FDD's National Security Summit

Conversation between CIA Director Mike Pompeo and Juan Zarate, Chairman and Senior Counselor of FDD's Center on Sanctions and Illicit Finance

(APPLAUSE)

ZARATE: Thanks. Thanks. Good morning, everybody. Hope everyone's doing well. I want to thank Cliff, Mark Dubowitz and the FDD team for hosting this incredibly important and timely national security forum.

And obviously I want to thank Director Pompeo for taking time out of his incredibly busy schedule, as you can imagine to take time to reflect on the national security issues of the day.

There's no secret here: I'm not an unbiased journalist. I'm a fan of this director. I worked on his transition. Frankly, I love the man. So, I believe in the Weberian concept of putting your biases out front before beginning the questions.

But, Mr. Director, welcome. It's great to see you again. And thank you for taking time.

POMPEO: It's great to be here.

It was not a condition of my appearance here that you be the moderator. But it all worked out.

(LAUGHTER)

ZARATE: Thank you, sir. Appreciate it.

You know, the director is a soldier, a lawyer, an entrepreneur, congressman and is doing great work at the CIA.

What I think we want to do today with the audience and with those joining us via livestream is talk about not just the issues of today that are in the newspaper, but some of the trends and issues you have to deal with as the director of the CIA in the intelligence community.

We often get captured by the immediate, and you obviously have to not only deal with that, but deal with how we're thinking about our national security five, 10, 15, 20 years out. So I want to make sure we talk about some of those issues.

There's no question there's a sense of dislocation in the world, a sense the map is shifting in some ways, that power itself is shifting, including with the role of non-state actors.

Major issues before us: North Korea, Iran, major policy shifts with the fall of Raqqa as the putative capital of ISIS, China's party congress happening as we speak. Lots going on in the world, and so let's get into it.

Mr. Director, first talking about Iran, the president gave his speech on October 13th reshaping U.S. policy on Iran.

I think the first question on this is why was that speech and that shift necessary? And is Iran in violation of the JCPOA? Or what's the animating principle behind this shift?

POMPEO: Juan, thanks for the question.

But first let me also say thanks to FDD for hosting this. Thanks to Clifford for inviting me here this morning. I look forward to a great conversation on lots of topics, including certainly this very important topic, the threat the Islamic Republic of Iran represents to the United States.

And I think that's the right way to enter your question. We often focus a lot on the JCPOA, and I'm happy to share the intelligence elements that are buried there, but the president has come to view the threat from Iran as at the center of so much of the turmoil that bogs us down in lots of places in the Middle East—right? Whether it's Lebanese Hezbollah, the threat that it presents to both Lebanon and to Israel; whether it's the Shia militias—you can see the impact that they're having today, even in northern Iraq; the threat that they pose to U.S. forces—we had an incident last week.

The list of Iranian transgressions—the missile program, their cyber efforts. The list of Iranian transgressions is long. And from an intelligence perspective, we shared that with the president. I think he concluded that we needed to reconfigure our relationships, not only with Iran but with the Gulf states and with Israel, to ensure that we are addressing what he views as the real threat to the United States in a comprehensive way.

ZARATE: And there's been a lot of focus, obviously, then on the deal and whether or not there was certification under the U.S. law, INARA, that required the president to certify every 90 days.

What's your sense of where we're headed with the deal?

Because there's been so much focus, especially from our European allies, on the centrality of the JCPOA in the context of the relationship with Iran. The president seems to be shifting that in the policy, and I think that the administration seems to be pushing, not just on the deal, but around the deal.

So how do you explain to people your view of the JCPOA itself and the role it plays in the policy?

POMPEO: So I think that's true. Juan, I will leave and I—just as fact, I don't do policy in that same way today. General McMaster will be in in a little bit, you can give him all the hard time you want.

(LAUGHTER)

But I will say this. Look, the mission set that the president laid out with respect to the deal was to ensure that there were no pathways for the Iranians to achieve a nuclear capability, to not put a president in the future in the same place this administration is with respect to North Korea, to close down all the various avenues.

And so, there are many pieces to that. From an intelligence perspective, we need even more intrusive inspection. The deal put us in a marginally better place with respect to inspection, but the Iranians have on multiple occasions been capable of presenting a continued threat through covert efforts to develop their nuclear program along multiple dimensions, right? The missile dimension, the weaponization effort, the nuclear component itself.

So we need to make sure from an intelligence perspective that we're enabled to do that. And the president has given us the resources to go achieve that and all the various tools that we have, the various legal authorities.

And so, when the president stared at the deal and asked us what this meant from a proliferation perspective inside of Iran, two years, three years, the difference of a breakout time across a handful of months, it didn't seem satisfactory to him. That's no surprise; he's tweeted about it.

It didn't seem satisfactory to him. So he asked us all to go evaluate how we might present a more comprehensive effort to push back against the Quds Force, the IRGC more broadly, and the Iranian regime itself.

The effort—the notion—and I'll stay on the analytic side, the notion that the entry into the JCPOA would curtail Iranian adventurism or their terror threat or their malignant behavior has now, what, two years on, proven to be fundamentally false. So...

ZARATE: Has the opposite happened? Have they gotten more aggressive than you would anticipate, or....

POMPEO: So it depends on which dimension. Look, they've been developing their missile system pretty consistently for an extended period of time now.

In terms of testing, about the same as where they were pre-JCPOA. But their desire to put guided rocketry in the hands of Hezbollah, the efforts with the Houthis in Yemen, launching missiles into the—or attempting to launch missiles to the Emirates and into Saudi. These are new and aggressive, and show no signs of having been curtailed by even the increased commerce that they've achieved through having Europeans back in the game in Iran.

ZARATE: Now it's not new that they've engaged in this adventurous, sort of, activity and dangerous activity from a U.S. perspective. When we talk about pushing back, what does that mean from your perspective?

Because, you know, I reflect on Qasem Soleimani, the head of the IRGC, the Revolutionary Guard Corps, sort of showing up in all the wrong places at all of the wrong times from a U.S. perspective. He was just in Kirkuk in the middle of this conflict. How do...

POMPEO: I'm aware of that.

ZARATE: Figured you were.

(LAUGHTER)

How do we push back? I mean, they seem to be pushing on all of the pressure points and what does that mean for us to be able to confront and push back?

POMPEO: All the tools available of U.S. power, so I'll begin with a handful. I could—we could talk about this for a long time, but I'll begin with a handful. It has been far too inexpensive for the Iranians to conduct this adventurism. We should raise the cost of that. The Agency has an incredibly important role there, providing the intelligence basis for us to help, not only the United States, but our partners in the region, which is the second piece of this.

