



## **DNI Clapper's As Delivered Remarks at the 2016 INSA & AFCEA Intelligence & National Security Summit**

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**Remarks as delivered by**

**The Honorable James R. Clapper  
Director of National Intelligence**

**“U.S. Intelligence as a Pillar of Stability during Transition”  
INSA & AFCEA Intelligence & National Security Summit**

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**Walter E. Washington Convention Center – Washington, DC**

When I was president of SASA, the predecessor to INSA in the 1990s, I tried to promote a combined symposium with AFCEA, but I could never pull it off. This event now marks the third year in a row for this joint summit. So I want to congratulate everyone who is involved in both organizations, AFCEA and INSA, in putting these things on, and now they're becoming a custom. So it proves that over time, things do change. But I think we can safely say it's an idea whose time has really come and that you've made it stick.

This has also been, for me, a very useful forum to convey messages and roll out IC-wide initiatives. At the first AFCEA-INSA summit two years ago, I rolled out the 2014 National Intelligence Strategy, which included our principles of professional ethics for the Intelligence Community. And last year, I rolled out the principles of intelligence transparency, our IC transparency working group which is now a permanent council, and a number of community-wide transparency initiatives.

So this year, I realize about the only thing we'll be rolling out the door in the next four months, is me. [LAUGHTER] So I thought this morning, I'd talk about what seems to be on everyone's mind, which is the forthcoming transition of our Presidential administration and IC leadership. In about two months, 62 days to be exact, we'll know who the next President will be, hopefully. And many of the faces and names at the top of the national security structure will probably accordingly change.



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Now, any Presidential transition is a very vulnerable time for the country. During President Obama's inauguration in 2009, I had a unique opportunity to see this, experience this first-hand. Just like for the State of the Union speeches, during inaugurations when everyone who's anyone is on the D.C. Mall, the administration picks a designated survivor, a Cabinet official or Cabinet-level official to stay in an undisclosed location away from Washington, D.C., so that in case something terrible happens, that person could assume the duties of the President.

Now, during the 2009 inauguration, that person was Bob Gates, not me. As secretary of defense, Bob was, I think, the only holdover Cabinet official from President Bush's administration. And at the time, I was the undersecretary of defense for intelligence. So I got to be the acting SECDEF for Bob while he was playing designated survivor. So I spent the inauguration in a cave at Fort Ritchie, Maryland.

The experience definitely drove home the vulnerability that we experience during a transition, and particularly the exact moment when the baton is passed from one President to the next. This upcoming transition will happen at a particularly, I think, difficult time as we're facing the most complex and diverse array of global threats that I've seen in my 53 years or so in the intelligence business.

So we are living in what I've come to call a world of unpredictable instability, in which two-thirds of the nations around the world are at some risk of instability in the next few years. Let me illustrate with some perspectives just on Africa.

Africa is enormous; over 11 million square miles with more than 1.1 billion people. And just between the years 2010 and 2015, 52 Presidential elections were held on the continent, contributing to the constant political change. More than 1,130 armed conflict events occurred, resulting in conservatively over 50,000 fatalities.

And there are two key factors driving the scope and complexity of unrest which span political, economic, security, cultural and ethnic sectors, and resulting clashes between varying factions, massive humanitarian crises and perpetual regional instability. And so that led to some interventions from the U.S. and other nation states, as well as multinational organizations.



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So Africa is just one region of the world where such turmoil is present. Nearly everywhere, the IC can point out the potential for failures or collapses. We certainly can't anticipate the specifics, the when, where and how for our policymakers. This unpredictable instability has been a constant for certainly this administration and will be, I think, for the next one too no matter who our President is.

In the coming decades, an underlying meta-driver of unpredictable instability will be, I believe, climate change. Major population centers will compete for ever-diminishing food and water resources and governments will have an increasingly difficult time controlling their territories. And so because of all of these factors, after ISIL's gone, we can expect some other terrorist entity to arise and a cycle of extremism which will continue to control us for the foreseeable future. And by the way, our more traditional adversaries like Russia and China and Iran and North Korea will continue to challenge us.

And of course, technology will continue to be disruptive. Just think about the fact that Uber is the biggest taxi company in the world and they don't own any cars. Airbnb is the biggest hotel company and they don't own any properties. It is difficult to predict how technology will affect national security. Tech areas like artificial intelligence, healthcare and agricultural, self-driving cars and 3-D printing have the potential to revolutionize our lives for the better or they could present vulnerabilities that are very hard to predict.

