

**ALISON KODJAK:** Good morning. Welcome to the National Press Club, the place where news happens. My name is Alison Kodjak. I am the 2019 president of the National Press Club and a health policy correspondent at NPR News.

We have a terrific program ahead and we invite you to listen, watch and follow along on Twitter, using the hashtag #NPCLive.

So we're joined today by one of the Congressional leaders at the center of the investigations into interference by Russia in the 2016 election. Congressman Adam Schiff is a Democrat from California. He represents Los Angeles County. And he chairs the House Intelligence Committee, which has opened one of the broadest inquiries into questions they say were left unanswered by the Mueller report.

Last week, the Committee issued subpoenas for National Security Advisor Mike Flynn and Rick Gates, the former top Trump campaign advisor who pleaded guilty to financial fraud crimes and lying to investigators.

Congressman Schiff, a Harvard-educated lawyer, who has served in Congress since 2001, also said last week that he will subpoena FBI Director Chris Wray if the Bureau does not update Congress on the status of investigations into President Trump.

And last week on Face the Nation, Schiff said he's worried about the New York Times report that said officials don't give the President complete briefings on cybersecurity because they're concerned he might disclose those secrets to foreign governments. President Trump dismissed the story as untrue and called it a "virtual act of treason."

We look forward to hearing Congressman Schiff's take on what's next in his committee's investigation, so please join me in welcoming Congressman Adam Schiff to the National Press Club. [applause]

**CONGRESSMAN ADAM SCHIFF:** Alison, thank you very much. It's a pleasure to join you this morning. And I thought I would start by giving you the perspective from the Intelligence Committee and begin with the widest possible aperture looking around the world and then bring it closer to home and share a few thoughts on our investigative work.

Looking very broadly though around the world, the subject of our first open hearing – and we've been doing a lot more open hearings in the Intelligence Committee this year – the subject of our first open hearing was on the rise of authoritarianism around the world. And I really believe this is the new ideological struggle of our time. It is not communism versus capitalism. It is, however, authoritarianism and autocracy against democracy in representative government. And viewed I think objectively, you would have to conclude that the autocrats are on the rise in places like Turkey and in Egypt, in the Philippines and in Brazil, in Hungary and in Poland, in the rise of the far right parties in Austria, in Germany, in France and elsewhere.

And in the context of this challenge to the very idea of democracy, you would expect in a normal world that the US President would be pushing back, would be the champion of democracy and human rights. But instead, we are a strange and dangerous time in which the President of the United States is making common cause with the autocrats, who is disdainful of fellow democracies. And that is challenging the very idea of democracy. We have foreign leaders who now quote the United States President for anti-democratic reasons. You have Erdogan and Bashir al-Assad and Duterte in the Philippines talking about fake news and condemning press criticism of the corruption within their

governments. And other foreign leaders who similarly mimic the words of the US President in disparaging the opposition, in denigrating their own judiciaries, or their own press.

And so, we're at a very dangerous time. I think that for most of us who grew up in the post-World War II generation, we felt that the increase in freedoms, the fact that year after year more people were living in a free society, more people were able to practice their faith or express themselves or associate with whom they would or love whom they would, that somehow this was inexorable, somehow, to paraphrase Martin Luther King, the moral arc of the universe was long, but it was bending towards justice, and that justice meant that we were in an ever-increasing liberalization with greater and greater numbers of people in representative forms of government, only to find that there's nothing at all inexorable about this. That in fact we are at an inflection point where we cannot say with confidence that the next generation is going to be freer than our own, let alone next year.

And so, I think this is a great and grave threat to the United States, this ideological competition that we're in, in which many young people, many young Americans, when they're asked about democracy and whether democracy is the best form of government now express doubt. As the memories of World War II recede further and further into the past, we are at risk of having to learn those horrible lessons all over again. And so, it's a dangerous time.

We are also seeing the effect of technology to perpetuate this trend towards authoritarianism. One of the next open hearings we had was on China and the rise of digital totalitarianism in China. China, through big technology, through data analytics, through ubiquitous CCTV cameras on each corner in each major city, wired into a database in which, with facial recognition, it can identify where its citizens are going and

what their social media posts are, and what their credit scores are, and are they having foreign visitors, and are they traveling elsewhere?

They're not only taking this technology to be able to better control its population increasingly unaware of things like Tiananmen Square, they're exporting that technology. They're making it possible for other authoritarian regimes around the world to perpetuate their autocratic rule. And this model, the Chinese model, along with Russian efforts to subvert other democracies, along with the pressures of economic disruption, I think, are propelling a lot of this trend towards authoritarianism.

We are, I think, in the midst of two revolutions going on at the same time, either of which would be disruptive enough in their own right, but together they are propelling this kind of xenophobic populism that we see around the world. And the first is the changes in the global economy in which, with automation and globalization, more and more people are feeling anxious about their economic future. I think these changes are every bit as disruptive as the Industrial Revolution and are propelling a lot of these populist movements.

