've known – I knew Senator Coats. I think the relationship's going to be great. We each have plenty to do. Different spaces, different domains. And I am thrilled to have him on board, beginning to help make sure that the broader IC, the dozen-odd intelligence agencies, are delivering a comprehensive product to the president. And not just a CIA product, or an NSA product, or an NRO product, but a comprehensive product that makes sense for the president.

MR. ZARATE: Before we turn to the question, and we hope to get those in a second, we like to end on a positive note. You know –

DIRECTOR POMPEO: That wasn't positive?

MR. ZARATE: No, that's – no, that's super. (Laughter.) No, I mean, thematically. Thematically. That's super positive and fantastic. No – (laughs) – you know, the CIA obviously, you know, presents information about threats, analysis around terrible events like the chemical attacks. But it also presents potential opportunities. Where do you see potential opportunities, not only for the intelligence community but for U.S. national security moving forward? There's a lot of threats in the world. We've just sort of scratched the surface. Where are some opportunities that you and the team at the agency have looked at and maybe even briefed the president about?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah. I can think of – there's more than a handful. Two or three that come to mind: Along with General Kelly, we presented the president some options where we think we can do some really good work against the counternarcotics threats in Mexico and in Central America. I think not a lot of resources but a lot of focus can do some real good there. And I think we're going to head down that path.

There are real opportunities in Africa as well, places where I think, in the same way, that we can – along with our partners – begin to develop a set of relationships. There's a big counterterrorism threat there, and one that we've done a mediocre job at addressing. And I think we can – if we present a more organized solution, we can come up with very, very good outcomes. And then I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful with respect to some of the larger threats that we've talked about, with China and Russia we can get to a place where we can find places where we are not constantly in conflict. And I think there's a handful of those as well.

MR. ZARATE: Let me – let me just take that last threat, on China, because I think it's worth asking. Do you think there's hope that the Chinese will exert more influence on the North Koreans to either slow or to suspend their nuclear program?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: I'm counting on it.

MR. ZARATE: OK. All right.

I'm ready for the questions. Thank you. And while I'm doing this, let me – let me also not only thank CSIS, but let me thank the Transnational Threat Project, led by the late Arnaud de Borchgrave. Alexandra de Borchgrave is with us in the front seat. Judge Webster is the chair of the steering committee, now run ably and expertly by Tom Sanderson. For those who don't know TNT, they do remarkable work. I was fortunate enough to be part of a three-year study with Tom and his team on the arc of instability, looking at the evolution of militancy. They do great work. So I just wanted to thank you, Tom, for hosting.

Alexandra, thank you.

And we always think of –

DIRECTOR POMPEO: You got a couple more here.

MR. ZARATE: Oh my gosh. All right, here we go.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: All right, I'm going to settle in. We got – there we go.

MR. ZARATE: (Laughs.) Yeah.

All right. I have to ask this one, I guess. Russia. As the investigations proceed, this person's curious, what are the big outstanding questions for you? What would you like to know that you don't? And is there any actual evidence that Russia continues to try to interfere or to use active measures to interfere in the U.S. democratic process?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Well, I don't have any comment on the investigations. They'll run their course. We'll do our duty and provide those who ask and have a right to see it, we'll give them the information that they need so that they can conduct their investigations. I think that's the agency's appropriate role.

But with the threat of Russian active measures, yes, it – (chuckles) – it will continue, and I would use as proof of that the fact it's been going on for decades. This is not a new problem.

I was in – I was in Europe this weekend, and they're very worried about it in their own elections. They're seen it. It's not that they're worried it's not imaginary. It's real. And it's going to take an enormous amount of creativity. It is, frankly – it is, frankly, with respect to these active measures, it is harder in a democracy, right? There are some tricky – important and tricky issues in a democracy to push back against these information wars, the set of active measures. But we've got to redouble our efforts to do so. We have to preserve the American democracy against this threat – this threat of misinformation and propaganda and the like that poses a real risk to our democratic values.

MR. ZARATE: And a lot of our allies are worried about that.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: They're all very worried about it.

MR. ZARATE: All right. Let me – I've got two here that relate to, you know, sort of bureaucratic questions, but they're important ones.

One relates to whether or not there's a plan to restructure the intelligence community, as reports indicated that the White House had hoped to do.

Related to that, let me ask this. Director Brennan had launched a large reorganization of the CIA. Some thought that it took the operational focus away from the agency. The question here is, do you plan to stand by the reorganization or revert back to the more traditional model?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah, I'm not going to comment on the second one. I'd certainly tell my workforce before I tell all of you, as much as I dearly love you. (Laughter.)