So with all this as a back drop, I think it makes a lot of people nervous that with an election cycle that's been sportier than we're used to, we'll drop a new President with new national security leaders into this situation – in 135 days, but who's counting?

I know a lot of people of been feeling uncertainty about what will happen with this Presidential transition. Been a lot of catastrophizing, if I can use that term, in the 24-hour news cycle, and of course, on social media. So I'm here with a message. It'll be OK.

About two weeks ago, I participated in a meeting at the White House led by the White House Chief of Staff Dennis McDonough in which was the first formal meeting between the current administration and the two transition teams. And I was struck by how sober and professional and courteous and civil the conversation was.



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When you pass on an inkling to whomever succeeds this administration some insight into the magnitude, complexity and the gravity of what it is to lead the U.S. government. Our nation has a great legacy of orderly transition and power, going back to George Washington retiring in 1797, when he turned the presidency over to John Adams. I remember it well. [LAUGHTER]

Because of our mission and our professionalism, today's IC I think represents a pillar of stability during such a transition. In contrast to the rapid technology advances and the unpredictable instability of the world and any uncertainty surrounding an election and transition to the next administration, one constant in national security is the people of the Intelligence Community.

Over the past few years, our nation has held a very public conversation about our work and how we should conduct it as an Intelligence Community. I believe a lot of what has been lost in the public debate about *how* we conduct intelligence is *why* we even do it in the first place. Why does any nation state conduct intelligence?

I spent a little time and thought on that question, and I think we conduct intelligence, maybe at its most basic level, to reduce uncertainty for our decision-makers. And that could be the President in the Oval Office or it can be a war fighter, if I can stretch the metaphor, in an oval-shaped foxhole. We can't eliminate uncertainty for any decision-maker, whether in the Oval Office or the foxhole, but we can provide insight and analysis to help their understanding and to make uncertainty at least manageable so that our national security decision-makers can make educated decisions with an understanding of the risk involved, so that we, our friends and allies, can operate on a shared understanding of the facts of the situation.

That's why we're already briefing the candidates to help reduce uncertainty for our next President, whoever it is, so that he or she will step into the Oval Office with as good an understanding of our complex and uncertain world as we can help provide.

And I've thought a lot about our work through sort of a historical lens, and maybe that's because I've lived through a lot of history. Although despite what I said before, I really wasn't there when Washington turned the presidency over to Adams. [LAUGHTER] I was deployed at the time, so I missed the ceremony. [LAUGHTER] Only kidding.



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So today, considering the press of public interest in what the IC is doing during this Presidential transition, which is unlike anything we've seen before, I want to shed a little light on what we're doing.

First off, to dispel a myth; we're not giving President Obama's PDB, or any PDB product, to the candidates. In fact, the tradition of giving candidates classified briefings predates the existence of the PDB. In 1952, President Truman offered the first candidate briefings to General Eisenhower and Governor Stevenson, and the newly-formed CIA conducted these briefings. Truman felt an obligation to do that because of his experience and how woefully uninformed he felt on his first day in office as President when he succeeded President Roosevelt.

In fact, he hadn't known of the *existence* of the Manhattan Project until 12 days after he was sworn in as President, and he had been Roosevelt's *Vice President*. So he wanted his successor to be a little better prepared based on the nomination to be President, not on any clearance the candidate held or had held. That precedent has carried over for every election since then – since 1952. The CIA handled those briefings until 2008, when the Office of Director of National Intelligence assumed the responsibility.

As a point of trivia, there have only been three elections in which briefings were offered to candidates from both major parties: 1952, 2008, and now this year, 2016. Those are the only years in which one of the candidates wasn't already receiving intelligence briefings as the incumbent President or Vice President.

So just to be clear, one team produces and delivers the PDB, as we always do, and a completely separate team produces and coordinates the cross-agency effort to brief the candidates. And in fact, in our effort to try to make sure that there's no political influence on the briefings, the candidate briefing team does not coordinate with the White House and only career intelligence officers give the briefings, not political appointees like me.

Similar to prior elections, we set ground rules months before the briefings started, which the White House concurred with, on June 22nd. And the IC has essentially been operating independently since then. We have a list of topics that we offer to each candidate. They can ask for briefings on any or all of them. They can also ask for briefings on new topics. If we give



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briefs on new topics, we'll make sure both candidates have a chance to get those same briefs. Otherwise we don't tell either campaign or the public what happens in those briefings: not what topics each candidate shows interest in or gets briefed on, not how either candidate reacts and not what questions get asked.