We need all of our partners. Sometimes I hear folks talk about the JCPOA and our partners, and nary a mention of the Saudis, the Emirates, the Israelis, but lots of talk about Germans, and Brits and French, and that's great. They're important partners, too. We need them all working against the continued expansion of the Iranians.

Treasury, too, has an important role. Juan, you lived this in your roles at Treasury. Secretary Mnuchin is keenly aware of the tools that are in his arsenal as well. I mean, think about this today imagine you're a—the Iranians have complained a great deal that they haven't seen the benefits, the economic benefits they had expected. But imagine you're a European CEO, or board of directors or a lender; the intelligence community struggles mightily to figure out which companies are controlled by the IRGC or the Quds Force. It is a difficult, complex intelligence undertaking to sort out which entities are controlled by the Quds Force, which ones have shareholders. It is intentionally opaque, but as much as 20 percent of the Iranian economy is controlled by them.

Imagine that you're a businessperson deciding whether it was appropriate to take that risk or not, whether the return was there for your company. I think we can make it even more difficult, and I think in order to push back against all these non-nuclear activities—put aside the nuclear issues in the deal, to push back against these non-nuclear activities I think is something the president's intent on doing.

ZARATE: Let me ask you just a couple more questions here, because I think the Iran policy and the JCPOA debate internationally sort of are windows into other trends and factors. How have our allies—or even adversaries—reacted to that speech and policy shift? You hear what—you know, you hear publicly. Is there a different line privately?

POMPEO: So I can't share a whole lot there, Juan, other than to say there is consensus of the Iranian threat. Just—again, just to push aside for just a moment the nuclear threat not to diminish—that is perhaps the paramount objective is to keep them from achieving a nuclear capability to launch weapons.

But, putting that aside, there is enormous consensus, global consensus, to push back against the Iranians there. And I've certainly heard that in private conversations with my intelligence counterparts; them desiring to work alongside us to build out the intelligence picture such that we can deliver, to all of our policymakers, the best information in the right places. The levers so that they can decide which ones they want to pull in order to achieve the policy objectives that each of our countries have.

I have not heard a single one of them deny the core of what President Trump said in his speech on Friday, which is that Iranian behavior is threatening not only the United States, but the West. The West, writ large, as well.

ZARATE: Right. I want to segue to a couple of other issues, feeding off of this speech. Because the speech highlighted two things that I think went largely unnoticed. One was the discussion of Iranian support to terrorism. And, of course, we know the typical sort of argument around that, and the data we have. Hezbollah, Hamas, you know, proxies in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen.

But the president mentioned Al Qaeda and the Taliban as well. And I thought that was interesting, in part because we've known, all along, that there have been links between the two. The Treasury Department has designated actors who've been—Al Qaeda actors—who've been in Iran and supported—the 9/11 Commission raised the question, frankly, that was unanswered with respect to Iran's potential role in 9/11. And the president actually raised it quite openly, which I found to be really startling and interesting.

Can you talk about that, the Iranian-Al Qaeda links that the president mentioned?

POMPEO: I can't say a whole lot more than he said, but I think it's an open secret, and not classified information, that there have been relationships, there are connections. There have been times the Iranians have worked alongside Al Qaeda.

We actually, the CIA is going to release, here, in the next handful of days, a series of documents related to the Abbottabad raids that may prove interesting to those who are looking to take at this issue—take a look at this issue a little bit further.

But there have been connections where, at the very least, they have cuts deals so as not to come after each other. That is, they view the West as a greater threat than the fight is between them two along their ideological lines. And we, the intelligence community, has reported on this for an awfully long time. It is something we are very mindful of.

And, with the defeat of the real estate proposition in Syria and Iraq for ISIS, we watch what's going on in Idlib. You've got ISIS folks, Al-Nusra Front, Al Qaeda folks up in the north.

We're watching to see if there aren't places where they work together for a common threat against the United States.

ZARATE: Let's take that threat. Because it then goes to this issue of the fall of Raqqa, the diminishment of territory that ISIS controls. But it also raises the question of the scramble for territory and what American interests and, even, presence looks like, as ISIS is, hopefully, more quickly defeated.

What is your sense of where American presence and influence goes in Syria and Iraq, now that ISIS seems to be on its way out? Or, at least, less in control of territory—better said?

POMPEO: You know what, I'd prefer to leave the policy piece of that, in terms of how the president's going to think about that, to others. But let's be clear. We have one stated policy from the president, that's very clear with respect to South Asia, and the threat that not only the Taliban presents there but the Haqqani network, Al Qaeda, ISIS, in Afghanistan, the increasing Russians.

The president's made an unconditioned commitment—that is, no-timeline commitment—to defeating the threat to the West from radical Islamic terrorism in Afghanistan. I am confident that the intelligence community will continue to deliver an understanding to the president, such that he can shape the policies he's going to follow in Syria. To push back not only against Iran, but the Syrian regime, and to ensure that the Abadi government in Iraq is successful as well.

ZARATE: From the director's perch, what's the ideal scenario, from your perspective, in terms of an ability to operate in these places? Do you need more of a physical footprint longer-term?

Obviously, Afghanistan gives you that with the troop deployment and without a timeline. But what does that look like in an Iraq and Syrian context? Especially when we're not committed to nation-building, obviously—

POMPEO: Yes.

ZARATE: —that's the president's stated policy. So, what does that look like from an intel chief's perspective?

POMPEO: Look, we obviously benefit when there are larger U.S. footprint in the places we're trying to collect intelligence. There's no doubt about that. And there are—but there are a bunch of places that we operate, even as we sit here this morning, in the confines of a nicely air-conditioned hotel. That we've got folks out in harm's way, untethered from a whole lot of help from American support, doing really good work to get information.

So our mission, our intelligence collection mission, won't change one lick. Whether there's a big U.S. footprint, a small U.S. footprint, or no U.S. footprint, the president will still demand good intelligence. We will have to just figure out a way to achieve that, regardless of what the U.S. posture is in any of those particular places.

ZARATE: You mentioned the Afghanistan policy in South Asia. Secretary Tillerson's going out to India and gave a speech yesterday, talking about the importance of that partnership. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, a few weeks ago, talked about Pakistan and some of the difficulties we've had, obviously, with the Pakistanis. In part, the intelligence service's ties, relationships, maybe even facilitation of terrorist actors that have been dangerous for U.S. troops and interests.

Thinking about that part of the world and the role that you play, you know, what is this—the right steady state for our relationship with Pakistan? At a time when we've obviously doubled down in Afghanistan, are committing to India, but seem to be confronting Pakistan a bit more soberly these days.

POMPEO: I think history would indicate that high expectations for the Pakistanis' willingness to help us in the fight against radical Islamic terrorism should be set at a very low level. It's—our intelligence would indicate the same. That is, I think we should have a very real conversation with them, about what it is that they're doing and what it is they could do and the American expectations for how they will behave.

