

TESTIMONY OF FREDERICK KEMPE
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TO THE HOUSE PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

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Chairman Turner, Ranking Member Himes, esteemed members of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, thank you for the opportunity to testify on geopolitical threats, how to meet them, and the role of the intelligence community.

It's fitting that the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence should be convening this public session four days after the first anniversary of Putin's criminal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. It's also just a week after President Biden's [brave and potentially historic visit to Ukraine](#). (I'll come back to what I mean by "potentially.")

Putin's war in Ukraine underscores three crucial and interlocking issues worth highlighting today.

- 1) First, we live at a historic inflection point, as crucial as the periods after World War I, World War II and the Cold War, where U.S. leadership alongside allies and partners – or the failure of U.S. leadership – will have global and generational consequences. In short, we live at the Fourth Inflection Point since World War I. Hence, our actions now should be informed by history's lessons and thus a conviction that Ukraine's war is at the same time a battle over what set of actors and principles will shape the global future.
- 2) Second, with the enormity of those stakes in mind, Putin's ongoing war in Ukraine, along with its failure thus far to have achieved its ends, underscores both the strengths and weaknesses of the U.S. intelligence community in navigating this defining moment. There is an urgent necessity to enhance the strengths and address the weaknesses, as the intelligence community isn't appropriately organized or funded for this moment.
- 3) Most important for this Committee, and for the United States more generally, to understand that at such a defining moment point the dramatic and decisive connection between short-term decisions and actions, and longer-term commitments and consequences. If the intelligence community has a glaring weakness, alongside the United States government and Congress more generally, it is in providing intelligence-driven, longer term analytical frameworks within which one can more confidently understand and respond to the wealth of daily intelligence.

So first, let me address each of these three points, starting with the Fourth Inflection Point for the United States since World War I.

THE FOURTH INFLECTION POINT

President Biden was right when he said during his presidential campaign and frequently since then that we face an "Inflection Point" in history, where it will be decided what countries and values will shape the global system for the era ahead. (I have been writing an Atlantic Council

newsletter since 2016 called “[Inflection Points](#),” having sensed and advocated that point of view before it became more popular.)

Putin’s invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and the ongoing war that followed, brought into sharp relief a new era of strategic competition that had been unfolding for several years already.

How we manage this period now, in the face of external authoritarian threats and internal challenges to democracies worldwide, will be no less critical than U.S. actions alongside allies and partners during the three previous inflection points, plastic moment in history when the U.S. role has had outsized consequences: after World War I, World War II and the Cold War.

The lessons of history are clear on this.

After World War I—where nine million soldiers and five million civilians died—we collectively squandered a historic opportunity to create a better world through the tragic failure of post-war arrangements (the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations, among them), through the bitter continuation of European fissures and through our own misguided isolationism. This resulted in the rise of fascism, the outbreak of World War II, and the Holocaust. World War II would be the deadliest conflict in human history, with an estimated 70 to 80 million fatalities, most of them among civilians.

After World War II, we as a country did something that was until that time aberrational in American history. We remained engaged in Europe and the world despite post-war fatigue and widespread isolationist sentiment. We introduced the Marshall Plan, providing economic assistance to restore the economic infrastructure of postwar Europe, and with our partners we constructed multilateral institutions to secure the future and, if possible, to prevent future great power conflicts: the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, NATO, and others.

Together with our allies, we constructed what came to be known as the international liberal order of institutions, rules and practices that expanded democracy, prosperity, and security, and safeguarded our own freedoms and values. It brought us [the longest, sustained period of major power peace, prosperity and democratic expansion in history](#).¹

In many respects, the Cold War was the World War III that never happened, Our triumph in that struggle between two competing ideologies and systems, without a fire being shot, was a credit not only to military deterrence, and the remarkable unsung work of our intelligence agencies, but it was at the same time was a victory of our national resilience, and our dynamic and magnetic democratic and free market system and values. It was one of the greatest accomplishments of American international engagement and statecraft.

After the Cold War, our failures were not as dramatic as they were after World War I, but neither were our successes as great or architecturally ambitious as they were after World War II.

¹ Ash Jain and Matthew Kroenig, “Present at the Re-Creation: A Global Strategy for Revitalizing, Adapting, and Defending a rules-based international system,” 2019, Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Present-at-the-Recreation.pdf>.

Initially, we were able to expand NATO, enlarge the European Union, and increase the number of people and countries who lived outside despotic rule with rising incomes and expanding rights.

It even appeared for a time that China would join the world of moderate and modernizing nations. However, as we see how, that period didn't end up being the end of history but rather marked the beginning of a new strategic competition.

