

“The Role of Intelligence at a Transformational Moment”

as delivered

CIA Director William Burns

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Well, good morning everyone, and thanks so much for that very kind introduction, President Cabrera. It's an honor to be here at Georgia Tech, an institution for which I have great admiration. It's an honor to be here with Saxby Chambliss, who over many years of service in the U.S. Senate embodied the very best in Congressional oversight of the intelligence community. And it's a special honor to be here with Sam Nunn, one of the finest public servants this country has ever produced.

I come to you today from Washington, DC, a city which remains as self-absorbed as ever. It's a place where, as one of my predecessors at CIA, Bob Gates, once put it, you can still see someone walking down lover's lane holding his own hand.

It's also a place not known for brevity in public speaking. Whenever I think of that elusive virtue, I'm reminded of a story about the famous author, George Bernard Shaw. It seems that Shaw was hosting an event in London one evening, and the first speaker came up to him and asked how long he should speak for. And Shaw told him he should probably limit his remarks to about half an hour. The speaker looked at him in horror and exclaimed: Half an hour? How am I supposed to tell them everything I know in half an hour? Shaw paused, and replied: In your case, my advice would be to speak very slowly.

In my case, you don't have to worry about me going on for more than half an hour – even if I speak very slowly.

This is my first public speech as Director of CIA, after almost exactly one year in the job. And it comes in a year which marks the 75th anniversary of CIA's founding by President Harry Truman. What I'd like to do with all of you today is reflect a little on the role of an intelligence agency in a democracy, at a moment of profound change on the international landscape -- one of those rare plastic moments of genuine transformation that come along once or twice a century, similar in its sweep to the moment after World War II in which Truman created the Central Intelligence Agency.

I should note at the outset a couple of unusual features of this speech.

First, I stand here not as a career intelligence professional or a political figure, but as the first career diplomat to become Director of CIA. That is less strange than you might think.

Over more than three decades as a diplomat in the Middle East and Russia, and serving as a senior official in Administrations of both parties, I developed enormous respect for my CIA colleagues. I served alongside them in hard places around the world. It was their skill at collection and analysis that often gave me an edge as a negotiator; their partnership that helped make me an effective ambassador; their insights and actions that helped me make thoughtful choices on the most difficult policy issues.

I hope that my experience as a diplomat and policymaker is making me an effective CIA Director, able to understand what matters most to policymakers and how to navigate other countries.

That's at least how I see things. My wife and daughters, always my most loving and discerning critics,

sometimes find it highly amusing that I'm leading an intelligence service, the world of James Bond and Jason Bourne and Jack Ryan. The truth, as they point out, is that I'm most comfortable driving a 2013 Subaru Outback at posted speed limits, and that the height of technological achievement for me are those rare occasions when I can get the Roku remote to work.

The second unusual feature is that I'm making a public speech at all.

Intelligence agencies are supposed to collect secrets and keep them – not talk too much about their work. We usually operate in the shadows, out of sight and out of mind -- our successes obscured, our failures painfully visible, and our sacrifices often unknown.

But I'm convinced that in our democracy, where trust in institutions is in such short supply, it's essential to explain ourselves as best we can and to be as open as possible.

Now a certain amount of discretion is necessary, given the nature of our business, and our responsibility to protect the agents and officers who risk their lives in support of our mission. But we have an obligation to help the citizens on whose trust we rely to understand what we do and how we organize our priorities.

We have an obligation to be straight not just about our accomplishments, but also about our mistakes.

And we have an obligation to explain our mission.

I think a recent Georgia Tech graduate who now serves with us described our mission well.

“Similar to Georgia Tech,” she said, “at CIA we focus on progress and service. We see challenging problems ... and we fight to find a solution ... to make America a safer place.” She's exactly right.

At CIA, we are in the foreign intelligence business. We gather information, or secrets, about the plans of foreign actors. Then we analyze that information for policymakers to help protect our country.

I want to underscore a word I just mentioned: “foreign.” Our focus is on collecting and analyzing information about foreign actors, not Americans. Domestic law enforcement is the business of the FBI, DHS, and state and local agencies. It's not ours.

At CIA, we focus particular attention on human intelligence, what we can collect from people, along with what we and our partners in the intelligence community can gather through technical means.

In practice, that means that every day, our officers in the field are working to recruit agents who can help understand the plans and intentions of adversaries, whether other states or non-state terrorist groups. Every day, our officers are working with our foreign intelligence service partners to share information and apply it together. Those allies and partners are a huge, historical asset for the United States – they're what sets us apart from lonelier powers like Russia or China.