But at the same time, you have a revolution in communication which is, I think, every bit as significant as the invention of the printing press, and that is the way we get our information now in social media, a medium in which lies travel far faster than truths, in which fear and anger literally go viral. And you put those two trends together, economic disruption and anxiety, in an information environment in which anger and fear travel so fast, and it is a combustible mix. And it is, I think, presenting a real and dire challenge to democracy.

These technological changes were the subject of yet another open hearing in the Intelligence Committee. Dealing with one specific facet of the problem and, frankly, one

that I'm most worried about as we look forward to the 2020 election, and that is the development deep fake technology, which is a technology that allows the creation of highly realistic and yet utterly fraudulent video and audio.

In 2016, as the election was taking place, as the campaign was taking place, and we were watching on the Intelligence Committee in real time as the Russians were dumping these hacked documents, my most profound concern was not over the voting technology – although I thought it was vulnerable then and I believe it is still vulnerable now – but my gravest concern was that the Russians were going to start dumping forgeries among the real documents. That they would take a real email between two Clinton campaign workers that was two paragraphs long and insert a third paragraph suggesting the campaign was engaged in illegality.

You can imagine how disruptive that would be if that were released two or three weeks before the election, how impossible it would be to disprove the veracity of that fraud. Particularly when these two Clinton employees were real people and they were in real communication, and they were paragraphs you could corroborate. It would be impossible to respond adequately.

The risk– and as far as we know, the documents by and large that the Russians dumped were authentic. They were stolen, but they were authentic. But that risk that the Russians might have dumped forgeries might have escalated further than it did is, I think, far greater now because of this new technology, which allows not just the forging of documents, but allows already, the state of the art of the technology is already good enough to fool anyone in this room watching a video with their naked eye. And released into the social media ecosystem tomorrow could be a video of Joe Biden saying something he never said. Or Elizabeth Warren. Or Bernie Sanders. Or Beto O'Rourke. Or

anyone else. Or Donald Trump. And you would need computer analysis to be able to determine that it's a fake.

There is a race going on between the AI that produces those deep fakes and the AI that can be used to detect them. But the AI is already good enough to fool us. And part of the problem is that psychologists will tell you that once you have seen the fraudulent video, much of the damage is already done. Even if you're later persuaded by someone who does the computer forensics that it's a fraud, you'll never completely lose the lingering negative impression of that person.

This is the future we may be heading into in which it is increasingly difficult to tell what is true and whether we can believe our eyes. And as one of the witnesses described in our hearing, this creates a liar's dividend, a dividend for those who lie. Because not only can you put out something fake and call it real, but you can disregard something real and label it fake. And of course, we already have a President who called the Access Hollywood tape, which was real, a fake. And pushed out a cheap fake video of Nancy Pelosi pretending it was real.

And so, that future is already here. And to me, there is little that is more corrosive to a democracy than the idea that there is no truth or a grave difficulty in telling what is true. And this is the threat to the democracy we have here at home, to bring at home. It is not obviously just an issue of the rise of illiberal democracy or representative government, the attack on liberal democracy, the rise of authoritarianism, but the attack on truth here at home. When the President's lawyer says that truth isn't truth, and the President's counselor says that they're entitled to their own alternate facts, and you have a President who dissembles every day, that is a grave threat to our democracy.

And so, I think this is an enormously challenging time for the nation. I'm also confident we'll get through it.

But there are also some very immediate threats on the horizon, and let me turn to those. I think the one that is most prominent at the moment is Iran. And I have to say as someone who spends so much of their time reviewing intelligence and working with the intelligence agencies, I'm a bit astonished at how much the discussion of Iran has revolved lately around intelligence. To me, the issues raised by Iran are really not intelligence issues. I think there's little question about Iran's responsibility for the attacks on the shipping. And I don't really think that the heart of the concern that our allies have is over the quality of intelligence, which is very strong. I think the problem is really that we ought to be surprised if we didn't find ourselves in this situation, that this was eminently predictable. In fact, the intelligence could have, and did, warn of exactly these kind of increased risks of conflict with Iran if we pursued the course that we have been pursuing for the past two years.

We withdrew from a nuclear agreement that Iran was complying with, which is problematic at many levels – problematic because Iran was complying, problematic because there was no alternative to the agreement when we left it. Problematic, too, for a much broader reason, which is, what reason now to do other nations have to believe that any agreement we enter into will be maintained and upheld beyond the life of that presidency. It used to be, I think, the view that when the United States committed to an agreement, the United States was committing to the agreement, not simply the President at the time. But you can imagine the difficulty of negotiating future agreements if friend or foe believe that we cannot be relied upon beyond the length of that presidential term.