So that leaves us with the post-post-Cold War period, though we should seek a better description for our era, where a contest is in full flower over who and what principles will define the global future.

Put most simply, there are three alternatives: the reinvigoration and perhaps reinvention of the liberal international order put in place after World War II, the replacement of that order over time by a Chinese-led illiberal order, or global chaos and incoherence, more along the lines of Vladimir Putin's law-of-the-jungle than any rule-of-law.

As we meet today, we have a generational opportunity to shape the future that Putin's potential failure presents us.

Last year at this time, it seemed democracies were in retreat and authoritarianism was on the rise following 16 years during which Freedom House has tracked the relative decline of democracy globally. In early February of last year, shortly before the Beijing Winter Olympics, China's Xi Jinping and Russia's Putin entered a "no limits" strategic partnership which viewed U.S. and Western leadership in irreversible decline.

The Ukraine war followed.

The past year, however, has been a challenging one for the world's worst authoritarians: Putin, China's President Xi Jinping, and Iranian Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

They ended 2022 reeling from self-inflicted wounds, the consequences of hubris, overextension, and a gamble that US alliances would crumble in the face of a challenge. Russia's war is failing, and its economy is imploding; China's excessive authoritarianism, thoughtlessly provocative "wolf warrior diplomacy," and botched COVID response, slowed its growth and alarmed international (particularly European) partners; and Iran's rush to nuclear capability and draconian response to ongoing protests following the death of Mahsa Amani, have shown the Ayatollah's theocracy is on shakier ground than many experts have thought.

At the beginning of my comments, I called President Biden's trip to Kiev last week "potentially historic." What I meant by that was that it would be historic depending on what follows now. For Ukraine to prevail would require a "[surge](#)" in support to Ukraine now to confront an unfolding Russian offensive.²

² Frederick Kempe, "Davos Dispatch: Why now is the time for a 'Ukraine surge': military, intelligence, economic, and other support to defeat Putin," Atlantic Council, January 21, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/inflection-points/davos-dispatch-why-now-is-the-time-for-a-ukraine-surge/>.

President Biden’s assurance to Ukraine that the U.S. would support its struggle “as long as it takes” is well-intentioned, but a war of attrition favors Moscow and endangers tens of thousands more Ukrainians and raises the prospect of U.S., Western and Ukrainian war fatigue.

If we truly believe that the battle for the global future is being fought in Ukraine and by Ukrainians, then the money spent now from the U.S. and other allied budgets is a bargain compared to what we’ll all need to spend if Russian and Chinese ambitions advance.

If Putin prevails, history has taught us that the necessity for other countries’ boots on the ground will grow. As former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates [wrote in the *Washington Post* in January](#), “It is better to stop (Putin) now, before more is demanded of the United States and NATO as a whole.”³

LESSONS FOR U.S. INTELLIGENCE REFORM

That brings me to what this period tells us about U.S. intelligence strengths and weaknesses – and what we should do to enhance the strengths and urgently address the weaknesses.

The Ukraine war has underscored intelligence triumphs and failures..

The United States did an extraordinary job of highlighting Putin’s war plans and ambitions and warning in advance of the very real danger of invasion. It was a notable break with past US policy, and risked exposing US sources and methods, but it paid off spectacularly in robbing Putin of any guise of deniability and hammering home that this was a planned invasion, while allowing Ukraine to prepare. When U.S. predictions proved to be accurate, it bolstered the international credibility of US intelligence. It also highlighted areas where intelligence sharing with US allies needed to be improved.⁴

On the other hand, U.S. intelligence didn’t foresee Russian military weaknesses and underestimated Ukraine’s defensive capabilities and resilience. Threat assessment is never easy but it’s crucial to prepare for future threats.

One of the questions this committee is seeking to address is whether the intelligence community is organized and funded appropriately to address current and future threats. The short answer is: not by a long shot. .

The immediate post-Cold War era proved a difficult adjustment period, but the United States intelligence community successfully transformed itself in the aftermath of 9/11 to meet the needs of the war on terror and support two decades of sustained combat operations.

US intelligence operates at a faster tempo, and its analysis is more integrated with operations than ever before. Furthermore, its ability to find and track threats all over the world, as well as to support military operations, is breath-taking. We see how that applies even outside of a war-on-

³ Condoleezza Rice and Robert M. Gates, “Time is not on Ukraine’s side,” January 7, 2023, Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/01/07/condoleezza-rice-robert-gates-ukraine-repel-russia/>.

⁴ Shane Harris, Karen DeYoung, Isabelle Khurshudyan, Ashley Parker, and Liz Sly, “Road to war: US struggled to convince allies, and Zelensky, of risk of invasion,” August 16, 2022, Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/interactive/2022/ukraine-road-to-war/>.

terror context in the war in Ukraine, where US intelligence has been critical for supporting Ukraine's military operations and planning.

