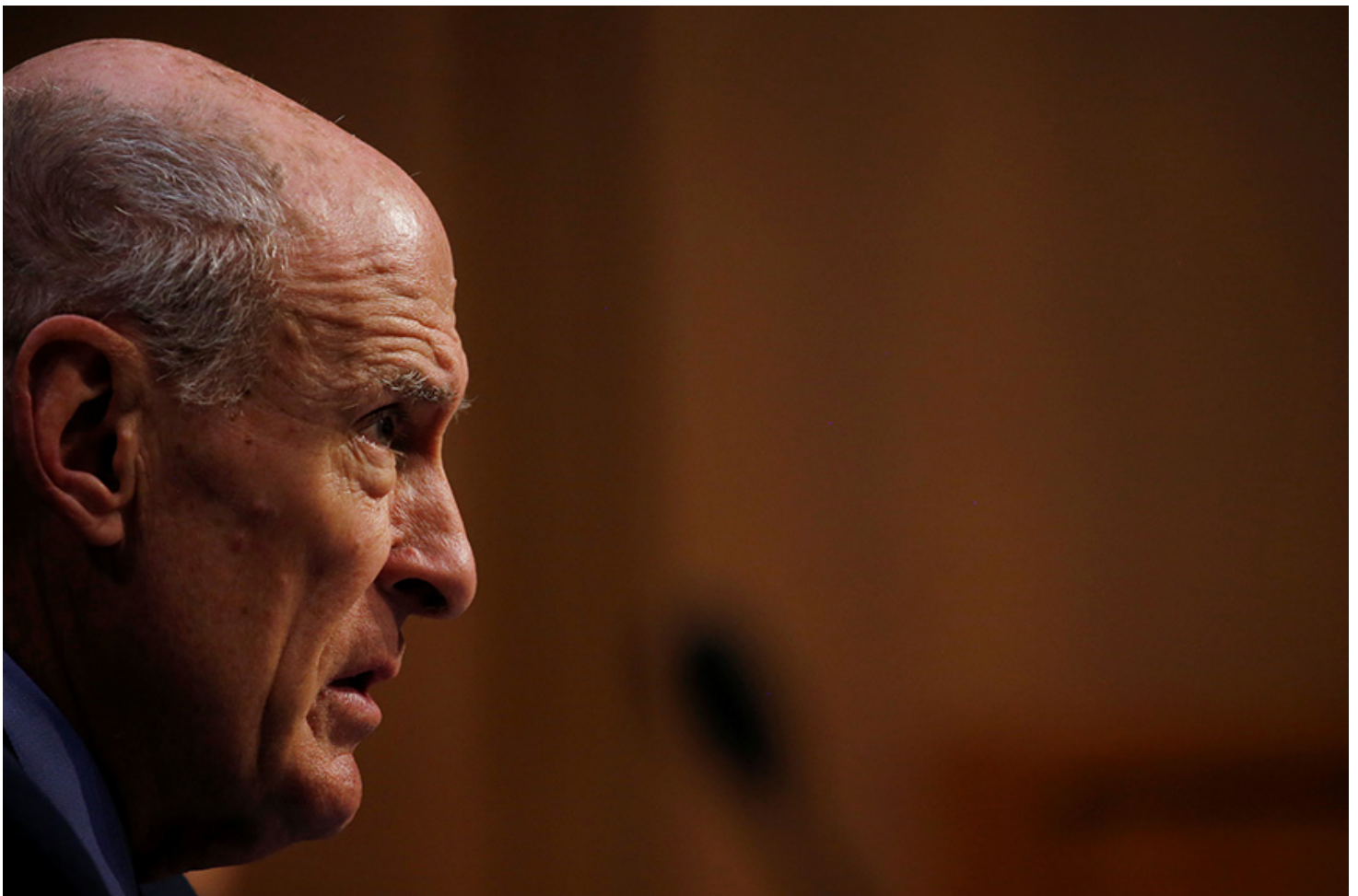


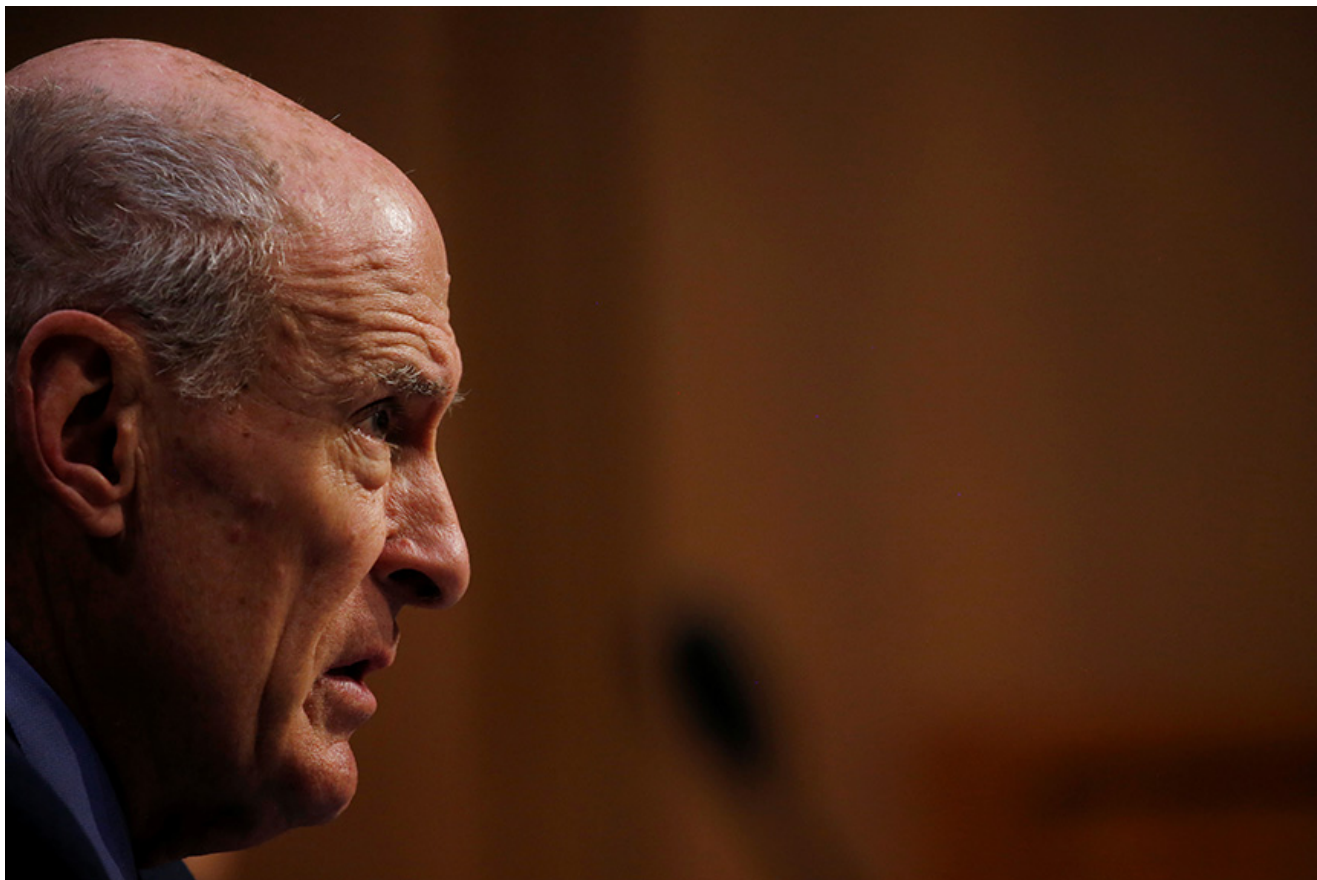
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# Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats: 'Look at the Actions of the Russian State, Not Putin's Pronouncements'

## Transcript

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Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions "demonstrate that he seeks to sow divisions within and between those in the West who adhere to democratic norms," Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats said at a meeting co-hosted by the Atlantic Council in Normandy, France, on June 8. (Reuters/Leah Millis)



Remarks as prepared for delivery by  
The Honorable Dan Coats  
Director of National Intelligence  
Tocqueville Conversation  
Friday, June 8, 2018  
Normandy, France

Good evening, and sincere thanks to the Atlantic Council, Le Figaro, and the Tocqueville Foundation for organizing this important conversation about Democracy in the West.

I enjoyed catching up with Atlantic council board member and a long-time friend Ambassador Boyden Gray and the Atlantic Council's Executive Vice President Damon Wilson just a few minutes ago.

Jeff Gedmin and I were also able to spend a few minutes together – both of us were previously posted in Berlin.

Last but certainly not least I would like to acknowledge former U.S. Ambassador to France and my close friend Craig Stapleton, who is here tonight. Craig, a member of the board of directors for the Tocqueville foundation is the reason I am here.

So if you don't like or agree with my remarks today, you can blame Craig.

There is no better venue to address the issue of democracy in the West than here in Normandy.

Duty prevented me from attending the D-Day ceremony, where Allied forces landed on the nearby beaches to liberate the continent. It was on this ground, in those uncertain days,

where decisive action was required and blood was shed to protect our threatened democracies.

And a century before that, Normandy was home to the famed 19<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher of democracy in America.