Every day, our officers are conducting operations in dangerous environments. These operations are enabled by CIA's uniquely capable support elements—in positions ranging from engineers to logistics specialists to doctors.

Every day, our scientists, technologists and digital specialists develop new tools to help us understand and leverage the information we collect. They develop the algorithms and artificial intelligence applications that help us mine the avalanche of data all around us, and use it to keep Americans safe and promote our interests. My colleagues spend more and more time analyzing “open source” information – like websites

or foreign media – to complement what we acquire clandestinely.

And every day, our analysts study the global landscape and provide the best insights we can to help the President and other policymakers make well-informed choices.

Recognizing that good intelligence is America's first line of defense, we have an obligation to deliver it to policymakers with honesty and integrity – even when it's inconvenient or unwelcome. Politics truly must stop where intelligence work begins. And in all that we do, we have an obligation to follow the law, which we take very seriously.

We only get ourselves in trouble as a nation, and make bad policy choices, when we forget those basic truths.

Like Georgia Tech, CIA is a place where we don't just admire problems.

We look for solutions with ingenuity and drive and courage.

The CIA is a place where analysts tell policymakers what they need to hear, not what they want to hear.

It's a place marked by passion for staying ahead of the curve in science and technology and digital innovation. It's a place to which policymakers turn when they need to get things done in challenging circumstances. It's a place where people look out for one another. And it's a place where I have no higher priority than ensuring the safety and wellbeing of my colleagues and their families.

That's the CIA I am so proud to lead into the new era unfolding before us, into our next seventy-five years.

In this new era, CIA will have to navigate an international landscape vastly different from the world of Harry Truman, or even the world I encountered as a young diplomat four decades ago.

It's a more complicated and contested world, featuring the rise of an increasingly adversarial China, and a pugnacious and revisionist Russia. It's a world in which the revolution in technology is transforming the way we live, work, compete and fight – with advances in machine learning, quantum computing and synthetic biology coming at dizzying speed. And it's also a world in which familiar threats like terrorism and nuclear proliferation – or regional troublemakers like Iran and North Korea – demand our attention alongside the growing dilemmas posed by climate change and global health insecurity.

CIA will have to reimagine itself to compete successfully in this new age. We have to test old assumptions, take calculated risks, and tap into the agility and creativity which have always animated our agency at its best.

Four big challenges will shape our future. The first is the immediate threat posed by renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. The second is the longer-term problem posed by China's ambitious leadership, the single most important geopolitical challenge as far out as I can see into the 21st century. The third is the massive impact of technological change. And finally, the challenge of building a work force drawn from the richness and diversity of American society. So, let me describe how we're approaching each of those historic tasks.

Much of my grey hair comes from dealing with Vladimir Putin's Russia.

I was the U.S. ambassador in Moscow fifteen years ago, and have watched over the years as Putin has

stewed in a combustible combination of grievance and ambition and insecurity. An apostle of payback, he is firmly convinced that the West – especially the United States – took advantage of Russia’s moment of historical weakness in the 1990s.

His risk appetite has grown as his grip on Russia has tightened. His circle of advisors has narrowed, and in that small circle it has never been career-enhancing to question his judgment or his stubborn, almost mystical belief that his destiny is to restore Russia’s sphere of influence. Every day, Putin demonstrates that declining powers can be at least as disruptive as rising ones.

By early last fall, we and our partners in the U.S. intelligence community had begun to gather disturbing and detailed intelligence about Putin’s plans for a major new invasion of Ukraine. Neither Putin nor many of those around him could imagine Russia as a major power without a deferential Ukraine, a Ukraine whose external choices were controlled by the Kremlin. I had learned over the years never to underestimate Putin’s relentless determination, especially on Ukraine.

In early November, President Biden asked me to travel to Russia to convey directly to Putin and several of his closest advisors the depth of our concern about his planning for war, and the consequences for Russia of attempting to execute that plan.

I was troubled by what I heard. While it did not yet seem that he had made an irreversible decision to invade Ukraine, Putin was defiantly leaning in that direction, apparently convinced that his window was closing for shaping Ukraine’s orientation.

He also seemed convinced that this winter offered a favorable landscape -- with President Zelensky and the Ukrainians unlikely, in his view, to mount effective resistance; the Russian military capable of a quick, decisive victory at minimal cost; our European allies distracted by their own politics and risk-averse; and the Russian economy sanctions-proofed by a war chest of foreign currency reserves.