But nonetheless, we left the agreement. We reimposed our sanctions. And, not content to leave on our own and impose our own sanctions, we have also sought to get our

European allies to leave the agreement, to impose their own sanctions. And of course, this has not isolated Iran so much as it has isolated America, at least from our allies.

And I think this is the difficulty we're facing right now of persuading our allies about the intelligence. It's not really about the intelligence. Rather, I think it's that our allies warned us that this is exactly the position that we would be in. And I think they're very reluctant to lock arms with us now that Iran is attacking shipping because these circumstances were so eminently foreseeable and predictable.

Now, that's not a reason not to protect the freedom of navigation. And we should. And we need to be working with our allies to do it. And we shouldn't be doing this alone; we can't be going this alone. But I don't think this is fundamentally an intelligence issue. I think the consequences of labeling the IRGC as a terrorist group were predictable in terms of increased risk to our service members in the region. I think the risk of Iran violating the agreement by having too much enriched material was a predictable result of leaving the agreement, of sanctioning or threatening to sanction countries that would import the nuclear material from Iran so that Iran would fall out of compliance. They were also a predictable result of Iran going back to enriching and accelerating its enrichment. Both nations seem to have driven into the same cul-de-sac, and now find it difficult to find a way out.

The reality is, we're going to have to protect shipping in the Strait. We're going to have to try to find a way to bring our allies and the United States back together on the same page. And we're going to have to try to find a way to keep Iran from going back down the nuclear path. But that has become exponentially more difficult by the policies that have gotten us here.



I was really quite astounded to hear the Secretary of State this weekend say, on Face the Nation, that the fact that Iran was going back to enriching shows just how flawed the Iran agreement was. That's a pretty hard argument to make, having left the agreement, to blame the agreement for Iran going back to enriching. You really have to do some serious mental gymnastics to be able to wrap your head around that point of view.

But this is, I think, leading us to increased likelihood of conflict with Iran. And we need to strategize about a way to de-escalate the situation and work with our allies to de-escalate the situation. Because a conflict with Iran would be utterly catastrophic.

So those are some of the more acute challenges. In the Intelligence Committee, we are trying not weigh the allocation of our resources to these difficult problem sets – the increasing belligerence and meddling of Russia in our affairs; the rise of China and the export of its digital authoritarian or totalitarian model; the acute danger from Iran; the persistent danger from Kim Jong-un. Who would have imagined in our lifetime or any lifetime a President of the United States saying that he loved the North Korean dictator at a time when that dictator was expanding both his nuclear and missile program? But that is the surreal world we live in.

And we also continue to analyze and debate the prioritization of resources for our counterterror mission, which has never gone away. Which we have, I think, successfully suppressed, but is not something we're ever going to be able to hang a banner and truly say "mission accomplished."

So these are the broad tasks before the Committee. Let me just turn briefly to the investigation, and then I'd be happy to go to your questions.

Our particular interest in the Intel Committee in the Mueller report and in our continuing investigation focuses on volume one of the Mueller report. And in particular, in volume one, the counterintelligence investigation of which we know very little about. This investigation began by the FBI not as a criminal matter. There was a criminal investigation that became an offshoot of the original investigation, but the original investigation was a counterintelligence investigation designed to look into whether US persons were acting as witting or unwitting agents of a foreign power. We got briefed on that counterintelligence investigation up until the point where James Comey was fired and it went into a black hole. And we have learned very little since.

So there are very basic questions: What happened to that counterintelligence investigation? How many individuals did the FBI and Justice Department have concerns about and investigate from a counterintelligence point of view? What is the status of those investigations? Are any still open? Or have they all closed? And, what are the findings that the FBI made? These are the questions that we have presented to the FBI.

We're starting to get answers to some of them. But there is still a great deal that we don't know. And these counterintelligence issues can be every bit as significant, every bit as important as the criminal law questions. The Mueller report is essentially a prosecutorial document about the exercise of prosecutorial judgment: We prosecuted these people for these reasons; we did not prosecute these people. And then there's a whole bunch of redacted people and sections. I would imagine, these are the decisions we made not to prosecute, and for reasons of privacy we're not making them public.

But it's a prosecutorial document. There is really only a page or a paragraph devoted to the counterintelligence investigation. And in it, Mueller says that, We had embedded within our team FBI agents working on counterintelligence, some it appears that were

working for the Special Counsel, some it appears that were still working for FBI or were still FBI employees, but some were reporting their findings back to the FBI.

What were those findings? What were the risks? Have those risks been addressed? Do those risks involve people that got security clearances by dint of nepotism? Are there still threats or compromise that we should be aware of that we need to take steps to mitigate?

Those are some of the more important questions that we have.