The writings of Alexis De Tocqueville and the on-going work of the Tocqueville foundation has helped generations of Americans better understand the American political experiment.

As a stranger in a strange land, his insights on US society, culture, politics, and institutions still strike contemporary readers as prescient and powerful.

For the rest of the world—including his fellow French citizens—his work still provides an early warning of the challenges and opportunities offered by the growth of democracy and political equality.

I can't help but wonder what Tocqueville would assess if he returned to America today?

To be sure, he would see a democracy that is messy and flawed. As Winston Churchill said, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those others that have been tried from time to time."

But Tocqueville would also see that our democratic experiment has endured many challenges, not least of which include a civil war, two world wars, a cold war, numerous regional conflicts, terrorist attacks, and foreign efforts to undermine our democratic process.

Together we have successfully met these challenges at great cost of lives and treasure.

My purpose at this conference is to explore how we can continue and strengthen our democracies to ensure they endure for future generations.

I'll approach this question through the lens of my role as the leader of the U.S. Intelligence Community.

In my current position, my responsibility is to focus on foreign threats to our democracy – and refrain from commenting on politics in the U.S. It is not pretty.

Frankly, I welcome this limitation. As a former U.S. Senator and member of the House of Representatives, I am acutely aware of the current state of U.S. politics.

So in the context of my current position, I'll offer my perspective on two topics:

One is the foundational role of intelligence in understanding the foreign threats to our democracies – and I'll talk particularly about the threat from Russia.

And the second is the importance of enduring relationships and information-sharing with our European allies in the face of these threats.

As I see every day in our intelligence reports, we live in a time of uncertainty, turmoil and peril for western democracies.

From Russia's renewed aggression, to China's global ambitions, to the persistent threat of terrorism, democracy and faith in our national institutions are under assault.

In addressing these threats, our role in the Intelligence Community is to gain understanding of these threats and provide essential insights to our policymakers.

It requires that we produce objective, unvarnished, non-political assessments.

And it requires that we tune out the daily political controversies and maintain focus on current challenges and the looming threats on the horizon.

In our business, we must adhere to the very foundational basis for intelligence agencies.

By that I mean we must seek and speak the truth, offer facts and assessments based on facts, but not opinions.

I consistently remind our workforce to remain focused on the mission, regardless of the political environment.

While our work is largely a human endeavor and therefore can be flawed, we strive to be seekers of the truth – to understand the world as it is, rather than how we would like it to be.

At our best, we help to frame debates, set the parameters for discussions, and present a core set of facts and assessments, all of which serves as the basis for our leaders to make informed decisions.

This is our goal – an aspiration made all the more important by today's cacophony of voices and opinions.

Our assessments aren't always popular, or what our policy makers had hoped to hear, but these clear-eyed assessments are necessary – as Tocqueville might have put it – to help “educate democracy.”

And they are necessary to help the US and our allies navigate what is the most complex, volatile, and challenging threat environment since World War II.

Among these threats, we are particularly concerned by external actors working to exacerbate existing social divides in our countries and undermine our democratic order.

Some—particularly Russia—have pursued and will pursue even more aggressive cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns with the intent of degrading our democratic values and weakening our alliances.

While I'm on the topic of Russian malign activity, I'd like to take a second to speak some truth with regards to Russia's behavior.

And by behavior, I mean their actions.... not their words.

In 2016, Russia conducted an unprecedented influence campaign to interfere in the US electoral and political process.

It is 2018, and we continue to see Russian targeting of American society in ways that could affect our midterm elections.

Last year, in France, Russian actors conducted hack and release campaigns against President Macron during the French elections.

Last year, Russia conducted similar operations against German and Norwegian political candidates in an effort to undermine politicians critical of Russia.

Last year, Russian actors attempted to exploit divisions in Spain over Catalonia in an effort to weaken the Spanish government.

Last year, the Russian military attacked Ukraine with a disruptive cyber-attack... that affected thousands of computer users and cost billions of dollars in damages worldwide. It was the most damaging cyber attack to date.

And, just three months ago, Russian agents attempted to kill two people in the UK using a nerve agent – endangering the lives of hundreds of innocent people nearby, including children.

Vladimir Putin says he wants a united and prosperous Europe because it is Russia's biggest trade and economic partner, yet all one needs to do is look at the actions of the Russian state, not Putin's pronouncements.

Invading Ukraine, seizing Crimea, attacking individuals in the UK with nerve agent, conducting cyber-attacks against multiple EU countries, and undermining the energy resources of Eastern European countries do not strike me as unifying actions.

I could go on... but I think my point is obvious.

These Russian actions are purposeful and premeditated and they represent an all-out assault, by Vladimir Putin, on the rule of law, Western ideals and democratic norms.