When he launched his war seven weeks ago, Putin was proven wrong on each of those counts. Ukraine, he had argued for years, was not a real country. But real countries fight back, and that’s what Ukrainians have done with such remarkable bravery, led with such courage and resolve by President Zelensky.

Throughout the conflict, U.S. intelligence has played a critical role. Armed with accurate and precise insights and information, the U.S. government shared them energetically with our allies from the start. We have been equally committed to rapid and effective intelligence sharing with our Ukrainian partners, throughout the fighting and for months beforehand. As Allied leaders and counterparts have emphasized directly in my travels in Europe, the credibility of U.S. intelligence helped cement the solidarity of the Alliance.

At President Biden’s direction, the U.S. government has also taken unprecedented steps to declassify intelligence and use it publicly to preempt the false narratives and false flag operations which Putin has used so often in the past.

By being open with some of our secrets, we made it harder for Putin to obscure the truth of his unprovoked and vicious aggression.

Those decisions can never be taken lightly, given the importance of protecting sources and methods, but in this case they have made a crucial contribution to a successful, whole-of-government strategy. They reflect the need for new thinking and new tactics, in this new and demanding era for intelligence.

The last chapter in Putin’s war has yet to be written, as he grinds away at Ukraine. I have no doubt about the cruel pain and damage that Putin can continue to inflict on Ukraine, or the raw brutality with which

Russian force is being applied. The crimes in Bucha are horrific. The scenes of devastation in Mariupol and Kharkiv are sadly reminiscent of the images I saw in Grozny in Chechnya as a young diplomat in the winter of 1994-95 – forty square blocks in the center of the city flattened by shelling and bombing, leaving thousands of civilian deaths.

But Ukrainian will is unbroken, and Putin's Russia has inflicted massive material and reputational damage on itself. American intelligence has been vital throughout, and offers valuable lessons for the future of our profession --- how to develop good intelligence, use it as the basis for good policy, share it systematically as the basis for good alliances and partnerships, and deploy it openly and creatively to discredit the false narratives on which adversaries so often thrive.

A silent partner in Putin's aggression, Xi Jinping's China is our greatest challenge, in many ways the most profound test that CIA has ever faced.

The People's Republic of China is a formidable competitor, lacking in neither ambition nor capability. It seeks to overtake us in literally every domain, from economic strength to military power, and from space to cyber space. Its rise has been remarkable. In 2001, before many of you in this room were born -- that makes me feel really old – China was the top trading partner with 12 countries. Now, it's the top partner with 120 countries.

At the beginning of this century, China's GDP was \$1 trillion. Now it's about \$15 trillion.

At the beginning of this century, around the time many of you were born, China was nowhere near what you would call a global leader in technology. Now, it's a leader in AI, 5G, drones, hypersonics, and web applications – probably quite a few of which are on your phones right now.

Of course, China's rise is not inherently a bad thing. Hundreds of millions of Chinese citizens have climbed out of poverty into the middle class, and Americans have also benefitted economically from China's growth. But let's look at some other numbers.

In the last few years, Beijing has hacked at least 150 U.S. companies to steal secrets. It is trying to increase its nuclear arsenal to 1000 warheads. It has detained 1 million of its own citizens simply because they are Muslim, and arrested thousands more in Hong Kong for peacefully supporting democracy. And it has lured countless countries into crushing debt, data-exposure and democratic backsliding.

The People's Republic of China is intent upon building the capabilities to bully its neighbors, replace the United States as the preeminent power in the Indo-Pacific, and chip away with other authoritarians at the rules-based international order that we and our allies have worked so hard to sustain. As an intelligence service, we have never had to deal with an adversary with more reach in more domains.

At the same time, it's important to be clear that our concern is about the threat posed by the People's Republic of China, the PRC—not about the people of China, let alone fellow Americans of Chinese or Asian descent. It is a profound mistake to conflate the two. At CIA, we will stay sharply focused on the PRC challenge.

This past January, we established a new mission center – one of about a dozen such centers at the Agency, around which we organize our geographical and functional work – devoted exclusively to China. It is the only mission center at CIA that is focused on a single country—a reflection of the long-term significance of our competition with the PRC.

We're also rapidly increasing our budget for China activities across CIA; there are few parts of the Agency which are not engaged in some way with the PRC challenge. We aim to double the number of Mandarin-speaking officers in the next few years.