However, despite this success in the past two decades, the intelligence community must transform again. While potentially useful adaptations and improvements from the post-9/11 era should not be discarded, the intelligence community must adjust and even hearken back to some of its strengths and features during the half-century long competition with the Soviets during the Cold War.

This transformation must begin with human capital, including some fundamental changes in how the intelligence community hires and manages its personnel, as well as the kind of expertise it fosters.

Before I joined the Atlantic Council, I served for more than a quarter of a century as a journalist at the Wall Street Journal. Drawing from that experience, I can tell you that there is a substantial difference between looking for a reporter who is highly skilled at dashing off a few quick lines of breaking news versus one who is a deeply knowledgeable on a subject and capable of conveying ample context and comprehension of a complex issue.

We need more of the latter in the intelligence community. We need more analysts who can think at the strategic level and marshal in-depth knowledge of our adversaries, including long-term trends and drivers of their economies, societies, political systems, militaries, goals and intentions; and their strengths and weaknesses.

With that type of analysis, the US government might have been less surprised, for example, by the Russian military's poor performance in Ukraine. We might have been less surprised by China's turn from biding its time and hiding its strength to a full-range global competitor that has little interest in human rights, a free press or respecting democracy in Hong Kong. The immense difficulty of spying in China—where the CIA lost between 18 and 20 operatives in one disastrous two-year period, from 2010-2012—demonstrates this. However, with China becoming ever more ambitious and brazen on the world stage, the need for strong intelligence and deep, thoughtful analysis is more pronounced than ever.⁵

We need fewer analysts focusing on rapid reaction to operational and tactical-level issues.

My understanding is that the intelligence community has changed its personnel practices in recent years to emphasize general analytic and writing skills over depth of knowledge or time working on a particular portfolio. I've heard that many intelligence community organizations are actively discouraging people from developing much of a specialty on any particular portfolio or spending too much time developing their experience on one topic, in order to be able to quickly move people around to cover emerging crises and conflicts.

⁵ Mark Mazzetti, Adam Goldman, Michael S. Schmidt and Matt Apuzzo, "Killing CIA Informants, China Crippled U.S. Spying Operations," May 20, 2017, New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/20/world/asia/china-cia-spies-espionage.html>.

This has even been driving some of the deep experts into early retirement or second careers. I'm all for flexibility, but I firmly believe we quickly need to reverse that trend and start growing long-term experts on the key countries and issues for strategic competition—and even hire some external experts in the meantime if that's what it takes to ensure that knowledge base is readily available.

Congress should also work with the DNI to grant greater professional freedom to talented intelligence officers. Toward this end, they should seek to make security clearances completely interchangeable. Family obligations, opportunities for promotion, and a desire to learn new skill sets can drive talented intelligence officers to other intelligence agencies, just as those factors would influence a lawyer, teacher, nurse, or bankers in the same way. That is something we ought to embrace. However, the 18 intelligence community agencies have varying systems for background checks, no uniform policy on polygraphs, and inconsistent additional requirements, all of which means that officers often cannot easily move to another agency, despite already having access to much of the same information and systems.

It also means that prospective employees, such as recent college graduates, need to have a separate application process for every agency to which they want to apply to work. Here, Congress can help. It should create a single common background check and standardized set of hiring requirements for all intelligence community officers. If an agency, for whatever reason, determines additional requirements are necessary for employment at that agency, it should be required to obtain the DNI's approval to include them as part of the hiring process.

Moreover, some organizational changes are necessary for this era of strategic competition. Some of them are already happening, with the CIA and DIA having established centers focused on China. This is a positive development, but we need to start looking beyond the obvious.

For example, my Atlantic Council colleague, Jonathan Panikoff, a former intelligence officer, has argued the Commerce Department now needs its own intelligence officers to help it keep up with its international trade and export control responsibilities, particularly vis-à-vis China.⁶ When the war on terror was our primary focus, it have seemed foolish to advocate for an intelligence element at the Commerce Department; today, it should be a top priority, as much of our future security depends on countering China's threats to our technology and innovation base.