And we take that confidentiality so seriously that I am still sworn to secrecy about what happened when I briefed General Eisenhower and Governor Stevenson. [LAUGHTER] Another geezer joke there. [LAUGHTER] But I'll make a serious point. People all around the world, not just opposing parties, want to know what the candidates are thinking. That's why we've seen attempted cyber intrusions against parties and candidates going back more than one election cycle.

We've certainly seen it this year with the network intrusion against the Democratic National Party. The President said last week, and I quote, "Experts have attributed this to the Russians." So I won't get out ahead of the President on this, particularly while the FBI is still conducting an investigation, but I can reiterate his other point. The Russians hack our systems all the time, not just government, but also corporate and personal systems. And so do the Chinese and others, including non-state actors. The point is, cyber will continue to be a huge problem for the next Presidential administration, as it has been a challenge for this one.

But back to the IC's role in this orderly transition. On the day after the election, the briefing process I described changes. The new President-elect will receive his or her first PDB briefing, and it will be essentially identical to that which President Obama receives. Later this month, I'll send over proposed ground rules to the White House about how we'll make all that happen. And later, my office will also provide support to prepare the next DNI and next generation of IC leaders.

This whole process is built on the precedent set by Harry Truman back in 1952. And I'm really glad, as a citizen, that he made that generous decision to better prepare his successor. I talked about the uncertainty of our world and the diversity of threats we face. I believe, I know, it's crucial for our next President to step into office on Jan. 20 as informed and prepared as possible to face that uncertain world.

President Johnson once said, "The President's hardest task is not to do what is right, but to



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know what is right." And having worked closely with and for our current President, I can absolutely attest, that statement by President Johnson still holds true. Knowing what is right is the President's hardest task. The IC can't make that decision for him. We wouldn't want to. When it comes to national security, it's our job to give him the intelligence he needs to decide what's right.

So our work means a great deal to the person we call, "Intelligence Customer Number One." I believe that in this time of change, when we don't know today who our next intelligence customer number one will be, what our national priorities will be or what challenges we'll face next, I'm confident that our unique accesses and insight will continue to help our national leaders manage this inevitable uncertainty, for a long time to come.

So let me wrap up with a story from about 54 years ago, in 1962, about a year before I actually started in the intelligence profession. I was an Air Force ROTC cadet at Otis Air Force Base in Massachusetts, when I briefly met President Kennedy. He'd flown into the base, to Otis, en route to a family vacation at their residence -- the family residence in Hyannis Port. And so they "fell out" all the ROTC cadets to greet him when he got off the plane.

And somehow, I ended up in the front row of the rope line when he got off Air Force One. There were maybe a dozen of us right up against the rope and the President came through and shook our hands. And each of my fellow cadets gave the President his name - that's what we were instructed to do - and told him which aircraft they wanted to fly in the Air Force. And when he got to me, I gave him my name and he asked me what I wanted to do when I joined the Air Force. And I told him I wanted to be an intelligence officer.

He paused, looked at me a bit askance, he said "Good, we need more like you," and then continued down the rope line. I'm sure President Kennedy never gave that little exchange another thought. I, on the other hand, never forgot it.

That's the impact our work has at the highest levels of government, something I learned as a 19-year-old -- 20-year-old ROTC cadet. And at the time, I certainly never would have dreamed in my wildest imagination that I'd close my intelligence career in a job in which I'd have the privilege of briefing the President.



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And there's simply no way you could have told me in 1962 that I'd spend six-plus years briefing our nation's first African-American President. That's something my parents would have been astounded by, my father certainly, and my mother would have been very proud of.

I look back over my half century in the intelligence business and can see the evolution of our IC. We are better, much, much better now than we were 53 years ago when I first took my oath of office as a young second lieutenant. We're better, more capable than we were 15 years ago, on September 11th, 2001. And I believe we're better, or like to think we are more integrated than we were six years ago when Vice President Biden swore me in as the DNI; although I'm going to leave it for somebody else to grade my term paper.

The reason we keep evolving and keep getting better is because of the people, the people in this room, the people in the IC and their instinct to serve. The nation continues to be a bedrock constant, just as it was when I started. Yes, the world changes, the threats evolve, the technology mushrooms, but our people, our IC will be a steady constant of vigilance and stability as it will be through this transition.

I couldn't be prouder to serve in this great community. And that's something that you'll keep hearing from me for another 135 days - but who's counting?

So thanks very much.

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[Read INSA's transcript of DNI Clapper's comments and Q&A session with INSA President Tish Long](#)