Look, they're an important country, sitting in an important place. Secretary Tillerson's statement, I think, is right about our desire to have a constructive relationship with the Pakistanis. But, equally, the president has made very clear. We're going to do everything we can—the United States is going to everything we can—to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table in Afghanistan, with the Taliban having zero hope that they can win this thing on the battlefield. To do that, you cannot have a safe haven in Pakistan.

There is—the intelligence is very clear. To achieve the objective that the president has set forth in Afghanistan, the capacity for terrorists to cross along the Af-Pak border and freely hide in Pakistan is prohibitive in our capacity to deliver that. And so, our mission is to ensure that that safe haven does not exist. And I hope that we can count on the Pakistanis for their help in achieving that.

We had a great outcome last week, when we were able to get back four U.S. citizens who had been held for five years inside of Pakistan, that's great news. And I—what's the right descriptor? I am hopeful that our relationship with them will deliver to us the things that America has as our vital interest in that region.

ZARATE: I want to go back to the Iran speech, not to talk about Iran per se, but to open a window into North Korea. Because another interesting thing that the president mentioned, again, largely unremarked, was the concern about potential links—not just on missile program, but other links between Iran and North Korea.

And in fact, in this speech, he said he was going to ask the intelligence community to look into this and to report back to him. What are your concerns about the links between Iran and North Korea, and the issue of proliferation writ large?

POMPEO: There is a long history of proliferation ties, as between North Korea and Iran. Sometimes one of the parties hasn't figured how to pay their bills, but I digress.

ZARATE: Sometimes we try to make it harder for them to pay their bills.

POMPEO: You know, so but there's a long history there—deep, there are deep conventional weapons, ties as between the two countries. These are two national states that don't have deep export control provisions within their countries.

And so it is a Wild, Wild West exercise and we do have an obligation to ensure that we account for that, as an intelligence community and then do our best efforts to ensure that we don't have capabilities transition between the two.

It could be the case, I can't say much, but you can imagine that each of these countries would have relative expertise in certain technologies, certain capacities and there won't even be dollars exchanged, but rather, there will be expertise or technology exchanged, as well, for the betterment of each of their weaponization programs, there missile programs and then their capacity to do explosive testing on nuclear devices, as well.

And so, yes, the president's comments there were—I—if you say unremarked in the intelligence community, noted that he has asked us to deliver him solid information, we are hard at work to do that.

ZARATE: Let me take that thread and ask this, is—are you concerned that we're in a state of greater risk with respect to proliferation? Not just with respect to Iran and North Korea, but with respect to the—sort of the global community of proliferation?

Given both lack of governance in parts of the world, concerns over who will acquire nuclear capabilities. Are we at a sort of an A.Q. Khan moment in 2017?

POMPEO: Yeah.

ZARATE: With respect to proliferation?

POMPEO: It's a good question. it's a question that is at the top of the president's mind, he talks to us and urges us all to think about these proliferation issues in every venue, not just North Korea and Iran, but Pakistan, every place that that risk is there.

There's both the intentional transition, the intentional proliferation and the risk that proliferation will take place with others conducting their own espionage activities, so we're conscientious of both. When you stare, even just at Asia, and you watch as North Korea grows ever closer to having its capability perfected.

You can imagine others in the region, also thinking that they may well need that capability to protect themselves. So, yes, we're deeply aware of the proliferation risks and working diligently, both to deny the incentives for that in other countries, and then on the hard

side of things, ensuring that we're watching as this proliferation activity, the communications begin to take down the network that would deliver that proliferation, as well.

ZARATE: You talked about the North Korean capability, and we've all watched the tests and we've read the newspapers around the quickening of their missile capabilities. We've seen the nuclear tests, which seem to be bigger and potentially more dangerous.

And we've obviously heard their bellicose threats. What are the remaining markers for their capabilities? It is simply re-entry of an ICBM capability? Is it the miniaturization of the nuclear device put on the tip? You know, are we perilously close to them having perfected all elements of an ability to hit the U.S. with a nuclear capability?

POMPEO: I can't get into the details, Juan, but this is an accurate statement: They are closer now than they were five years ago, and I expect they will be closer in five months than they are today, absent a global effort to push back against them.

That is each test, successful or unsuccessful, as defined in the West, continues to develop Kim Jong Un and his engineers' and scientists' knowledge base. They are intent upon completing that whole chain of activity, and it is the case that they are close enough now in their capabilities that from a U.S. policy perspective, we ought to behave as if we are on the cusp of them achieving that objective. That is there is always also some risk. Intelligence isn't perfect, especially in a place like North Korea, that we will be off by months or a couple of years in our understanding.

It's the case we've actually done good work. This before my time, done good work at tracking this program throughout the years. But when you're now talking about months, our capacity to understand that at a detailed level is in some sense irrelevant. Whether it happens on Tuesday or a month from Tuesday, we are at a time where the president has concluded that we need a global effort to ensure that Kim Jong Un doesn't have that capacity.

ZARATE: Right. This raises an interesting question for the intelligence community. Because it raises the question of how definitive you need to be in terms of when they've reached that capability and what—I'm not asking you to be a policymaker here. But from a policymaker's standpoint, then the question is what point do you assume, or have to assume, for the sake of national security that they do have that capability? And then that begins to shift your policy options and goals even.

POMPEO: It does. And it's one of the things that our team is incredibly mindful of. When I took over as the director, in a few weeks I created an entire mission center to attack this problem set broadly speaking, right, the Korean nuclear problem set.

And we are diligently trying to refine that answer so that we can give to policy makers a shorter window with which to face the conundrum of do you have to assume that they're all the way there. It's a challenging target, one that we have spent an awful lot of energy on, and will continue to each day. But to think we're going to have granularity in days and weeks, I think is

something that we have now—we all now have to accept we won't have. And so there is, you have to build backwards from the timelines that we lay out for the president.

ZARATE: Do you think that the perception of the threat from North Korea changes fundamentally at that moment? Not just in terms of their ability to potentially hit the U.S., but in terms of their posture in the region and what they're willing to do or not do.

And so I think I'm asking this question. Do you think that the threat from North Korea changes fundamentally at the moment that there is consensus that they've reached that capability? And if we imagine what that looks like, aside from a missile that can potentially hit Guam or Seattle or New York.

POMPEO: You know, I'm not sure it changes dramatically. I mean given where we find ourselves today, they are so far along in that, it's now a matter of thinking about how do you stop the final step. And then beyond that, it's one thing to be able to deliver a single missile along a certain set of trajectories to a certain destination, and another thing to have a country with the capacity to not only process the fissile material at a high volume, but deliver missile systems, technology—excuse me, guidance systems, all of the pieces to develop a truly robust capability to deliver those types of weapons. So even once you hit the "he could do it once" moment; there's a great risk that proceeds from the continuation of the development of those programs that far exceeds the moment that there's consensus revolving around whether he could reliably pull it off for a single missile system.