And finally, we're increasing substantially the number of positions overseas that focus on China, much as we did with Soviet specialists during the Cold War. That's a recognition of the importance of competing with Beijing not just in the Indo-Pacific, but around the world. Nothing will matter more to our long-term success as an intelligence agency than how well we compete with the PRC, and how well we organize ourselves for that competition over the next few years.

That brings me to our third challenge, the main arena for competition with China – the revolution in technology.

I don't have to tell you at Georgia Tech that technology is transforming our world. You know that better than I do. But let me tell you a little bit about how it's transforming our work at CIA.

To give you a sense of what we're up against, I'll try to apply it to your own lives. Say, for example, you start walking to a class after our discussion here today. You head towards "Tech Square" with your phone in your hand. You keep walking, and a traffic light camera catches your face. And all this time, you are scrolling on Instagram.

Now, this is just fine. But say you weren't walking to class. Say you were going to meet with an agent in a country who is putting her life on the line to meet secretly with you. And if you get caught, both you and your agent could very well end up in jail – or worse.

You may need your phone to communicate with your agent, but that same phone is tracking your every move. And it's probably close to one hundred cameras within a couple blocks. And all that data you generated while scrolling your phone – it's going straight to the foreign government to help them build a profile on you.

In the intelligence world, we call this "ubiquitous technical surveillance." Basically it means that intelligence officers are being watched, tracked and observed all the time.

As you can imagine, this has prompted us to fundamentally rethink how we do our operations. But it's only one of the many ways technology has upended the way we perform our mission, and even how we define it.

Today, we're focused sharply not only on the military technologies that CIA has long been expert in understanding, but also civilian technologies – the new and emerging technologies which are remaking the power calculus among nation-states and re-shaping their competition.

That means we have to better understand the pace of innovation in the private sector, the vulnerability of supply chains, the endlessly ingenious ways in which adversaries can attack our critical infrastructure with cyber tools, and the revolution in deception which produces deep fakes of all varieties – fake video, fake audio, and fake photographs.

It means becoming more nimble in our capacity to manage big data, finding the nuggets that matter most in the avalanche of open source information, and becoming as adept at protecting secrets as we are at stealing them.

The revolution in technology presents valuable opportunities for CIA to partner more effectively with fellow innovators in the private sector. That's why we've created another new mission center at CIA, focused on technology. It is already off to a strong start, part of an unprecedented effort at CIA to openly seek out the kind of relationships in the tech sector which this transformative moment requires—as well

as to collect and analyze foreign intelligence regarding technology.

Additionally, we've launched a new CIA Technology Fellows Program, aimed at attracting promising professionals in the tech sector to spend a year or so in public service, and offering CIA officers a chance to spend time in private industry. And we've established, for the first time at CIA, a Chief Technology Officer position – to serve as my senior advisor on technology issues and the architect of a long-term technology strategy for the Agency.

We don't lack for tech talent at CIA – nearly one third of our officers work every day primarily on technology, digital or cyber issues. But we have to be more than the sum of our parts, and we have to run even faster and stretch our imaginations even further in this incredibly competitive and fast-paced era.

The fourth challenge before us connects all the others. It's about the people who animate CIA, and building the workforce we need to continue to be a world-class intelligence service. We recruit across all fifty states, and we're committed to shaping a workforce that fully reflects the diversity of American society. We're equally committed to demonstrate that there's a pathway to the very top of the Agency for women and minority officers.

Last month, the promotion list I approved for the Senior Intelligence Service – the general officers of CIA – was the most diverse in our seventy-five year history, 47% women and 27% minority. For the first time in our history, those senior promotion percentages actually exceeded the overall proportion of women and minorities in our workforce.

We still have a long way to go to strengthen the diverse and inclusive cadre of career officers that are so important to an agency with global reach, and global responsibilities. We cannot compete successfully on that landscape if everyone looks like me, talks like me, and thinks like me.

I also have no higher responsibility than to take care of the people of CIA, whether at headquarters or in dangerous places around the world.

The pressures and strains faced by officers and their families are unrelenting – with two decades shaped by counter-terrorism threats followed by two years of COVID. Some of our officers and family members have also had to deal with Anomalous Health Incidents, where we've made significant progress on medical care but still have work to do on our government-wide investigation into the cause of AHIs in a number of discrete cases.

We've embarked on a new medical and wellness initiative, with a new state of the art fitness center at headquarters and innovative programs to help officers get the support they need and deserve. And we're investing in new childcare options and trying to develop as many flexible work models as our secret work allows.