And to give you, I think, probably the clearest illustration of the difference between a criminal issue and a counterintelligence issue, probably the most prominent is Moscow Trump Tower. This was a project that the President was pursuing during the presidential campaign while denying having any business dealings with the Russians. This was a business deal that, according to the Special Counsel, might have earned Trump and his business hundreds of millions of dollars. It may have been the most lucrative deal of his life. This was a deal that he was seeking the Kremlin's help to make happen, a deal that Michael Cohen believed, and others as well, that without Putin's support they could not make happen.

So they're seeking Putin's and the Kremlin's support while then-candidate Trump is out on the campaign trail extolling the merits of Vladimir Putin. What a surprise. Of all the people he's unable to criticize, it turns out one of them is someone that he will require their approval, tacit or expressed, to make perhaps the most lucrative deal of his life.

That may not be a crime. Maybe it should be, but it may not be a crime. It is, however, a counterintelligence problem of the first order of magnitude.

And what is so revealing about the nature of this threat is, when we discovered a year after the fact in the middle of 2017 that the effort to make this deal happen went through the middle of 2016, it didn't end with the Iowa caucuses or before the caucuses, as the President and his team wanted us to believe, wanted the American people to believe. When we learned the truth about their efforts to get help from the Kremlin, the President was stopped outside the White House and asked, "What do you think about this? What's the answer? You said you had no business dealings with the Russians." And his answer was illustrative. First he said, "That's not a crime." And then he said, "I might have lost the election, why should I miss out on all those business opportunities?" That is, "Why should I miss out on all that money?"

Now, the interesting thing is that when that became public, when it became public that they had reached out to the Kremlin, that they had literally called and emailed Dmitry Peskov, who is generally referred to as the spokesperson for the Kremlin, but in reality is much more than that. Very close to Putin himself. When it was revealed that they made that outreach to the Kremlin, Peskov issued a statement saying, "We never responded to that outreach." That was a lie.

And so, you have the prospect of the Kremlin lying to cover up for the President of the United States. That is its own and very separate form of compromise. And so, the question we have is, were there others of compromise that the American people need to know about? That the Congress needs to know about so we can take steps to protect the country?

It may very well be the President's view, to this day, "I may lose my reelection; why should I miss out on making that deal in Moscow? I'd be a damn fool to criticism Vladimir Putin if I've got so much money riding on that." And this is the danger, I think, of a President so driven by his financial interests, so opaque about his finances and

business, that we cannot tell whether he is driven in his relations with other countries and world leaders by his financial self-interest or by the national interest.

So those are some of the most important questions that we're focused on. We had the testimony in another open hearing just a week or so ago from counterintelligence experts, former heads of divisions within, branches within the FBI that focus on counterintelligence about these issues. And of course, in a way that you, I suppose, it's better to be lucky than good, one of my colleagues asked the minority witness, a Fox News contributor, the question, "Well, if this happened again, if the Russians reached out to your campaign, would you call the FBI?" And his answer was, "Yes, of course, I'd call the FBI." It would turn out that would be the same day we would learn the President, once again, affirmed that he might not call the FBI, that in fact he might accept that help all over again, and there's nothing wrong with that.

This is a grave danger to us, and to the 2020 elections. Not just the President continues to affirm his right to take help from a foreign adversary, but the fact that as recently as a month ago he told that foreign adversary, apparently in a phone conversation with Putin, that he still thought the whole Russia thing was a hoax. Underscoring, I think, once again to the Russians, if there were any doubt, that they're free to intervene in the next election, as long as they intervene on the President's side. And he will not have the guts to call them out on it. He may even be grateful. That is the message that the Russians have gotten from the President.

Now, we are trying to do everything we can on the Committee to divine Russian plans and intentions in 2020, to make sure the intelligence agencies are focused and resourced on that problem set. But we need all the other agencies: We need the Department of Defense establishing a deterrent. We need the Department of Homeland Security aggressively urging the states to adopt technologies to protect their elections'

infrastructure, to make use of the diagnostics that DHS has. We need our Secretary of State discussing with his Russian counterpart the hammer that will come down in the form of sanctions if they mess with us again. But we don't have that whole-of-government effort because I think for any of them to make it a priority would be considered a threat to the legitimacy of the President.

And so, we speed towards the 2020 elections, an environment in which there are new technologies like deep fakes that are potentially hugely disruptive, even less attributable than a hacking-and-dumping operation, and we are not nearly as prepared as we should be. And these are the problems that we are focused. These are the problems that we're going to continue to air and expose and use our platform on the Intelligence Committee to take the steps that we can in Congress to protect the country and to protect our democracy, but also to keep the pressure on the administration to do the same.

And with that, I'm happy to respond to your questions. Thank you.

**MS KODJAK:** Thank you, Congressman. Again, if you have a question, please raise your hand. Somebody will come around with a mic. I'm just going to start quickly. Going back to Iran, yesterday we lost— or the nominee for Defense Secretary withdrew, and we have a new Acting Defense Secretary. Meanwhile, the Secretary of State is saying that the United States will respond if Iran takes any actions against Americans. What do you think about this power structure right now in our defense and diplomacy?