But I'll comment this way with respect to the transition that took place at the agency over the past couple years. I did this twice when I ran small businesses. I did things that you would call a modernization or reorganization. In neither case did we nail it. In neither case did we get it right the first time. And so we took a look at it, tweaked it, made it better. In neither of those cases did we get it right the second time, either.

Look, these are continuing processes. When you're operating in an agile space, organizational structure changes to meet the evolving set of threats. And I certainly intend to make sure that the agency gets to the right place so that we can meet those threats.

And with respect to the review of the structure of the DNI, there's been no policy decision made yet. I have been – and I don't have to hide it, because I wrote about this in some of your newspapers – I have often stated that I believe that now, 10 years plus on from the creation of this structure, it's worthy of a review, given how the threats have evolved. And so I would welcome that kind of review to make sure we have it right, that we're not back to where we were or that we've not gone to a place that doesn't deliver the intelligence the president needs. A once-a-decade scrub of the structure of the intelligence community might seem to me, at least, like a useful undertaking. That's just me. We'll see. I don't – not foreshadowing what the administration may or may not do.

MR. ZARATE: Yeah.

This is a related question, but it is about the CIA directly. In the changing global threat environment, what will the agency prioritize in attracting the next generation of CIA intelligence professionals? Is it diversity, expanding the size of the CIA, et cetera?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: One more time? Is the question about what kind of people or what –

MR. ZARATE: What kind of – what's the next generation of CIA pros? Recruitment, are you looking for diversity? What are you looking for?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: No, I'm looking for some brave young men and women who want to go do really cool stuff. (Laughter.)

In that sense, Juan, it's – this agency has a fabulous history, remarkable people. And those are the kinds of people that we're looking for: smart people, agile people, people who are willing to sacrifice an enormous amount of their lives to go do really hard things on behalf of the American people. And we'll find them and take them from wherever we – wherever we can. We need to make sure we have the languages so that we can make sure we understand what others are doing and come from a cultural context.

And by the way, those languages include machine language so – right? – so that we have the capacity to do some of the things that I suggested in my remarks, that is, we have to be cutting-edge with respect to our technology as well. But the core skillset is willingness to work really hard, to be really smart and to be an enormous patriot.

MR. ZARATE: I'm going to take the prerogative. I'm going to ask a follow-on question to this. And it relates to your – to your remarks. Is there – is there a role for non-state actors to play a bigger role in advancing U.S. interests? We often talk about the negative side of the ledger. Obviously, your remarks touched on it. We talk about terrorists. We talk about hackers. But there's also ethical hackers. There are also those that are trying to promote U.S. values and interests, NGOs and others. What's your view of the role of non-state actors in a positive way? And the reason I ask it is because that question about what are you looking for, both internal, it's a – there's an external question to that as well.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah, yeah. You know, I haven't given much thought to that in the cyber realm and the hacking realm. I haven't given it much thought. It is the case today already that we have great partners all around the world who are non-state actors, who are helping America do good things in places all around the world, and we deeply appreciate that assistance.

I'd say this too. I had a question. I think it was a week or 10 days ago I was asked – it was about something some world leader had said that was just clearly false, and I was asked, well, what are you doing to disprove that. And this was a journalist who asked me the question. And I said, well, tell me what you're doing to disprove that, right? I mean, you're the fact-finders. This is – this is a central theme that we hear from journalists all across the world, is they are truth-tellers extraordinaire. So I'm hopeful that we will get some of the truth-telling from these people, who will go out and do their own independent fact analysis about what all of us say, whether it's our own government, where they spend a lot of time – and appropriately so – but others around the world who are saying things that are just patently false. And the global media sometimes turns to others to debunk them, when in fact they have a great capacity to do so.

MR. ZARATE: Yeah. Fantastic.

Let me ask this one, because I know it's near and dear to your heart, and to mine too. What, if any, effort will be made to collect more HUMINT on money laundering and terrorist financing? What's the CIA's role?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: I may just let you answer that one.

MR. ZARATE: No, sir.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah. (Laughter.) Yeah, so always more to do. Along with our partners at Treasury and other places too, chasing the money flows has proven important, and will continue to prove important. There's always a cyber element to this. There's always a banking element to this. But very often, there's also a human intelligence collection piece of it as well, that is, you have to go touch something or be some place so that you can get to that electronic solution. And it's critical that we get that right, we get this piece of it right so that we can track those terror money flows around the world as well, and then as a result of that, make good decisions – good decisions about networks, good decisions about sanctions and all of the other tools that the president has in his kit bag.