I know I'm now perilously close to George Bernard Shaw's 30 minute rule for public speaking. So I'll close with two thoughts, one about my admiration and appreciation for my colleagues at CIA, and the other a shameless recruiting pitch to all of the students in this audience – from Georgia Tech, to Spelman and Morehouse and Emory and Clark Atlanta and Georgia State and all of the other wonderful colleges and universities represented here today.

I am extraordinarily proud to serve with the exceptional women and men of CIA. They never cease to amaze me, at headquarters and in the field. In fourteen overseas trips in the year I've been Director, I've seen them doing hard jobs in hard places with grit and dedication, and often with genuine heroism.

In outposts in the Middle East and window-less vaults at headquarters, I saw our officers working relentlessly to track the former Amir of ISIS to a small compound in northwest Syria, using ingenious tradecraft to pinpoint his identity and location, and then support a superb operation against him by the U.S. military.

In Kabul late last August, I saw our officers take incredible risks, going out beyond the wire at Kabul International Airport to rescue stranded American citizens and at risk Afghans. And thanks to their determination, we fulfilled our profound obligation to our Afghan partners and brought thousands of them to safety in this country.

In my office in Langley, Virginia, across the Potomac from Washington, I have a photograph that I often reflect upon. It shows a bare wall in a building at Kabul Airport, with thousands of black check marks, a tally of all the lives our officers saved in those perilous days at the end of August, each one a reminder that we did our duty.

There is another wall that I pass every day, as I come through the lobby of CIA. It's the Memorial Wall, the most hallowed place at our Agency, its marble surface marked by 137 stars, each one a tribute to the sacrifice of officers who died protecting our country.

The Memorial Wall has never been an abstraction for the men and women of CIA. Nor have the stars on that wall ever been an abstraction for me. One of them, for example, marks the loss of Matt Gannon, a gifted intelligence officer and one of my best friends at my first post in the Foreign Service many years ago. Matt was killed in the line of duty a few years later, in the terrorist bombing of Pan Am flight 103, en route home from the Middle East to join his wife and two young daughters for Christmas.

Intelligence is fundamentally a human endeavor, and I'm reminded every day that my greatest good fortune in this job are the people with whom I serve.

They don't seek out public acclaim, and their profession often keeps them in the shadows. The risks they take and the sacrifices they make are little understood, and often under-appreciated. But the role they play is vital to our nation's security and wellbeing, and I am glad to have this rare public chance to introduce you to them, and to their work.

The students in this audience today have a wealth of professional opportunities unfolding before you. But I hope you'll consider CIA.

Intelligence is not an easy profession, and it will bring more than its share of difficult moments. What it offers, however, is a chance to test yourself against some of the hardest and most important challenges in our world today, from the revolution in science and technology to the rise of China and the resurgence of Russia. It offers a chance to do something important and consequential for our country. And it offers a chance to serve with some of the most capable and committed and interesting people you'll ever meet.

Forty years ago, when I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life, my father wrote me a letter. A career Army officer and a remarkably decent man, my dad said: "Nothing will make you prouder than to serve your country with honor." I've spent the last four decades learning the truth of my dad's advice. I hope that all of you have the same good luck that I have had, and take some time to explore CIA and public service.

Thank you all very much.

END SPEECH

Student Questions and Answers

Dr. Jenna Jordan:

Thank you so much for the talk and I know we have a lot of questions from the audience. I'm going to take my moderating privileges and ask a couple of quick questions. Before we start I just want to urge everyone to please keep your questions as brief as possible and make sure they are actually questions.

DCIA Burns:

I will try to keep the answers brief, which is usually the challenge!

Dr. Jenna Jordan:

So my first question is about the use of intelligence in Ukraine, and whether it signals the sort of transformative moment in warfare and kind of blurring the lines between operational support and actual NATO involvement in warfare.

DCIA Burns:

Well you know, I think I mentioned in my remarks the decision that the President took to declassify, you know, some of the intelligence that we had collected as a way of preempting what I've seen too often during the course of my career was, are the efforts of Vladimir Putin to create false narratives, and to point to false flag operations. In other words, we had clear evidence of him planning to try to pin the blame on Ukrainians, wrongly, for provoking a conflict as well. And so by going public with some of those things, by going public with some of the secrets we had about Putin's planning for war, I think we helped preempt some of that. I think we helped build credibility with our allies which contributed to their willingness to step up and support the Ukrainians ability to defend themselves and support of much tougher sanctions than they originally imagined against Russia. So we always have to be careful about this, we have a profound obligation to protect sources of methods and I think this is one of those instances where we have to take a calculated risk and I think it's paid off in some important ways.