And we should be mindful, too. We talk an awful lot about missile systems that could reach Denver and Los Angeles and New York. But there are enormous U.S. interests in South Korea and Japan and in Asia, as well.

ZARATE: Right.

POMPEO: And so we shouldn't just focus solely on this ICBM threat, but the enormous conventional weapon systems put in the hands of this man, and the other elements of their nuclear program and other delivery technologies of those nuclear weapon systems.

We tend to focus on this, you know, missile trajectory issue. Make sure—from an intelligence community, I promise you, we have not lost the—we're still staring at every tree to make the forest, not staring at a particular tree—

ZARATE: Right.

POMPEO: —in the North Korean threat forest.

ZARATE: Can I ask about a separate growth?

POMPEO: You can ask about anything you want.

ZARATE: All right.

POMPEO: And I'll choose not to answer anything I don't want.

(LAUGHTER)

ZARATE: That's great. I'm loving this, by the way, I hope it's going OK.

The New York Times had a really interesting and important article the other day about North Korea's cyber capabilities, and how those have increased over time.

Their force of 6,000 cyber analysts, how they've embedded in the Chinese infrastructure, how they've spread them around in Southeast Asia and other places. Can you speak to how serious this cyber threat is from North Korea?

They've attacked the South Korean backs in the Dark Seoul attack in 2013. They've obviously been implicated in other attacks since the Bangladesh Central Bank heist, et cetera. How serious should we take the cyber threat, along with these other threats from North Korea?

POMPEO: Yeah, that's another tool in Kim Jong Un's arsenal as he thinks about how to deliver his end-state, right? His end-state, which is the continued capacity to go to sleep in a really nice bed in Pyongyang every night.

So it's another tool in his kit bag. He has shown a willingness to use it at a pretty robust level. Although not a level yet that I would describe as a catastrophic attack that is something intended or creating a risk for his regime.

But as they measure, you can see—they've done this with their missile program, as well. You can watch them measure Western responses to attacks. They attack. It’s not always the case that there is an overt response. But there is a response that is perceived by Kim Jong Un.

And he is trying to measure, trying to figure out where the lines and the boundaries are from not only U.S. policy, but policy of the other states that have been attacked, as well. So we're very mindful of it. They have a very robust capability, it is cheap.

If you compare the amount invested in their cyber program compared to the amount of money invested in their conventional weapon systems programs, or their nuclear program, it is pennies on the dollar. And its effectiveness would generate—if you were looking at it from a business perspective, an incredibly high ROI for that relatively small investment set.

ZARATE: Yeah, yeah. It gives them the ability to profit obviously. It also gives them the ability to reach out beyond their borders and disrupt, if not destroy.

POMPEO: It does. And it's interesting the actions they have taken, however, have very clearly had some impact on the global community, as well. We haven't talked much about this yet, but the Chinese actions have been most welcome.

And, frankly, when I came into my new role in January of this year, I think if you had told the intelligence community that we could have expected the Chinese to do all the things that they have to date, there would have been great skepticism inside of our building.

And there certainly would have been great skepticism around the world, so there—real progress there, I think there's a lot more economically and diplomatically, that we can all do. And the team that I lead is working very, very diligently to help identify the places we can help the world get maximum economic leverage against Kim Jong Un.

ZARATE: We've put a major amount of stock in the idea of Chinese pressure and influence on Pyongyang. You've just described what seems to be a shift for China.

Can you give a couple of examples of what China's done differently or in a way that you think's helpful? And do you think they've made a fundamental, sort of, shift in their policy or is there yet more to come for them?

POMPEO: So, I hope there's more to come. President Xi spoke for three and a half hours yesterday in a way that asserted Chinese prominence on the stage.

I hope they'll take this opportunity to demonstrate that they truly are going to be globally important players in reducing a threat—a global threat like Kim Jong Un presents with his nuclear weapons system. And the behaviors we've seen have been good, right?

They've done—they sent on to Security Council resolutions that were certainly far in excess of what had been done in previous administrations, both U.S. administrations and Chinese administrations.

The trade had greatly been reduced, it's still imperfect, there are still gaps that we're all working to help identify, to ensure that we get that piece better and tighter. But they have also communicated around the world that they are intent on helping us resolve this in a way that we all want to resolve it.

We all want to resolve this without resort to a military activity, President is intent on that as well, and we're going to pull every arrow in the quiver until such time as we conclude that there's no alternative at that point.

The President's made very clear he's prepared to ensure that Kim Jong Un doesn't have the capacity to hold America at risk by military force, if necessary.

ZARATE: Mr. Director, another point of friction with China, North Korea is potentially one of them, is their own cyber-activity. And this is something the President's pushed back on and raised, obviously, at the highest levels. Has China's behavior in the cyber-domain altered or changed in the last nine months?

POMPEO: I don't know that I know the answer to that one. They have, along with the Iranians and the Russians, world-class, premier cyber-capabilities, defensive cyber-capabilities. As well as the capacity to conduct offensive cyber-operations, as well.

They are also—the Chinese are also incredibly active with what I'll call cyber-theft. That is, there's a trail of tears about the American intellectual property that has been stolen by the Chinese, much to the benefit of the Chinese military, and the Chinese commercial capacity, as well.

The President's been pretty clear about this. This is unacceptable, he's tasked all of us to have a role in that. Certainly the intelligence community, to have a piece of that to do our best to push back against it.

I don't know the answer to your question about timelines. They still have a robust capacity and are out there working the problem set very, very hard.

ZARATE: We have maybe a final question on China, with the Party Congress happening, is there anything that you're looking for to come out of this Congress that either signals greater or lesser power on the part of President XI? Or that would signal something different about the trajectory of China and U.S.-China relations?

Is there something that you would anticipate coming out of this?

POMPEO: So, we're watching this very, very closely.

We're watching not only the party congress very closely, but we were watching the run-up to it as well. To watch the machinations; who was in, who was out, all the sort of old-school guys who used to do Kremlin work are now off working on this other Politburo.

Yeah, I don't want to say much about what we're looking for. The Agency has openly made clear, we think that President Xi will come out of this in a dominant position, with incredible capacity to do good around the world.

And we hope that the great relationship between he and the President leads the Chinese to behave in ways that are additive and constructive and productive, taking down threats and not increasing threat profiles from lots of different actors, not just North Korea, that the Chinese could have an influence on all around the world.

ZARATE: I want to draw our conversation back to terrorism and some other issues in the news. But before that, I want to talk about intelligence capabilities. Because your first speech at CSIS, I was honored to be there, as well, you talked about the role of Wikileaks as a non-state foreign intelligence service and adversarial service. You've talked about the dangers of leaks. You've also talked about the need to preserve capabilities like Section 702 of the Patriot Act.