MR. ZARATE: Let me combine a couple more of these questions. The first has to do with the ideology of radical Islam, or violent Islamic extremism. So the first question is, is there a clear strategy for dismantling the ideas of radical Islam. That's the question. A related one is, what can the CIA do to mitigate recruitment of Americans online to commit terrorist acts?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: I don't have much to say about the first one. It's certainly important, but frankly, not at the center of the mission of the agency that I run.

With respect to the second part of that, the recruitment online, enormous amount of resources are being brought to bear. I remember now almost three years ago, almost four years ago, December 2013, there was a man in Wichita, Kansas, who tried to blow up our airport. He got very close. And through the great work of a number of elements of our intelligence community, he was foiled literally at the airport gate. It was very, very well-done. He had been recruited online. It was an aircraft worker who one might not think terrorist, bought a gun online, had found Inspire magazine inspiring, and had made an endeavor to blow up – put a truck with a bomb between gates six and seven at Wichita Mid-Continent Airport – the place that I took off from each and every Monday morning.

We have a lot of work to do to make sure that we're ahead of the game. It's far too complex a question for today, but this – the signals intelligence that we collect gets harder as encryption improves – that is, it makes our collection challenges more difficult than they were the day before encryption took place – and we all have an obligation to make sure that we don't lose access to those foreign terrorists and the information that they're communicating.

MR. ZARATE: Let me ask you a question about sort of the future of intelligence, as well as technology. I've got two here. One that asks: What's your plan to innovate and adapt to future threats, especially as technology changes society faster than governance, policy or law can adapt? And a related question is, given your statements today that the CIA needs to be as clever and as innovative as the enemies we face, what is your commitment to using the best science available, specifically the 25 years of complexity science, to create the adaptive culture and keen foresight you need?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: That's a great question, although I know less about complexity of science than I probably ought to. It is hard, by the way, I'll concede this, in a government institution to stay cutting edge. There was nothing like my time as a small-businessman. When you failed, boy, you knew it pretty fast. Somebody stops buying your product right away, and it is difficult. The agency stood up under my predecessor a directorate dedicated to digital innovation. It's called the Directorate of Digital Innovation. And our efforts are not only to find and hire talented people who can keep us at the cutting edge, keep us out in front of our adversaries, but also to work with technologies that have been developed in other places, make sure that we are the beneficiaries of the enormous work that goes into other people developing good technology.

We have to stay at the forefront. Our enemies are. The Chinese spend a lot of money on this. The Iranians spend a fair amount of money on this as well. Our adversaries are investing in technology. And we have to make sure that we continue to do so as well.

MR. ZARATE: Do you think a lot of this has to do with the pressures on the intelligence community, the CIA, to be more predictive? That you've got to come up with predictive technologies and analysis to feed the policy beast?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: We do. And the agency has spent, and I have reinforced lots of efforts in that very vein, right? There's some really good math. There's some really interesting work that's being done in the sciences to give us better capacity to do that. And what's a challenge is to make that applicable in the tactical and strategic – tactical and operational environments that we often work. These aren't things that are set piece and one has years to do. We often have hours and days to develop solutions. And if we haven't done that homework before, the chance of us being able to deliver that technological solution is pretty low.

MR. ZARATE: Let me – let me take the two questions here that take us back to your remarks. One has to do with the First Amendment. It says, you spoke about the need to limit the lateral movement Assange has by misusing our First Amendment rights. Can you expand on how you plan to accomplish that? And then the second question, which is a bit more tactical but you refer to it in your remarks, are you reviewing insider threat detection efforts in response to the WikiLeaks Vault 7 release?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: We are constantly reviewing insider threat work, and need to. If there's one thing that doesn't evolve, it's the threat from insiders inside intelligence organizations.

There's a long history, dating back to Mesopotamia. So this is – this is a constant challenge and something we have to be ever-vigilant about.

What was the first part? The first part was about –

MR. ZARATE: The first part was about the First Amendment.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah, First Amendment freedoms. What I was speaking to there was, as – was a little less constitutional law and a lot more of a philosophical understanding. Julian Assange has no First Amendment freedoms. He's sitting in an embassy in London. He's not a U.S. citizen. So I wasn't speaking to our Constitution.