Dr. Jenna Jordan:

So my second question is shifting gears slightly. And I'm wondering for the students in the audience, do you have any advice for students that might want to pursue a career in the intelligence community?

DCIA Burns:

Well you know, as you can tell from my remarks from my own checkered career, I'm not undecided about the value of public service. I think, you know I wouldn't have traded all the years I spent both at the State Department and now at CIA for anything. It can be incredibly rewarding, for all the difficulties that, you

know, come along the way as well. For CIA, there's no kind of fixed template for applicants who want to join. I mean, we, you know we have successful applicants who have a variety of experience, whether it's around this country, whether it's overseas experience, we've always looked for people with strong foreign language skills. We're increasingly focused as I said in my remarks, on people with strong STEM skills and Georgia Tech is the perfect place for that in science and technology, in engineering and mathematics, as well, just given the technological challenges that we're going to have to cope with as a U.S. intelligence service as well. So we get folks from, you know, all walks of life from across this country. We focus intently, as I said before, I'm trying to recruit, you know, a diverse cadre and our workforce as well. The other thing that we're trying to do for our partners is to streamline the process. You know, when I became Director a little more than a year ago, it took more than 500 days to get from application to actual entry into CIA. And that's crazy. It's very difficult as all of you know better than I do, to compete for the best talent we can find if the process takes that long. So we've set a new goal, and I'm happy to say we're making good progress in this direction, that within the next year, we're going to reduce that to a median of 180 days. Which still seems like a long time, but it's a significant improvement from where we've been. We can't cut security corners. That's something you always have to be aware of. But I hope that that will make the CIA, you know, an even more attractive place for all of you, and for others who are interested in public service and in the particular kind of challenges that you have to encounter at CIA.

Dr. Jenna Jordan:

Well, I could ask questions all afternoon, but I think we should turn it over to the audience. So we have two microphones on either side. So please, come down. And we have students handling the actual logistics down there. So we'll just alternate—so, we can start on this side, please.

Student:

Thank you for coming. Not too long ago, Li Keqiang of the Premier of State Council of China just announced that he will be leaving government and with the 20th Party Congress coming up later this year, how do you think that the Chinese foreign policy will shift? And at the same time, what the Sino-American relationship will change with that?

DCIA Burns:

Yes, a very good question. And I think that the Party Congress, in November towards the end of this year, is obviously a very important moment for the Chinese leadership for Xi Jinping in particular, it probably sharpens his focus on domestic issues and relative stability on the international landscape over the rest of this year. But I think there's no mistaking at least from the point of view of where I sit today, the breadth of ambition and determination in Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping. I think, as I said, there's a clear determination to supplant the United States in many respects across the Indo-Pacific to develop the capacity where, for example, China could envisage an effort by military means, control Taiwan, I think the further out we get in this decade, the greater that risk becomes. So it's very important, again, my role as director of CIA, to be clear-eyed about those challenges, and to invest even more in our alliances and partnerships. Not just in the Indo-Pacific, through the Quad which brings together the United States, Japan, India and Australia. But to invest in those kind of partnerships and alliances so that we can help ensure security and stability across the Indo-Pacific even in the face of what I think are likely to be some quite threatening Chinese leadership ambitions. Thank you.

Student:

Hi, my name is ... and I am an MBA student at Georgia Tech – a recruiting question since you are -

DCIA Burns:

I figured I should have done an MBA.

Student:

I would say for many one of the big challenges in thinking about public service is the difference between private sector pay and public sector in addition to the sacrifices and so on. I was wondering, you mentioned this program where you can go, developing this program, where you could go for one year into public service. Have you thought about ways in which people who work at Google the consultant firms or investment banks can collaborate with the CIA on a more regular basis?

DCIA Burns:

It's a really good question. And it's something that you know, for people in my generation in public service, you know, I spent three and a half decades as a Foreign Service officer and now I'm back, you know, in public service at CIA. We're gonna have to adapt over time, I think, to your generation, to the generation of my two daughters, who are not necessarily going to be attracted to spending thirty-five years in one place and they're going to be more attracted, I think, to opportunities to kind of go in and out of public service. So the CIA technology Fellows program that I mentioned, is one step in the direction to create shorter term opportunities for a year or more for the public service at CIA, for people who are mostly experienced in the private sector, and make that a two-way street. So some career CIA officers have a chance to get a better feel for the private sector. I think we also want to look at ways, and again, in the world we work in there are ultimately going to be restrictions on how flexible we can be. But to look at more ways in which people can go in and out of public service. Because we benefit enormously from the experience and technological innovation, just for example, that, you know, we need at CIA in order to keep pace with rivals and adversaries and to better understand the ways in which technological trends are moving. So one of the things I've been determined to do over this past year at the CIA in the years ahead is to try to find more creative ways to deepen those connections, and to attract the kind of cadre of people at CIA, some of whom may spend a thirty-year career at CIA which is wonderful, but some of whom may go in and out over that period. I think we will benefit from both.