**CONGRESSMAN SCHIFF:** Well, I guess probably the word that comes most to mind is incoherent. We learned a week or so ago that the, at least it was reported that the Japanese prime minister carried a message from the President inviting Iran to a dialogue. Not surprisingly, the Iranians rejected this. And this, I think, gets to the whole kind of—you can't even call it a mythology because that, I think, presumes too much forethought.

There was this expectation, I suppose, that if we reneged on the nuclear deal and we embarked on a maximum-less pressure campaign that Iran would come begging back to the table ready to give up everything. I don't know anyone who thought that that was plausible. And I think it was really the absence of thought. It was tactical actions with the absence of any strategic thought. And certainly with no backup plan.

So it should not have been surprising to anyone that the Iranians rebuffed that overture through the Japanese prime minister. But at the same time that overture is being made, John Bolton announces a new round of sanctions on Iran, to crack down further on Iran's oil economy. I don't know whether that was meant to sabotage the President's diplomatic overture or whether to have that effect, but it's certainly completely incoherent. I don't know what you're supposed to make of that. If you're Iran, what do you deduce from this? Is this a Mutt-and-Jeff routine? Is it one not talking to the other? Is it one trying to scuttle what the other is doing? Is the President secretly really behind what Bolton and Pompeo were doing? You know, I fear that it's simply incoherence because that's been the pattern with this administration.

And so, I don't think there is a well-thought-out strategy here. And of course, in the midst of that, the risk of miscalculation is great – by the Iranians and by us. And so, this is not a particularly good time to lose your stability in the Defense Department at the top level. And so, it is concerning.

Now, I know the Army Secretary and think highly of him. I wish him every success. We all wish him every success. But it's an odd time to be changing the guard. And it comes on top of an otherwise incoherent policy vis-à-vis Iran.

**MS KODJAK:** Right here in the blue?

**BILL ROBERTS:** Bill Roberts with Al Jazeera. Mr. Chairman, I have two questions for you. Can you give us a sense of timing when you will either subpoena or get an agreement for testimony from FBI Director Wray and former special counsel Mueller? And regarding the Khashoggi murder, the United Nations released its report this morning identifying Saudi government responsibility. What is the explanation in your mind for why the Trump administration has refrained from holding the Saudi government accountable?

**CONGRESSMAN SCHIFF:** In terms of Wray, we have started to get answers from the FBI. They are not nearly complete. I would describe it as the beginning of their response, not the end. But I think they recognize they're going to have to live up to their legal obligations. They are statutorily required to keep us abreast of any significant intelligence or counterintelligence matter. And it's hard to imagine any more significant counterintelligence matter than these.

So we've started to get answers. But as we have seen all too often in the last six months, without the threat of coercion, we don't get anything. And I think patience is running out at every level. So we're going to continue to press the FBI to get answers. If it's necessary, we will bring the Director in under subpoena. But we're determined to get answers.

In terms of Bob Mueller, he's going to have to testify. And he can testify voluntarily or he can testify under subpoena. But it's going to have to happen. I don't think a two-year investigation of this magnitude, followed by a written report and a ten-minute statement without questions satisfactorily answers the many, many questions that we have about the investigation. So I also think time and patience are running out on that front.



Finally, on Saudi Arabia, why can't the administration hold Saudi Arabia accountable, why is it even now trying to do an end run around Congress in terms of arms sales? I don't know the answer. We are, of course, concerned that what may be driving this is, again, the President's financial interests or that of his family in terms of our policy vis-à-vis the Gulf. But we don't know.

What drives the administration's North Korea policy? I don't think that is driven by financial interest. And yet, it is completely irrational and dangerous. The President has done nothing but enhance the stature of the North Korean dictator. He is mollified by a birthday card. And I don't know what's driving that.

I suspect what's driving that, frankly, is having reneged on the Iran nuclear deal and created another crisis with another nuclear aspirant, he's desperate to get a deal with North Korea that he can say is "the greatest deal since sliced bread." But that very weakness of that position has so benefited Kim Jong-un.

But it's not always possible to divine his motivation. And with respect to Saudi Arabia, it may be financial or it may be other. We're determined to, as a part of our counterintelligence work, make sure that US policy towards the Gulf – whether it's towards Saudi Arabia or UAE or Qatar or anywhere else – is driven by the national interest.

And we continue in the Committee to examine Saudi Arabia, its role in the peace process, its role in Yemen, its role in the murder of Khashoggi. And we're going to continue to do so.

**WES PIPPERT:** Wes Pippert, Press Club Wire. About the Intelligence Committee, are you able to work with any kind of unity as on, say, on the Senate side? In other words, how's your relationship with Nunes?

