

Intel Committee Ranking Member Statement at Open Hearing with Former Secretary Johnson

Washington, DC – Today, Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA), the Ranking Member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, delivered the following opening statement at a hearing with former Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson.

Below are the remarks (as prepared):

Three months ago, during the committee’s first open hearing, former FBI Director James Comey revealed publicly for the first time that he had opened a counterintelligence investigation last July to determine whether any U.S. Persons associated with the Trump campaign had coordinated or colluded with the Russian efforts to interfere in our election.

Last month, we heard from former CIA Director John Brennan, who helped us to better understand what the Russian government did, how they did it, and what motivated them. He testified that information he was seeing concerned him so greatly that he feared some Americans could be suborned to the Russian cause and began sending counterintelligence leads to the FBI for investigation.

Today we will hear testimony from former Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson about how the U.S. Government responded to this unprecedented interference in our political affairs: What threat the Russians posed to our election infrastructure, and what steps we took to protect our institutions, to inform the public what was happening, and to deter the Russians from further meddling.

By the middle of last summer, it was apparent that the Russians were not merely gathering information for “traditional” intelligence purposes, but were intent on “weaponizing” it by dumping tranches of stolen emails into the public domain and in a way intended to damage the campaign of Hillary Clinton.

As the Ranking Member of the House Intelligence Committee and part of the so-called “Gang of Eight,” I had been made aware of information concerning the Russian hack, as was my counterpart in the Senate, Dianne Feinstein, and other senior leadership.

What we saw alarmed us, and we believed that it was incumbent on the Administration to inform the American people what was going on.

And so, on the same day that Donald Trump was urging the Russians to hack Hillary Clinton’s emails, the Senator and I wrote to then-President Obama urging that the Administration declassify and release any intelligence community assessments related to the DNC hack and develop a swift and powerful response.

Over a month later, when the Administration had still made no public statement informing Americans about what the Russians were doing, Senator Feinstein and I took the extraordinary step of issuing our own public statement – carefully vetted by the IC – attributing the hack to Russia and senior levels of the Kremlin.

It would be yet another month before the U.S. Government would publicly declare Russia behind the interference in our election, when you and DNI Clapper issued your October 7, 2016 statement. And it wouldn’t be until well after the election that the Administration would take steps to signal just how truly significant an action the Russians had taken, when it imposed sanctions on Russia over the hack, expelled Russian spies and closed facilities used by the Russians for espionage against America.

I hope, Secretary Johnson, that you will be able to share with us and with the American people, a sense of the debate that was ongoing in the Executive Branch as evidence of Russian involvement and hacked emails piled up through the late summer and early fall. What led to such a long delay in making attribution, and why would the most significant step of imposing costs on Russia for its interference come only after the election? And what are the lessons learned?

At its heart, our democracy relies on the trust of the American people in their institutions. The events of last year and the potential for worse in the future are a stark warning to all of us that we must guard our democracy jealously, and that there are powerful adversaries that wish to tear down liberal democracy and America's role as its champion. We have our work cut out for us, but the world is counting on us to be up to the challenge.

I thank you for your extraordinary service, your testimony today, and yield back.

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