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**CHAIRMAN MIKE ROGERS OPENING STATEMENT
WORLD WIDE THREATS HEARING—2014—OPEN SESSION
February 4, 2014
As Prepared*

I'd like to welcome our witnesses, the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper; the CIA Director, John Brennan; the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, General Michael Flynn, the Director of NCTC, Matthew Olsen, and the Director of the FBI, James Comey, for the Committee's annual open hearing.

It's been quite a year for the Intelligence Community. The harm done to America by the constant flood of illegal disclosures these past eight months is outmatched only by the shocking volume of critical information that was stolen and likely disclosed to our adversaries.

As the Department of Defense recently explained, we have experienced the single largest compromise of national security information in our nation's history. And let me be clear: we are not talking about business records and phone metadata.

These compromises go to the very core of this country's ability to defend itself. They seriously threaten the capabilities of every one of our armed services: the Army, the Air Force, the Marines, the Navy. And long into the future, this stolen material will threaten the safety and security of our soldiers in the field.

Yet, at a time when our intelligence agencies need leadership and clear direction, they must endure more regulatory confusion emanating from this Administration. For five long years, we have witnessed delays, incoherence, and confusion, and policies that do little but tie our hands.

Red lines are not enforced; one task force reviews another task force; important, legal programs are changed even though they have done nothing wrong. And indecision on key covert action activities has had serious negative consequences.

When it comes to America's current approach to national security, there is only one thing that is certain: our allies have no clue what our policy is from one day to the next.

Talking about a problem; reviewing a problem; assigning a task force to think about a problem... that is not leadership. That is dithering. And our adversaries see it as weakness.

And look at how the world has evolved in response these last five years. America's strength and stature in the world have diminished. Terrorists are emboldened and grabbing land around the world. Rogue nations are only more bellicose. And our adversaries, like Russia and China, capitalize on our indecision and absence from the world stage for their own strategic advantage.

When policy makers embrace national security policies based on what sounds good in speeches, those left to untangle the mess are the men sitting in front of us today.

So, I thank you, and all those who work with you, not only for the good work you are doing now, but for the years you have spent defending this country; for making the arguments; for standing up for what is right and what is needed at one of the most challenging times in our country's history.

But I also fear that the Administration's lack of leadership has created growing risk aversion within our intelligence agencies. As al Qaeda has morphed and spread throughout Yemen, Syria, the Levant, and Africa, this Administration has piled on even more bureaucracy in Washington, D.C.

Today, individuals who would have previously been removed from the battlefield by U.S. counterterrorism operations for attacking or plotting against U.S. interests remain free because of self-imposed red tape. While we are busy pondering more "transparency," our intelligence professionals are left paralyzed because of totally incoherent policy guidance.

So let me be the first to say publicly: the President's May 2013 policy changes for U.S. targeted strikes are an utter and complete failure. Those changes, while sounding pretty in a speech, are *today*, right *now*, endangering the lives of Americans at home and our military overseas.

And as to Afghanistan, last year at this same hearing, I asked whether we had the conviction to cement our hard-fought gains and achieve a lasting victory, or whether we would walk away. A year later, we seem even more focused on leaving the war before victory has been won. Yet we have already learned what happens after a hasty exit in Iraq. Instability in these countries gives al Qaeda and other terrorist groups their most-valued asset: ungoverned space to plan, train for, and conduct terrorist attacks against the West. Such operational freedom results in a loss of our hard-fought gains.

We are in a fight, and our policy should be dictated by what best protects America, and not what is politically expedient.

America's adversaries are not slowing down. Now is not the time to disengage from the world. The drip of classified information designed to undermine U.S. interests will continue, but we must move past false accusations and feigned outrage. We need leadership and clear thinking in this difficult time. And we must get back to business of protecting America. That is why we look to you, the heads of our intelligence agencies, to find innovative ways to reclaim America's rightful position in the world. It is no small task.

Before turning to our witnesses for an opening statement, I will yield to Mr. Ruppertsberger for an opening statement.