Do you want to talk about—first of all, Section 702 which is set to sunset, you want to talk about the importance of that authority from your perspective? And then I want to ask you

questions about whether or not we're falling behind, in terms of our capabilities. Given what everyone else is doing.

POMPEO: It's interesting, Juan. So I came into this debate, call it five odd years ago now, when I first joined the House Intelligence Committee. This debate about U.S. intelligence authorities, what capacities ought they have.

So I read the history of the terrorist surveillance program, all of the—and the Patriot Act and how that all came to be. We're now 75 days away should Section 702 expire in December from going back to a pre-9/11 mindset in terms of how we conduct our intelligence sharing across the interagency process.

You'll recall the deep criticisms the intelligence committee for not sharing, for creating stovepipes and walls and barriers, it's variously described. What Section 702 was designed and intended to do was to knock down those walls, right?

This is—the concern seemed to be—this is about data lawfully collected, right? This is information collected as part of a lawfully constructed foreign intelligence collection program. Every court that's looked at it has said as much, that this is wholly constitutional and wholly lawful.

And so now the question is do you want to raise the barrier for intelligence committee officers to go in and use that data effectively to tie together various threat streams? I've seen it in my time, the incredible importance of Section 702.

We think about it in the CT environment because that's what it was created for. But it's very important. We talked about stopping North Korean coal shipments. Our capacity to interdict ships at sea is fundamentally tied to Section 702's capacity to take this information, this foreign intelligence that's collected and share it across all the various agencies that are involved in that type of undertaking.

So I'm very hopeful that Congress will renew it, and they'll do it in a way that's consistent with the post-9/11 threat environment, not just the CT counter-terror environment, but all the various threats the United States faces. It is a central pillar of American intelligence collection and we need it.

ZARATE: Do you think that whole debate has been skewed by the fact that it's seen so much through the 9/11 lens, through counter-terrorism and doesn't look at all these other threats that are implicated by Section 702 and information sharing?

POMPEO: Yeah. It's why I talked about the other uses that we have for it, I do. I think it's been used at a post-9/11 CT tool. I also think it was skewed by Edward Snowden and by those leaks, as well. And this notion that somehow this information was being used by the intelligence community, whether that was the Agency or the FBI or others in a way that was unlawful. And it's simply not true, there is enormous oversight. Not only from—in the role that I had, where there was a quarterly report that I read with great interest, but by the courts, as well.

There's enormous oversight for this information. I'm happy about that. I think it is completely appropriate that that oversight remain in place. But the tool, the data collection tool and the ability to go query that data to tie together various threat streams is really essential.

And I hope we don't walk back to a pre-9/11 understanding of how it is that we created the risk that day so that we never have another day—so that we never have another day like that.

ZARATE: Going to the issue of leaks, there seems to be sort of a torrent of leaks, including from the intelligence community where people are able to take, steal, distribute, publish terabytes worth of data. Are you worried that there is sort of a momentum to this that we really can't stop it?

And in that regard, are you worried that we can't keep secrets anymore and that our adversaries are not just seeing what we know and understand, but getting sort of the secret sauce of our capabilities and using it against us?

POMPEO: Since the very first day I became the Director of the CIA, I put at the center of my mission set to make sure that the secrets we stole weren't re-stolen. Or worse yet—

(LAUGHTER)

POMPEO: Or worse yet, given away by either someone who worked for us, either formally, as an officer at the CIA or a contractor, or frankly anybody else who had access to the information that we've worked our rear ends off to go to collect that was so vital and so unique that it ought not be shared with the rest of the world.

I worry about it an awful lot. The technology barriers that have been so beneficial to so much in the world make this an incredibly more complex problem set. But we're good and we're America, we're the CIA. We can protect our stuff, I'm confident we can do it.

We will devote the resources to it. We will make sure that the people who are working for the Agency have an understanding of what that means, what their obligations are. I would share with you those obligations extend far beyond your time as a CIA officer.

There are an awful lot of former CIA talking heads on TV. I'd just urge everyone who has sworn to protect this information to understand that their obligation far extends beyond the day that you turn in your badge at the CIA.

It is so central. If we don't do this well, we will deny American policy makers with the enormous unfair advantage that the CIA was designed to provide to them.

ZARATE: This issue of leaks also blends into what is—appears to be an age of asymmetric information warfare, info-ops. Seems to be part of what the Russian campaign was in 2016, campaign to use information ops, cyber capabilities.

We're learning more and more about, you know buying of ads and use of bots on Facebook and Twitter. Are we in a new period or era of info-ops that is hard to manage? And can we compete in that space?

POMPEO: Yeah, we can compete. Yeah, the first rule of competing is you got to try.

ZARATE: Are we trying?

POMPEO: You got to get in the game. And so look, we have some disadvantages there, we operate a democracy. That is—it is far easier for ISIS or for the Russians or for other nefarious actors that don't operate in a democratic environment to exercise these active measures. We have rules, deep rules, important rules, appropriate rules about how we ought to use them. And we need to make sure that they're current, we need to make sure they fit the model that exists today.

Your point, Juan, is an important one. It's not just the Russian info-ops. I talked about these non-state actors. It is not just WikiLeaks. Indeed, I may have overemphasized them. They are an enormous threat. We are working to take down that threat to the United States, as well to reduce the threat from all of it, but Hezbollah, ISIS, Al Qaeda, none of them sit at the U.N.

These are all non-state actors, each of which has not only cyber capacity, but they look and feel like very good intelligence organizations. They run assets, they run counterintelligence program, they lure dangles.

All the tradecraft that you read about from the excellent work that the Agency has done, and the competitors—our State competitors—have done for decades and decades, you now see being adopted by these non-state agencies. The rules that we have in place at the agencies today do not—intelligence community today—do not reflect this change. We modeled on a nation state model as we developed our collection authorities.

So we are well along the way of refining that to make sure we have the right rules, policies and understanding about these non-state threats so that we can apply the same good work against them that we do against our state intelligence adversaries as well.

ZARATE: That's a great point.

POMPEO: It's important. The world has moved, and we have to be sure that we move at the speed that it does and against it as well.

ZARATE: Are we able to keep up technically? Do you think we're able to stay ahead of the curve, given all the attempts to expose what our capabilities are, and—

POMPEO: Yeah.

ZARATE: —what very sophisticated actors are trying to do to us?

POMPEO: You talked, at the beginning, about one of our challenges. It's every challenge. I ran two small businesses before I did this. There's always the crisis of the day, there's always the demand for resources for the thing that you're working on that is two months, four months out.