What I was speaking to is an understanding that these are not reporters don't good work to try to keep you – the American government honest. These are people who are actively recruiting agents to steal American secrets with the sole intent of destroying the American way of life. That is fundamentally different than a First Amendment activity, as I understand them, and I think as most Americans understand them. So that's what I was really getting to.

We've had administrations before that have been squeamish about going after these folks under some concept of this right-to-publish. No one has the right to actively engage in the threat of secrets from America with the intent to do harm to it.

MR. ZARATE: And just remind the audience here, a Harvard-trained lawyer, which you take great pride in.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah. (Laughs.) It was a long time ago.

MR. ZARATE: Yeah. (Laughter.) Here are a couple of questions that you may not want to answer, but they've been posed.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Those are the best kind.

MR. ZARATE: Yeah. Do you think Assad was emboldened to use chemical weapons after the Trump administration said his future was up to the Syrian people?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: So you're asking me to get in Assad's head. And that's a place I simply refuse to go. (Laughter.)

Yeah. I think it's enough to say this. We know what took place. We know that it was an atrocity. And President Trump chose to make a decision in response to that.

MR. ZARATE: What should our policy toward Putin's Russia be?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah, I'll leave that – I'll leave that to somebody else too. It's one of the great things about being an intelligence guy is that I can leave to others some of the challenging questions about the details around policy. I'll let Secretary Tillerson and the president and the team present U.S. policy on Russia –

MR. ZARATE: Yeah.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: – in 30 seconds or less.

MR. ZARATE: Yes. (Laughs.) This is a question about the State Department. Again, you may not want to answer this. But this is important, I think, for the intelligence community. The State Department is a member of the IC, of course. What impact, if any, will the proposed reduction in the State Department budget and personnel presence have on the ability of your agency to carry out its mission?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah, we work closely with State Department nearly every place that we operate. And it's important that they have the resources to do that. With respect to the budget fights, I'm someone who came from the policy world who always thought that government could do better with even a little bit less money. I still firmly believe that, not only at the State Department, but in my agency too. We all ought to be ever mindful that we're delivering value against the dollars that we are extracting from the American people.

And so I think what we ought to do, rather than spend a lot of time thinking about the exact number of dollars, we ought to talk about the mission set that we have, the resources that are required to execute that in a way that is deeply excellent, and then match the resources to fit it. And I'm confident that the State Department will end up with those resources as well.

MR. ZARATE: This is a related question, but it's about elections. There's a lot of important elections coming up. We talked a little bit about Turkey. We've got elections in France and Germany. We've got elections in Iran as well. We've got a transfer of power in South Korea. How does the agency analyze elections and these political movements? And what – is there anything that concerns you about trends in terms of political movements or these elections?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: You know, we perform intelligence on those elections in the same way that we do with respect to everything else. We try to help the president understand what the election looks like and what it tells you about the direction, the policy direction, that a particular country might take, right. It's – that's the important thing. It's not necessarily the who but the what that follows from those elections.

So our intelligence is very, very focused on trying to help deliver to the president what could be disjunctive changes in a country, right. If you have a big change in leadership in France or upcoming – I hesitate to call it an election, but this thing that stands for an election in Iran – you want to make sure you deliver to the president what the future might look like. And we do our best to deliver that to him.

MR. ZARATE: Let me close maybe with one last question for you. Has there been anything that's surprised you as CIA director, something big or small that's been surprising or something you didn't expect as the CIA director?

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Yeah, a whole lot of people show up. (Laughter.)

You know, the thing that – so I was on the Oversight Committee, so I had a sense of the people and the culture at the Central Intelligence Agency. So I had a feel for that already. But as a member of Congress, you spend some fraction of your time on that work and then you have other things that occupy your life as well.

And as I've been doing this now full-time for some weeks, what constantly amazes me is the scope and scale of the work that we undertake, the enormous breadth and the capacity to deliver really well-grounded, very contextual, often highly nuanced answers to policymakers in a very, very short time. It takes a whole lot of resources to do that. There is no other organization in the world that can pull that off. And that is special and unique, and while perhaps not surprising, something I have enjoyed and that America benefits from greatly.

MR. ZARATE: Great. Mr. Director, thank you for your time.

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Thank you.

MR. ZARATE: Thank you for the honor of being here on stage with you.

Let's all join and thank the director for his time. (Applause.)

DIRECTOR POMPEO: Thank you all very much.

Thank you, Juan.

MR. ZARATE: Thank you, sir.

(END)