**CONGRESSMAN SCHIFF:** It's funny you should ask that question because we had a hearing yesterday on the topic of going dark. And at the end of the hearing, it was quite interesting because the members' points of view were all over the map. You could not tell who was a Democrat and who was a Republican. And towards the end of the hearing, one of my Republican colleagues said, "Isn't it nice to have a whole hearing that is not the least bit partisan?" And I said, "It is wonderful and let's see if we can get to the end of it without screwing it up." Which we did.

The good news/bad news in terms of our committee over the last two years has, I think, been— at least the bad news has been plain to see, which is our very profound differences on Russia; and there's no sugarcoating it. We not just view the issue differently, but we view our role differently. From my point of view, our role is to do an objective investigation and to make sure that the country is protected. But from my perspective, they view their role as being the President's defense team. And those roles are incompatible. I'm sure they would view it differently, but that's the perspective I get from how they have approached this.

The good news is that on all the other constellation of issues that we've talked about this morning, whether it's Iran or China or whether we're allocating resources properly between the counterterrorism mission and the hard targets set, the investments we're making in overhead, versus human intelligence, versus signals intelligence, all those issues we are working on in a non-partisan way. And the product of them is the annual Intelligence Authorization bill, which year after year we have passed out of our committee and passed through the House on an overwhelmingly bipartisan basis. Which,

I might say, for all the criticism of our committee in contrast to the praise of our Senate colleagues, we have been able to do and they haven't. The Senate has not been able to pass an intelligence bill in years.

And so, that's I think the good news/bad news of our committee. I look forward to the day when we can work on a whole constellation of issues in a unified way. But it is difficult to see how that happens vis-à-vis Russia during this presidency or the pendency of this investigation.

\_\_\_: Hi, Congressman, thanks for being here. So I have two questions. You've mentioned a few times that the FBI has started to answer certain questions about the counterintelligence investigations. I'm wondering how much you can reveal about what kinds of questions they've started to answer, about which topics. I'm also wondering with regard to the Durham investigation whether or not you know whether the CIA has compelled its analysts to comply with Durham's questioning or whether it's voluntary.

**CONGRESSMAN SCHIFF:** Well, the FBI began in answering our questions about the counterintelligence investigation just telling us about process. And this is a formula now that we have seen in other aspects of the Trump administration. When the Government Reform Committee sought to understand who was getting clearances where the agencies had recommended their refusal, their denial, and our own committee looked into this, and is looking into this issue as well, all the administration was willing to tell the Government Reform Committee was, "This is how the process works, but we're not going to discuss specifics of any particular application or individual." That's useless.

Those were the first answers we got on the CIA investigation – "This is generically how we do a CIA investigation." Now, a CIA investigation, like a criminal investigation, has a

beginning and it has an end. And when it ends, there is a formal ending of that investigation. Whether that process was followed here, we still don't know.

Clearly, some, if not all, of the counterintelligence investigation has come to an end, but which parts? Whether it all it has or some of it? What the conclusions were at the end of any particular element of that? We still don't know.

So that is sort of generally where we are. But each week they are providing more information. But it is, like everything else, pulling teeth. And our patience is growing fatigued at this point. So that's a bit where we are on the CIA information.

In terms of the issue of either the investigation by the Inspector General or Durham's investigation or Bill Barr's investigation, we have very little visibility. I have discussed personally with the Director of National Intelligence Coates my profound concern about what Bill Barr is doing in particular. This desire to provide cover for the President by investigating the investigators, this desire to give amplification to the counternarrative, ignore what the Russians did, ignore what the Russians may do in the next election, focus only on investigating the investigators. And we have already seen, I think, a disturbing erosion of our checks and balances.

The effort by the President, for example, to get McCabe fired before his pension would vest and the decision to initiate that investigation and to accelerate the timetable and reach a result on it so that he could be fired before his pension vested, that tainted that whole investigation. The findings of that investigation by the IG may be perfectly accurate, but it is tainted from the start because it had a political origin from the start.

I used to serve on, it was called the Democracy Assistance Commission; now it's a democracy partnership between the Congress and emerging democracies. And we always

used to encourage these emerging democracies that when you win an election, you don't seek to jail the losing side. And yet, that's what we find this administration trying to do, to investigate and prosecute the losing side.

And once again, the echoes of "lock her up" were in the air last night. That ethic is now part of DoJ policy under Barr – investigate your rivals.

The only other thing I would add which to me was among the most dangerous changes along these lines is when Bill Barr testified that the President could have made the Mueller investigation go away any time he chose, if he thought it unfair. What President would think an investigation into his or her corruption was anything but unfair? That view of the top law enforcement officer in the land doesn't make the President above the law; it means the President is the law. And I can't imagine any more dangerous view of an attorney general than that one.