In addition, the intelligence community needs to become more effective at navigating public-private partnerships to address many of the challenges it will face in the years ahead. For example, we saw the impact of COVID-19 on supply chains and the importance of supply chains to US national security, including economic security, given that nowadays we cannot realistically separate the two. But the intelligence community does not have the background or expertise to meaningfully address these challenges in the near or medium-term by itself. Instead, the US should better partner with private sector companies already deeply involved in this work. Doing so will come at a cost but one whose premium will be far less than trying to reinvent the wheel. There are major corporations, like Intel, that have over a thousand people just working on supply

⁶ Jonathan Panikoff, "We Already Have 18 Intelligence Agencies. We Still Need 1 More," *Politico Magazine*, February 1, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/02/01/intelligence-agencies-commerce-department-00080392>.

chain issues. We cannot and should not try to duplicate this effort. We don't have the time to learn or train—it's an issue that must be addressed immediately. and the expertise and knowledge required is extensive. And even if we could recruit on our own, doing so would not be a good use of time or resources as the US government would be competing against the many private sector companies who can offer both incentives and salaries the government cannot.

Finally, we should mitigate the extent to which the Director of National Intelligence is subject to the whims of politics. To help address that, the DNI should have a fixed, five-year term, renewable once. There's no perfect way to ensure a president will not choose someone who would be unacceptable to a president of a different party in the future if the DNI has a five-year, fixed term—and that's why the President's prerogative to dismiss the individual should be retained—but the political price for doing so should be high.

The simplest option is to replicate the FBI model but for a five, versus ten-year, term. Only one FBI director has ever completed a full ten-year term, so a five-year renewable term might be more realistic anyways.

Second, we need to improve cohesion among those involved in intelligence, and the most important step to take toward this end is to strengthen cohesion with our allies on intelligence matters.

Inside the US intelligence community, it appears to me that we have made strides toward improving cohesion. While not perfect, nearly two decades after the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 and the establishment of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence that law created, we have organized a true US intelligence *community* in a way that did not previously exist.

My sense, however, we have not matched these important domestic steps to achieve cohesion with similar progress on coordination with allies, even our closest ones. It is essential that the US intelligence community does more to improve cooperation and collaboration with allies. My organization published a paper on this very subject a few months ago, authored by a former US DIA senior executive and a retired British military intelligence officer. Entitled “Beyond NOFORN: Solutions for Increased Intelligence Sharing Among Allies,” the piece offers several policy recommendations to reduce barriers to cooperation.⁷ I won't recount all the details here, but I recommend it to you and your staffs.

Ultimately, I think what will be necessary is a change in incentives for intelligence leadership and the workforce to make more progress on how we share intelligence with allies. For change to come, it will require engagement from you in the form of oversight, or even legislation, if it is not going to come from within the intelligence community.

Third, Congress can take action to improve oversight of efforts to strengthen the intelligence community.

⁷ AVM Sean Corbett, CB MBE and James Danoy, “Beyond NOFORN: Solutions for Increased Intelligence Sharing Among Allies,” Atlantic Council, October 31, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/beyond-noforn-solutions-for-increased-intelligence-sharing-among-allies/>.

Congress should ensure there is a much greater emphasis on sharing unclassified assessments with the public. Decisions relevant to strategic competition are made every day by people without security clearances, in multiple sectors. I humbly ask you to ensure the intelligence community remembers that, and that they see institutions like the Atlantic Council conducting analysis on national security issues not as competitors but as eager audiences and even potential partners in their difficult and important work.

Holding these open hearings in parallel with the intelligence community's Worldwide Threats hearing is perhaps just one step toward greater engagement between the intelligence community and the public. It would be even more helpful to mandate some form of engagement between the content of Worldwide Threats briefs and non-government assessments. I think there is ample evidence to suggest that think tanks, for example, and the US intelligence community can learn from each other, and thereby ensure a better-informed public on key issues pertaining to strategic competition.

In closing, the intelligence community should accelerate and deepen its reorganization and realignment for strategic competition, with a particular focus on revising its approach to human capital and adding an intelligence element to the Commerce Department. The intelligence community should also be encouraged and enabled to improve cohesion with allies, and oversight efforts should promote more opportunities for intelligence community engagement with experts and analytic institutions outside the government.

STEPPING UP TO STRATEGIC COMPETITION

In closing, and this was my third point, we need a change of attitude and an acknowledgment that we are facing a historic inflection point where we face a peer authoritarian competitor in the form of China and peer authoritarian disruptor in the form of Russia that is unprecedented in our history. As with any competition, when your opponent changes or improves their game, you need to respond.

There was a period of time where our often-disabling political polarization, when our failures to institute reforms to strengthen our capabilities and address our weaknesses, were the unharmed indulgences of a necessarily messy democratic system.

If the intelligence community has a weakness, alongside the United States government and Congress more generally, it is in providing intelligence-driven, longer term analytical frameworks within which one can more confidently understand and respond to emerging challenges.

The risks of inaction are growing alongside the urgency for common cause in the face of the Fourth Inflection Point of the period between World War I and today. History has taught us the long-term and tragic cost of our failures and the benefits of constructive, concerted, and intelligence driven international engagement.