To continue to invest in the people, the technologies that will deliver five and ten years from now, for the director after the director that occupies the incredibly privileged role that I have today. We're making sure that we have that. We are every bit their equal.

But we've got to make sure, today, that we are—we're not equal. There's nothing satisfactory about being a peer competitor of anyone. It's not in our tradition in the intelligence community. We have always been the leader, the most robust, the most capable to deliver that unfair advantage. We're going to continue to do it.

The blessing is we've got lots of incredible technology. Home-grown, U.S. technology that will help us deliver that. And great partners, all across this country, patriotic businesses that are very, very helpful in helping us figure out how to stay at the cutting edge, to move at the speed of our adversaries.

And I'm intent on making sure that we use all that great skill set and all the great people that we deliver, here in the United States, in a way that our adversaries can simply never match.

ZARATE: Let me ask one more question about, sort of, the information age and where we find ourselves. You know, there's a lot of talk about fake news, the info-ops sort of take full advantage of obfuscation of truth. Autocrats like Putin and al-Assad, when confronted with accusations, often say, "Prove it." Right?

So in this world, especially with intelligence being seen as a proxy for evidence, are truth and credibility now strategic assets for a country?

POMPEO: Absolutely. There's no doubt about that. My first significant experience with this was the event in Syria, where the president chose to take out a target in Syria as a result of the Syrian use of chemical weapons—Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons against his own citizens. The Russians, I think to this day, deny it.

ZARATE: Yes.

POMPEO: The Syrians, of course, most certainly do. Looks like the OPCW, the folks who have, as one of their charges, taking a look at this, looks like they're going to conclude the same thing that the CIA officers concluded in about 70 hours.

In about 70 hours, we had in our hands solid evidence that, not only were they chemical weapons—although at that point, we did not know exactly which chemical had been used, but we knew where they had been delivered. We were on firm footing with respect to who had delivered them and we were able to deliver truth to the president of the United States about what had taken place.

In spite of all the Twitter accounts and all the stories and all the denials from Lavrov and his team, we knew. Truth matters. Our obligation is to deliver that to the Secretary of Defense, Secretary Tillerson and the president, each and every day. And we have to make sure that we have the capacity to do that every place in the world.

Relying on Twitter feeds and news reports will prove wholly insufficient when policymakers have to make some of the most difficult decisions they face.

ZARATE: Going back to terrorism and non-state actors, Raqqa has fallen, Mosul fell. Lots of questions about what comes next, obviously. But let me ask you about the state of ISIS because ISIS, certainly, their physical caliphate in that part of the world is diminished, but they've been able to reach beyond their borders into Europe, obviously, with attacks.

Their members—or proclaimed members—have taken over a town in the southern Philippines, which has taken a lot of blood and treasure and—

POMPEO: Mm-hmm.

ZARATE: —and attention in the Philippines. So ISIS has moved beyond Iraq and Syria. How do you perceive the threat of ISIS and, even if we are able to diminish them in the heart of the Middle East, what comes next? Is there a son of ISIS, a son of Daesh?

POMPEO: It would be foolish to predict that there was going to be no son of ISIS. It seems that that would be—you'd be betting against historical fact. Whether they call themselves ISIS or ISIS 2.0 or whatever you want to call the name, the threat—this threat from radical Islamic terrorism is real, it remains—the fall of the caliphate is great news, it is an historic achievement, to be sure. But it—it's partial at best.

You talked about all the places ISIS operates—the Philippines, Southeast Asia, the list is long—we'll talk about things that they are capable of doing, wholly apart from the regions in which they operate. They still have the capacity to control and influence citizens all around the world. Technology enables it, and their desire, to even do these small-scale attacks—I've spent a lot of time with my British counterparts, they have suffered this more than we have.

Small-scale attacks, directed from afar, motivated—pick a term. I often hear folks talk about lone wolf. I prefer not to use that term because it is seldom the case that they were completely individual, acting autonomously. It is almost always the case that the ideology that drove them was driven by someone who had great intent to deliver that idea into their head.

It is an incredibly difficult adversary. Those attacks have shorter lead times. The tools that we have developed to take down networks are less likely to be successful. Although, in many cases, have achieved the end of taking down particular plots. But I think we would all be foolish to believe that the fact that the command post, and the thousands of folks operating out of particular geographies, is no longer a possibility for ISIS, at least in those places was going to be the end of the threat to the United States. It's still very real.

ZARATE: Do we—this goes back to the question I was asking earlier, do we have to have physical presence in some of these places to ensure that ISIS doesn't roar back? Or something doesn't replace it that is going to be just as menacing five years down the road?

POMPEO: I don't think there's a singular answer to that. I think there's places where a robust U.S. presence matters an awful lot, but there's other places I think we can achieve our ends by asking our partners to take up the mantle.

That is, there may not need to be a significant U.S. presence, but we can provide tools—intelligence collection tools, law enforcement tools, all the things that you do to take down these terror threats.

We can provide them, and hope that our partners can satisfactionally take down that threat where it resides, such that the external capacity is diminished, the threat to the United States from the region in which the threat is being launched is diminished.

ZARATE: I want to talk about partners because I think it raises several interesting questions.

First, as you've spent a lot of time travelling, meeting with your counterparts in your early tenure. Have relationships gotten better, from your prospective? Are there new relationships you're trying to forge?

Is there anything interesting you can talk about, whether it's from your trip to Turkey or your trips to the Middle East, or trip down to Mexico?

Are there things that are emerging in the partnerships that are of interest, that you want the public to know?

POMPEO: The fact that you know my travel schedule so well, suggests our clandestinity needs—

(LAUGHTER)

ZARATE: Sorry about that.

(LAUGHTER)

POMPEO: —needs some level—needs some level of work.

(LAUGHTER)

But you didn't catch them all, Juan.

ZARATE: I know, sir. I know. I try to keep some quiet.

POMPEO: Yeah. You know, I don't know how to answer that, other than to say that many of the places I have travelled, my counterparts—and I'm meeting with my intelligence counterparts for the most part, have welcomed our agency's reengagement.

That is, it's no secret I have asked our officers and they are thrilled to be doing it, to reengage in ways that are out in the field, who are prepared to accept more risk to achieve high pay-off returns for the President, so that we can deliver him the important information.

We, in turn, ask our partners to support that increased level of activity, the traditional espionage that the CIA must do to keep America safe. And so every place that I've gone and talked to them about what it is I want my team to do to help the United States, and in turn, to help the security in their country, we have been incredibly welcomed.

It is something that they had noticed an absence of, and they are thrilled at the CIA's returned to its traditional understanding of being at the cutting edge, out on freedom's frontier, collecting the right information to deliver to U.S. policy makers, and more appropriate, our host nation's policy makers, such that we can collectively take down threats all across the world.