It also means, by the way, that these other dozen or 14 investigations that Mueller spun off to other elements of the Department of Justice presumably the President could also make go away if he thought they were unfair. And that's why I believe that Bill Barr is the second-most dangerous person in the country right now.

**TOM HAMBURGER:** Mr. Chairman, Tom Hamburger, Washington Post. A two-part question, if I may. You spoke earlier about the threat to US elections that might come from, specifically, the Russians going forward. I wondered if you and the Intelligence Committee have concern about similar initiatives that might come from other foreign powers and if you could specify that concern. Also, given the concerns you raised about Saudi Arabia, I wanted to ask specifically whether the Saudis or their allies in the Middle East might be a matter of concern for that interference.

Second, if I may, I wanted to ask about your priority that you set on looking at Trump Tower Moscow. What else is there to learn, given the reports we've had in the Mueller report going into it in some detail? Why is this a matter of priority for the Intelligence Committee?

**CONGRESSMAN SCHIFF:** Let me start with the issue of whether other countries may also have an interest in interfering in the 2020 election. I think the aperture has been opened for other foreign meddling in our affairs. And what's more, the model has been made now for domestic bad actors to employ some of the same tactics. So the risk that I mentioned from deep fakes is not just a foreign risk. Obviously, domestic bad actors can do it, and I don't know the precise origin of the cheap fake involving Speaker Pelosi. That may have had a domestic origin.

So the risk, I think, is now quite widespread because the Russians have shown just how easy it is. And in fact, even in the last election, even in the midterms, we saw people experimenting in Alabama with the use of false flag operations, these phony personas online, as a way of manipulating voter sentiment.

So is it possible, plausible, probable that other actors like Iran, for example, might decide that it wants to mess with us as a way of fighting back asymmetrically? It's certainly possible.

In terms of China, I think the administration has often conflated two different kinds of influence in an effort to take the focus off of Russia when the administration talks about China and China's effort to influence the public. It will talk about the Chinese use of tariffs strategically to get the President's attention in places that he cares deeply about. That's quite overt. Or they'll talk about China writing op-eds in newspapers or engaging in diplomatic encounters. I think that's a far cry from a hacking-and-dumping operation.

So I don't anticipate that the Chinese are going to use the same kind of tactics the Russians did. But other countries certainly may. The North Koreans, for example, have demonstrated a willingness to hack Sony over a far less important issue, a bad movie. So I do think other nations will view this as a relatively low risk, potential high gain opportunity.

The more profound concern I think we have over some of these other actors comes with respect to our infrastructure, our critical infrastructure. And so, we obviously closely monitor that as well.

In terms of Saudi or other nations, there have been allegations involving Gulf powers and intervention, for example, involving Jeff Bezos as a way of punishing the President's enemies or rewarding his friends. Whether those allegations are accurate or inaccurate, there is always that risk. And that risk is accentuated when the President seems to say "there's nothing wrong with that; everybody does it." I think it only encourages that kind of thing.

And I'm sorry, you had a second question?

**MR. HAMBURGER:** Trump Tower Moscow.

**CONGRESSMAN SCHIFF:** Trump Tower Moscow. We would like to present a fuller account of Trump Tower Moscow because that remains such a potentially compromising circumstance. If the President continues to want to make that deal, then our policy continues to be held hostage by the profit-making incentive there. So I think getting out as much information ultimately about the efforts to build that tower will be salutary by shedding a spotlight on it.

But I hold up that merely as the example, frankly, of why we need to be concerned about a whole constellation of counterintelligence issues. That's just the most tangible. It was going to be the tallest tower in all of Europe. It's hard to get more tangible than that. But there are other issues that we are looking into as well. If there was a change in US policy owing to the need to refinance certain real estate, that's a problem.

And so, there are other counterintelligence issues and problems that we're also examining.

\_\_\_: Hi, Congressman Schiff, thanks for being here. So in the context of Trump seeming to show some willingness to accepting foreign information, Republicans countered with what the Clinton campaign did, with hiring Fusion GPS foreign opposition firm to then hire ex-British spy Christopher Steele to compile a dossier using Kremlin sources. And then the FBI using that information in an investigation, using it in FISA applications possibly containing Russian disinformation, being unverified and that sort of thing. So do you consider that to be foreign influence in any way? And when you recommend to campaigns that they not accept foreign information, would you also recommend that campaigns and campaign vendors not seek out foreign information as well in the next campaign?

**CONGRESSMAN SCHIFF:** I think this is an illustration of a tactic the administration and its allies often use which is the argument of false equivalence, the sort of "what-aboutism." Yes, the President called on Russia to hack his opponents' emails and said they'd be richly rewarded by the press. And hours later they attempted to do exactly that. But what about the fact that the DNC hired Fusion GPS? Well, Fusion GPS is an American firm. Now, Fusion GPS did hire Christopher Steele, who's a foreign national. And there are rules about what role foreign nationals can play in any campaign. Rules



which I think probably the closer analogy is the Trump campaign's use of Cambridge Analytica and its employment of foreign nationals at Cambridge Analytica and whether those four nationals were exercising a degree of control in the campaign that violated the campaign prohibition on the use of foreign nationals. That's probably the better analogy.