Student:

Hi, my name is I am a PhD student here in nuclear engineering. Thank you for your speech and insights. They are extremely valuable. My question is, how is the interplay of intelligence sharing among different foreign intelligence agencies changed with the evolution from the CIA, as its inception of the OSS, to nowadays, and how do you see that further evolving with the advent of new difficult to attract proliferating technologies, hostile actors, and bolder states?

DCIA Burns:

I think that's a really good question. And I think all those phenomena you described, make it even more important for us to invest in intelligence sharing with our allies and partners. Maybe we've seen this over

the course of the last seven weeks in the conflict in Ukraine. We see it in lots of other areas as well, especially, as you said, where for all sorts of modern technological reasons, it becomes more and more difficult to track progress not just in nuclear proliferation, which remains a big concern, but also in areas like biotechnology, which, you know, could pose huge challenges for not just competition between nation states, but you know, for the security of societies as well. So, for all those reasons, I think it's no coincidence that I'm about to leave on my 15th trip overseas as CIA Director. A large part of that is focused on strengthening those bonds with some of our closest allies and partners to make the exchange of intelligence a two-way street so we better understand a lot of those trend lines and we're better equipped to deal with rivals and adversaries as well. Thank you.

Dr. Jenna Jordan:

All right. I think we might have time for one, maybe two more questions? So I'm sorry, I know everyone has lots to ask.

DCIA Burns:

I'll try to give shorter answers. I'm sorry.

Student:

Hi Director Burns. I'll try and be quick. So my name is I'm a student at Emory University. I wanted to speak to you, well, I guess I'll start off by saying that President Biden has been able to unite the west in regards to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, however, on the global south has been much more silent on this issue. While they have been able to unite the west on the basis of upholding the rules based international order, many of these countries don't feel that same respect or appreciation of the United States is upholding it, so much is that they don't feel as though the United States has been able to, I guess, follow that given our history, such as the invasion of Iraq. Given that China has been able to increase their influence in these regions, you mentioned, it's been able to become the trading partner between, from 12 to 120 countries, particularly in this region, how can The United States continue to guarantee to these countries that the US is a better trading partner or a better partner in general than countries such as China or Russia?

DCIA Burns:

So it's a really good question. And I think it reminds us we have to be honest with ourselves about how other people perceive us and honest about our mistakes, where in Iraq in 2003 is one of them. I experienced that as a diplomat as well. And I think we have to be honest about, you know, the skepticism, sometimes that people in the Global South, and large parts of the world will see us and see the United States. On the other hand, I think we have again, if we're honest about our mistakes and our warts and our flaws, I think we also have a lot to offer. I think for human beings around the world, the scenes of brutality and atrocities and ugliness that we're seeing in Ukraine today, perpetrated by Putin's Russia, I think cut through a lot of that skepticism, people understand, that at a very fundamental level, that is wrong and that needs to be called out and it needs to be stopped. Second, I think people understand around the world whatever their skepticism about American policy sometimes that it's fundamentally wrong to have a world in which big countries can swallow up parts of small countries just because they can. And I think also, you know, China's a formidable competitor. It's not ten feet tall either, and I'm an

optimist about the ability of the United States to compete in technology and innovation in terms of what we can offer societies that are struggling around the world, many of whom are still struggling with COVID in ways beyond what we are doing. They are struggling with the economic consequences of that. They're struggling with problems of inequity and gaps between rich and poor and everything else and I think, the United States, working with our allies around the world again, again, mindful of all of our flaws, has a good case to make. And I think we can compete quite effectively, you know, with China let alone with Russia and others in making that case, but it's a really important question, and I'm glad you raised it.

Dr. Jenna Jordan:

Thank you. Well, I apologize but we have one final question.

DCIA Burns:

I'm glad to, if I give shorter answers, I can do more than one.

Dr. Jenna Jordan:

Well, I also wanted to get to Senator Nunn. So maybe we can squeeze in a brief question, and then we'll turn it over to Senator Nunn for our final question.