ZARATE: Do you think we're aligned properly on—with our partners, on the big ticket items that seem to be concerning the administration? Iran, North Korea, Russia, terrorism?

Do you have the right coalitions and partners, and capabilities aligned?

POMPEO: So, it varies, I think. Look, with respect to Iran, we've had to rebuild that. The previous administration had a different view of Iran, without getting into right or wrong, it was a different view.

And so, our intelligence posture, with respect to our allies in the region, has had to change as well. You know, with respect to North Korea, I think we have refocused a lot of the world's attention on that issue.

I think President Trump's focus on that has caused others to reengage. I don't mean just in the region, but those all around the world who are helping us against the North Korean targets. So I think it varies by country.

And let's be clear, we don't do policy at the CIA, but we respond to the President's priorities. He lays out the national intelligence priorities framework, and we organize our resources, our talents and skills against those priorities so that we can deliver to our senior policy makers what it is they need.

ZARATE: Are we good enough at dealing with non-state partners? This raises in part the question of how we deal with the situation in the Kurdish north in Iraq. Are we able to balance our need for both state and non-state partners, especially in difficult parts of the world where we need intelligence?

POMPEO: One of the glories of what I do is that these intelligence relationships often survive even very bad political situations between two countries, and indeed if we have a poor intelligence relationship, if the diplomatic relationship is great and glorious.

The folks who do security and the folks who do intelligence understand that we have to be there every day, and whether our—whether there's a trade spat or an economic dispute or something that's taking place between the two countries politically that we still have this incredible obligation to deliver security for our two countries.

And so even in places where—you talked about what's going on in northern Iraq. Even in places that are challenging and are complex political situations. Our officers understand that the work to develop things that are additive for both ourselves and our liaison—foreign liaison partner agencies remains.

ZARATE: Couple more questions and then I'm going to open it up to a couple of questions that we've got time for. When thinking about your role as director, when you came in there were a couple big thematics. One was the moral of the intelligence community is low.

Lots of questions about whether or not the President was exacerbating that. Second was do you re-organize in a way that continues what your predecessor put in place? And you know what does the CIA look like moving into the future?

For those interested in the intelligence community and what's happening at the CIA, can you give folks an insight as to where you're taking things and what your first few months sort of led you to think in terms of the organization and morale of the CIA?

POMPEO: Let me start here. For those of you who are interested in finding a patriotic place to spend your time, cia.gov is the place to go.

(LAUGHTER)

POMPEO: This is a shameless hike for what the Agency needs. We continue to need and have been blessed to have, for an awfully long time some of America's most talented people come join this mission set.

The Agency is deeply apolitical. I represent one quarter of all the political appointees at the CIA. That is different and important. What does that mean, what does that translate into? It translates into an organization that has watched this presidential transition take place, and has absorbed a President who deeply values the work product.

I deliver the President the daily briefing most days of the week. I've watched him consume it, I've watched him ask really difficult questions. I've watched him challenge us where he thought we were not in the right place.

And we've gone back to validate our work, or to correct it if we had it wrong. And I've watched the President support this agency in countless other ways. A good strategy without resources is just wishful thinking.

So we've now laid out a strategy for how we're going to execute our strategy with incredible vigor. We're going to become a much more vicious agency in ensuring that we are delivering this work. We are going to go to the hardest places with some of the hardest people and of our organization to crush it.

And when we do that, the President has promised that he will have our backs and that he will resource us. Resource isn't just money. It is the authorities that we need to go execute that, so an understanding of the policy process that delivers this work.

And so the President has put an enormous burden on us to deliver for him. And I am confident that he's going to give us everything we need to do, and our team will in fact execute that mission in the finest tradition of the Central Intelligence Agency.

One last thought, you asked about this modernization idea.

ZARATE: Right.

POMPEO: There was much talk about how the previous director had made these changes. When I came in, my deputy Gina and I stared at it for a little bit and concluded that much of what was there made sense, but pieces of it did not.

We've tried to fix those that didn't. I think less about org charts than I do about mission. And I've told our team this. I've asked everyone—I say do not print the org chart out. I mean look, the finest companies in the world are restructuring their team every day.

They find a customer, they find a problem set, they find the resource to match it and they slam those resources against the problem until they either achieve their objective or conclude that they cannot. And I want the CIA to be that way, too.

My ask of every officer has been if you're in a team or an organization or a section or a mission center or however—whatever we call it—if it's not working, break it, tear it down, rebuild, start with mission not with org chart.

The organization of the team will fill itself out if everyone's focused on the mission. And I think we've transitioned that culture to worry less about who's sitting in what position on the org chart and a whole hell of a lot more about how the bad guys are going to regret that they ever challenged the United States of America.

ZARATE: That's a great recruiting message.

(LAUGHTER)

ZARATE: That's awesome, that's awesome. Let's open it up for questions. I think we've got David Clark here from the *AFP*, please. Let's start with David.

CLARK: Hi, thanks for organizing this, I'm David Clark from the *AFP*.

ZARATE: David, could you stand up? That way folks in the back can see you?

CLARK: I've heard it suggested in a few places around town in the past few days, particularly in reference to what just happened in Kirkuk, but also the bigger picture in the Levant, has the United States been concentrated so hard on the battle against ISIS, which is now apparently going quite well, and has not been well positioned for all the other rivalries in the region, other neighbors of the area seem to have treated ISIS as a second order problem and they've been advancing their own agendas?

Do we understand where we are vis-a-vis Turkey, Kurdistan, Baghdad government, Iran, Russia, and the various non-state actors? Thank you.

POMPEO: I appreciate the question. Let me answer that from an intelligence perspective, from my agency's perspective. We have not lost sight of any of those threats. We have the capability of walking and chewing gum.

We both are incredibly focused on the CT mission more broadly, not just ISIS. I talked about the other terror threats. And we've spent a lot of resources on that, make no mistake about it. But we've not lost sight of any of the other risks that are posed to the United States of America.

We have robust intelligence collection against each of the threats that you identified there. And I think are well positioned to deliver our senior leaders in the United States government and National Security Council the information they need to—as a sound footing upon which to base their policy.

So, no, I don't think the intelligence community took their eye off of any of that, in spite of the enormous threat that ISIS was and remains.

ZARATE: Vivian?

SALAMA: Hi. Thank you so much for doing this. I'm hoping to squeeze in two questions if that's possible, but—

ZARATE: Vivian, can you introduce yourself?

SALAMA: Oh, I’m Vivian Salama from *NBC News*.

POMPEO: Yes, ma'am. You can try two questions and I'll see if I can hold them both in my head at the same time.

SALAMA: I appreciate it. So we have a broad intelligence assessment that Russia most likely interfered in this election. There's really not been a lot of doubt about that. But, in the past month, we've learned about some extraordinary actions taken by Russia in terms of ad buys for it on Facebook, Twitter.