In the case of the DNC and Fusion GPS, they appeared to have abided by the rules. In the case of Cambridge Analytica, it appears they violated the rules. But I don't think there's an equivalence between hiring an American opposition research firm, even one that hires a former British intelligence officer to do some of its opposition research and having a direct contact with people in the Russian government to get dirt on your opponent as part of what's described as "that foreign nation's effort to help your campaign." That seems to me very different qualitatively and far more problematic.

But I think this is yet another effort to deflect and blur the distinctions and say, Well, everybody does it. Everybody doesn't do it. When the President says that, I think he is merely projecting his own lack of ethics onto others, which we have seen repeatedly.

**MS KODJAK:** We have time for about two more questions.

\_\_\_: Hi, I want to ask about Iran, and particularly just how confident you are on the intelligence because there are questions that people have going back to WMDs that intelligence sometimes is wrong. And secondly, sort of a follow-on to that, we have Senators— yesterday, Senator Lindsey Graham said one of the things that's under consideration is potentially attacking Iranian oil assets, taking away their ability to refine oil. I'm wondering what you think about that sort of strike in response to some of these attacks.

**CONGRESSMAN SCHIFF:** I mean, there's always a risk that sources of intelligence can be wrong or the analysis can be wrong. I think the intelligence is pretty strong here, that Iran is responsible for these attacks. The navigation, the shipping needs to be protected. And you can make an argument that even if you didn't know who was responsible, you need to protect the shipping going through the Strait of Hormuz from any bad actor.

I also think that this, as I mentioned earlier, needs to be an effort that we don't embark on alone. This should not be the United States trying to police the Strait of Hormuz on its own. This should not be the United States taking unilateral action because of Iranian or other attacks on international shipping. This needs to be done in concert with our allies.

I think we are seeing the dangers of a policy of going it alone, of castigating and alienating our allies, that when we need our allies, as we do right now, they're nowhere to be found. And so, I think this really calls for an international effort to protect shipping and to deter any further attacks.

I would also say, on the question of the US attacking Iran as a response, as Senator Cotton and others have advocated, that is not something within the authority of the administration to do on its own. That would require an authorization from Congress. The authorizations that are outstanding do not apply in any way, shape or form to these circumstances. We're not talking about those responsible for 9/11 here. We're not talking about Iraq.

And so, I firmly disagree with those that are suggesting that somehow these prior authorizations or Article 2 cover this. They don't. And I think it would be a tragic escalation on our part to act unilaterally, to act without the consent of Congress, to take

steps that just further drive us from our allies or provoke an even greater counter-reaction from Iran.

**MS KODJAK:** I'm sorry, I'm going to jump in here because you say our allies are nowhere to be found, but Secretary Pompeo's right now going to the Middle East and then to Europe to talk about these very issues. Do you think that's the right thing to do? Do you think he'll get support?

**CONGRESSMAN SCHIFF:** Well, I think it's the right thing for him to try. And the fact though that we have been so unsuccessful at this point when ships have been attacked in such a flagrant way is a testament to how much we have alienated those allies.

I attended the Munich National Security Conference with a large contingent, Democratic and Republican, led by the Speaker, and you could tell from the reaction when we interacted with our foreign counterparts how alienated we are from our allies. One conversation I had with a head of state coincided with a presidential tweet that said "He, Europe, you better take those foreign fighters from Syria. Otherwise I'm just going to order them released, and good luck with that."

And this foreign leader said to us, "Is this how you treat your ally now? There's no contact between your head of state and ours? There's no engagement between your Secretary of State and ours? We have to get threatened on Twitter." And when you treat your allies that way, and this is one of our allies, and then you have a situation like this, a crisis where shipping is being detonated in the Gulf, why should we be surprised when they don't come rushing to join us?

This is, I think, what Secretary Pompeo is encountering. This is the secretary that effectively – I don't know the diplomatic word – crashed an effort by Europe to deal with

the Iran situation previously now complaining that Iran may leave the agreement when Iran warned the administration this was exactly the course it was setting.

Again, Iran is a sponsor of terror. Iran is a uniquely malevolent actor. Iran has no right, no need for either nuclear energy or a nuclear bomb. And it would be catastrophic if they get one. But this confrontation that we're in now was so eminently predictable that it has made it enormously hard for us to marshal the kind of international support that we should.

**MS KODJAK:** I'm sorry, I know there are more questions, but we are out of time. So thank you very much, Congressman, for being here.

**CONGRESSMAN SCHIFF:** Thank you very much. [applause]

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