Student:

Hello. Thank you for your speech. My name is ... and I'm a fourth year architecture major and an international affairs minor. My question is actually a little bit unusual. So within the defense and intelligence sectors, climate change hasn't really come up as a factor however, we know from the defense sector, for example, increasing sea temperatures can destroy ship engines and also mass migration and economic insecurity for people in that central region of the world pushes them towards organizations such as the Taliban, so my question is, what are some of the challenges or opportunities that the intelligence sector faces with climate change?

DCIA Burns:

So really good question because, you know, if you ask me what's the single biggest existential threat to the United States, American society, to the international community in general, I would agree with you, that it's climate change, which is moving at a pace, I think, which threatens us in some very real ways. For CIA, again, as a Foreign Intelligence Service, you know, our focus is on several important dimensions of that. One is to keep highlighting in every way we can, some of the consequences you just described. The impact that climate change has on everything from drought to the creation, to the migrations of people, to undermining the stability of governments and societies around the world, to economic insecurity as well, because that's one way of driving home the centrality of this issue to Americans, and to our policymakers as well. So that's what we're very sharply focused on in this one of the new mission centers, and these are kind of the organizational building blocks at CIA that I just mentioned, is designed to help sharpen our focus on issues, transnational issues, but particularly on climate change, so we can better understand the impact on different societies in different parts of the world. And then also better understand and help our policymakers to understand how different leaderships are approaching this issue and what are the best ways to help get their attention beyond the power of our

own example. Because, unless we walk the walk on these issues, you know, it's very difficult to get people's attention sometimes, too. But I'm really glad you raised the issue.

Student:

Thank you very much.

DCIA Burns:

Sure.

Dr. Jenna Jordan:

All right, well let's turn it over to Senator Nunn, who is right over here, for our final question.

Senator Nunn:

Thank you Mr. Director for being here. You do us great honor in your recruiting group and their intelligence came in the right place for tremendous talent of young people. So we're very proud came to Georgia Tech and favored the International school here on the campus. So we are grateful for that. George Bernard Shaw would have been proud of your speech today, both in terms of timing and substance. Not many 360 degree speeches, probably by definition, but yours covered a large spectrum of the challenges facing, not only the agency, but America. My question is related to the risk assessment. President Biden has a tremendous responsibility to both healthy trade, but also to avoid world war three. That was a huge, huge responsibility to both help Ukraine, but also to avoid World War III, and that's a huge responsibility that many do not fully grasp. In terms of risk assessment, I'm sure a lot of that's going on now, but Russia has announced a lot of different type of policies, or at least some of that conversation indicates that on the use of nuclear weapons, particularly small or tactical nuclear weapons, we've heard the policy escalate to tactical nuclear weapons to deescalate a conflict. We've also heard the policy of escalate to victory, and we've heard most recently, a little bit more encouraging, that nuclear weapons would be used by Russia only to defend the existential threat to Russia itself. Would you like to just comment on that kind of risk assessment and what the agency is thinking?

DCIA Burns:

Sure. I'd be glad to. First, I'll say that no one has contributed more than you have, Sam, to people's understanding of the threats that are posed in this nuclear age, and in particularly, some of the threats posed by, you know, movement towards low-yield nuclear weapons and a greater reliance on tactical nuclear weapons. So you know, it's an honor to get that question from you. Second, what I would say is that, you know, we're obviously very concerned, I know that President Biden is deeply concerned, about avoiding a third World War, about avoiding a threshold in which nuclear conflict becomes possible. You're right, that Russian military doctrine holds, that you could escalate to deescalate, in other words, that faced with an overwhelming conventional military threat that you could resort to a first use of tactical or low-yield nuclear weapons. So in that circumstance, what some Russian leaders have talked about is a circumstance in which, you know, NATO would intervene militarily on the ground in Ukraine in the course of this conflict, and that's not something, as President Biden has made very clear that's in the

cards. But you know, given the potential desperation of President Putin and the Russian leadership, given the setbacks that they've faced so far militarily, none of us can take lightly the threat posed by a potential resort to tactical nuclear weapons or low-yield nuclear weapons. We don't, while we've seen some rhetorical posturing on the part of the Kremlin, about moving to higher nuclear alert levels, so far we haven't seen a lot of practical evidence of the kind of deployments or military dispositions that would reinforce that concern. We watch for that very intently. It's one of our most important responsibilities at CIA.

Dr. Jenna Jordan:

Well, thank you. Please join me in thanking Director Burns.

DCIA Burns:

Thank you all.