Former DNI James Clapper, himself, said that he cast doubt that, on the legitimacy of President Trump's victory in last year's election, due to a lot of these developments. And so I want to ask you: Can you say, with absolute certainty, that the election results were not skewed as a result of Russian interference? Especially given what we've learned just in the last few weeks. And, more importantly, are we vulnerable in 2018 and 2020—

POMPEO: Well, I'm not sure there could be—

SALAMA: —what are we doing—

POMPEO: —I'm not sure there could be anything—I'm not sure there could be anything more important than that—

SALAMA: OK. Then, moving forward—

POMPEO: —that we conducted an election that had integrity. Yes. The intelligence community's assessment is that the Russian meddling that took place did not affect the outcome of the election. You know, I made some comments about formers?

SALAMA: But are we vulnerable in 2018 and 2020, is that—

POMPEO: Yes. We're very—

SALAMA: What's being done?

POMPEO: Yes. We're always at risk. We've talked about this a great deal. But not just from the Russians, let's make no mistake about it. There seems to be focus on the 2016 election and the Russians. I'm happy to focus on that, I'm happy to spend plenty of time looking at it. But I was actually doing some reading the other day. It's fascinating.

The Russians have been at this an awfully long time. Go back and read the history of the election and the Russians' efforts to influence the Nixon election. This is not new. It seems that the world is stunned that the Russians are trying to poke their hand into U.S. elections and policy. This is not a new phenomenon.

The technology is different, the tools that they use are different. But this was a threat in 2016, it will be a threat in the midterm elections in 2018. It will be a threat in 2020. Until there is a new leader in Russia, I suspect it will be a threat to the United States for an awfully long time.

All of USG, all of the United States Government, has an obligation to understand that. That's our primary task, and to deliver that understanding to the president of the United States

and the team, and then for us to find ways to push back against it. We're intent on doing it, we have a lot of resources devoted to that and I am optimistic that we will continue to reduce the capacity of anyone—the Chinese, the Iranians, Al Qaeda, WikiLeaks, and the Russians—from impacting our election.

SALAMA: Thank you for that. A really simple follow-up, just on North Korea. Is the diplomatic channel completely closed at this point, do you think?

POMPEO: No. We're still the—Secretary Tillerson and his team are hard at work.

SALAMA: Thank you.

ZARATE: Demetri?

SEVASTOPULO: Thank you. I'm Demetri Sevastopulo, Bureau Chief at *The Financial Times*. I've got two quick questions on North Korea. The administration keeps saying that deterrence doesn't work with North Korea in the way that it did during the Cold War. Can you explain, from an intelligence perspective, why does deterrence not work, in your view? If you agree with that.

And secondly, very quickly, obviously North Korea's a hard intelligence target. What do you think would happen if Kim Jong Un, to use an Irish phrase, kicked the bucket for whatever reason?

(LAUGHTER)

POMPEO: Didn't realize that was Irish. I'm Italian, we use it, too.

(LAUGHTER)

So with respect to the question of deterrence, I mean I guess it depends how you're thinking about deterrence. Intelligence consensus is that Kim Jong Un's mission is to stay in power. And to the extent that is his singular objective, that is, if that's your only goal—and he views his only tool to continue to have to hold the world at risk with a nuclear weapon.

Then, so long as he's got that tool, there's nothing—you can't deter him from continuing down that path because he has a singular goal and a singular tool. So you can't deter him by conventional means. That is, there's no—you couldn't, you know, you couldn't build a weapons system that would threaten him because he views getting to the finish line on that as the sole tool he needs to stay in power.

Rightly or wrongly, he has concluded that and so he's marching to it. So there's no external activity that could be undertaken to convince him to stop that, until such time as he concludes that there's another way, or a better way, or a greater risk to him from continuing down that path.

And that's what you see through the diplomatic effort, right? You see an effort to convince him that it is not in his best interest to continue down that path. To continue to have a nuclearized North Korea is something that we are working diligently to change his mind—call it diplomacy, call it deterrence, call it what you will—to change his mind to head down a different path.

SEVASTOPULO: So it's not deterrence that you want him not to use it, it's deterrence about getting it.

POMPEO: Yeah, I'm not sure I understand the question. Our—the mission statement from the president is very clear. I talked about it earlier. It is to prevent him from having the capacity to hold the United States at risk with a nuclear weapons system.

With respect to if Kim Jong Un should vanish, I just, you know, given the history of the CIA, I'm just not going to talk about that. Someone might think there was a coincidence if, you know, there was an accident.

(LAUGHTER)

It's just not fruitful. We have a clear U.S. policy. It is an effort to diplomatically and economically challenge the North Korean regime in such a way that they won't get to that end-state.

ZARATE: One last quick question. Catherine, please.

HERRIDGE: Catherine Herridge. I'm the Chief Intelligence Correspondent at *FOX News*. I wanted to pick up on the thread about ISIS that Juan raised. The Acting Secretary of Homeland Security was in London and said that she believes ISIS has its eye on a major plot in the lines of 9/11. How severe is the threat picture facing, the United States, right now? How advanced is the development of nonmetallic explosive devices to bring down jets heading to the United States? And have we disrupted any plots in their final phases?

POMPEO: Those are such brilliant questions that I am not permitted to answer them in any level of detail. But let me take a run at it and then you can tell me I didn't answer and we can both agree that that's the case.

(LAUGHTER)

So ISIS' capacity to conduct an external operation remains, but I wouldn't put ISIS—I think you started your question with ISIS. I wouldn't put them in a singular bucket. AQAP—Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula—has, for a long time, had this mission statement which includes the taking down of a commercial airliner bound for a western country.

Certainly, amongst those would be the United States. You've seen Homeland Security take some actions, security measures surrounding that. Those are in response to perceived threats, I think, measured appropriately. But make no mistake about it, the intent still remains,

the capability remains and we worry, too, that there is capability that we just don't see. You know, we often talk about the things we know.

It's always—I always remind everyone to remember the things that we simply may not see. Call them an intelligence failure if you will, but it's difficult stuff in faraway places, and the capacity to put things online, and for a bomb maker in Asia to learn something from a bomb maker in the Sahel that never have to actually get on a phone or communicate is a challenge for intelligence community, to figure out how that technology may have transferred.

I don't want to get into the particular tools and techniques that they may or may not have, but suffice it to say we're very focused on it, and it is clearly the case that there are terrorists around the world who are intent upon using commercial aviation as their vector to present a threat to the West.

ZARATE: I think that's going to be it. Mr. Director, thank you for your time.

POMPEO: Thank you, Juan.

ZARATE: Please join me in thanking the director. It's been an honor. Thank you, sir.

(APPLAUSE)

POMPEO: Thank you.

ZARATE: Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

END