His actions demonstrate that he seeks to sow divisions within and between those in the West who adhere to democratic norms.

This should not be a surprise. President Putin openly acknowledges that his experience in the KGB has established his approach to politics.

Perhaps that is why he thrives in an environment of cynicism, lies, and misdirection.

He arrests those who dare to run against him in elections and then celebrates when he receives 76% of the popular vote.

The facts and international law are clear and hard to refute. Which is why the Kremlin resorts to accusations of "Russophobia" and lies when we hold the Russian government accountable for their actions.

These accusations hold no weight and reflect the old legal saying, "When the facts are your side, pound the facts. When the law is on your side, pound the law. When neither the facts nor the law is on your side, pound the table."

In the face of this common threat, our history of relationships with our democratic allies in Europe bears particular importance.

Our ties are longstanding and durable.

They are forged over time and distance, through common purpose and shared sacrifice.

And our ability to share information, knowledge, and insights about common threats is a foundational pillar of our collective intelligence capabilities, and it would be naïve to think that these threats will dissipate.

And so our cooperation against these threats is a challenge that together we must engage in.

Of course, our relationships will inevitably ebb and flow.

We will have differences over policies. We always have, but our overarching relationships have endured.

I arrived in Germany in September of 2001 and my 2<sup>nd</sup> day on the job as the U.S. Ambassador was September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

In the days and months that followed that fateful day we developed a remarkable partnership with the Germans in our joint efforts against terrorism.

During that same time period though, the U.S. relationship with France soured to the point that US Embassies in Europe received guidance from Washington that we were to stop serving French wine.

This wasn't a big problem for our Embassy in Berlin – our wine cellar was stocked with German and American wine.

But I called our then Ambassador in France – Howard Leach – to see how they were faring with this State Department requirement.

He reported they too had received the instructions from Washington.

He assured me that they were honoring the guidance to get rid of their stock of French wine... one bottle at a time.

Almost twenty years later, those differences are memories of the past.

And we now see the center of gravity in Europe shifting toward France.

President Macron is clearly taking a more assertive role in addressing European and global challenges.

And our intelligence cooperation with the French is quite strong and hopefully will continue to grow.

One of the benefits of this trip is the opportunity I have to visit with and strengthen ties to my intelligence and security counterparts here in France.

Meanwhile, as a former Ambassador to Germany, I'm personally disappointed to see that Germany – the country most capable of providing strength and resources to Europe – isn't punching up to its weight.

Our expectation is that our partners will join us in countering malign aggression and global threats.

In doing so, they are not taking a political stand, but a stand to guard and sustain our security and democratic values.

True cooperation requires that we all contribute our fair share of our unique expertise, capabilities, and resources because the threats we are facing are simply too complex to tackle alone.

Recognizing that the United States cannot be the sole global security guarantor.

On this point it should be noted that we have appreciated President Macron's willingness to take a greater role in global and regional security issues.

Cooperation also requires that we see beyond the ebb and flow of policy disputes, and maintain our steady collaboration on vital security interests.

In this sense, we must support European institutions, like NATO, that are both the target and deterrent to malign aggression.

I've been an enthusiastic supporter of the new NATO intelligence division under the leadership of my German friend Arndt Freitag von Loringhoven.

This newly established intelligence arm of NATO creates a mechanism to coordinate and integrate intelligence among member states.

This is similar to the approach we have taken in the United States to integrate the 17 elements of our Intelligence Community.

In doing so, we bring to life Aristotle's dictum that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The Russian threat in particular has awakened Europe to the need to reinvigorate NATO and bolster our collective defenses.

Allow me to repeat this again...

The Russians are actively seeking to divide our Alliance, and we must not allow that to happen.

And so I call on all of our allies to carry their share of the burden and shared responsibility we have to address the challenge of our time.

As I conclude, let me acknowledge that I know that governing a democracy is complex and difficult.

After all, I served in the U.S. Congress for most of my career with a front row seat to the difficulty of legislating in a toxic public environment.

But I urge us all to look beyond the day-to-day headlines, individual policy differences, and the fractious politics in our countries.

And remain focused on the long-term trajectory of the threats we face and the cooperation we need to address those threats.

Seventy-four years ago, our forefathers fought, bled, and sacrificed their lives to free a continent from fascism.

Today, we honor that sacrifice by recommitting ourselves to the democratic values that Tocqueville articulated.

Standing together in defense of the democratic order should be and must be our number one priority.

We owe this to our forefathers, to those who lie below the thousands of white marble crosses in military cemeteries in Europe, America, and around the world, and to our public today, and finally to all those that will inherit the foundational values of democracy, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Thank you.