

Trump Administration Confirmation Hearings: Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard Policy Insights

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Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard

Tulsi Gabbard—Trump's nominee for Director of National Intelligence (DNI)—spent decades in public service, both in uniform and as a congresswoman representing Hawaii. She has a degree in business administration, with a concentration in international business, from Hawaii Pacific University. In 2002, at age 21, Gabbard became the youngest woman in America ever elected as a representative in Hawaii's legislature. In 2003, she joined the Hawaii National Guard. After multiple deployments to the Middle East and Africa, Gabbard was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where she served four terms while maintaining her military service. She is now a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve.

OPENING STATEMENT

Gabbard believes that "President Trump's reelection is a clear mandate from the American people to break the cycle of failure and the weaponization and politicization of the intelligence community and begin to restore trust [in those charged with securing the nation]." She stated that the Federal Bureau of Investigation and intelligence agencies were politicized by Trump's opponents to undermine his presidency and falsely portray him as Vladimir Putin's puppet. She promised to lead by example and committed to fulfilling her duties without bias or political influence.

Gabbard stated that she has four priorities. First, she wishes to assess the global threat environment, identify gaps in U.S. intelligence, increase information sharing, and support President Trump and policymakers through collecting and analyzing apolitical and objective intelligence. Second, she seeks to end the politicization of the intelligence community. Third, she wants to rebuild trust through transparency and accountability. Finally, she wants to address efficiencies, redundancies, and effectiveness across the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) to channel personnel and resources toward its core mission of national security.

GENERAL APPROACH TO NATIONAL SECURITY

To refocus the intelligence community on the terrorist threat to America and Americans abroad, Gabbard's strategy will be to redirect resources and identify gaps in intelligence to get ahead of threats. When asked about restructuring the National Intelligence Priorities Framework to better align with President Trump's goals, Gabbard stated she looked forward to working with President Trump and his National Security advisor but wants to be fully informed before voicing recommendations.

Gabbard stated that the DNI must ensure that the President has access to *all* intelligence to make the best-informed decisions. She confirmed that she would brief President Trump daily on the information, all options available, and an assessment of possible repercussions for each option. When asked about handling conflicting intelligence reports, Gabbard stated that there is a "brick wall" between her official obligations and her politics; she committed to ensuring that dissenting views are not only allowed but encouraged.

When asked to explain her decision-making process, Gabbard stated that she would build a strong team around her to assist. She said she would ensure that the truth is reported, regardless of its convenience. She said that, if asked to perform an illegal order, she will comply with the law.

ODNI REFORM

Gabbard committed to assessing the ODNI to ensure its effectiveness and eliminate redundancies. She indicated her support of policy proposals to cap its size, eliminate ODNI taxes, and return some ODNI employees to their home agencies. Gabbard is concerned that stove-piping (i.e., lack of information sharing) remains an issue within the intelligence community and said that in some cases, unnecessary bureaucratic layers may contribute to it. Finally, she believes it is important to severely narrow those who have access to the most sensitive and compartmentalized intelligence reporting and capabilities.

SECTION 702

Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which enables foreign surveillance of non-U.S. persons overseas, accounts for roughly 60% percent of the content of the President's daily briefs. Gabbard, who supported repealing Section 702 in the past, was questioned about what reforms led her to change her position. Gabbard characterized Section 702 as "critical" to national security. But she also emphasized protecting Americans' Fourth Amendment rights and emphasized that Section 702 must coexist with safeguards to protect civil liberties.

Gabbard agreed that Congress's civil liberty reforms to Section 702 have fixed several issues that she had with it previously, and voiced support for additional reforms. For example, Gabbard affirmed that warrants should generally be required before an agency undertakes a U.S. person query of Section 702, with caveats for exigent circumstances.

PROTECTING WHISTLEBLOWERS VS. PROTECTING SECRETS

Gabbard was heavily questioned regarding her previous stance toward Edward Snowden, including her praise of Snowden as "brave" before she became the DNI nominee. Gabbard conceded that Snowden broke the law and stated that she did not support all the intelligence he released or his method. But she also stated that his actions exposed "egregious, illegal, and unconstitutional programs" within the government and led to serious congressional reforms. Gabbard was repeatedly pressed by multiple senators on whether she believes that Snowden is a traitor to the United States; she did not directly answer the question.

Gabbard confirmed that she would not advocate for a pardon or clemency for Snowden. But she was questioned about her introduction of a bill in 2020 that would have, according to at least one senator, functionally pardoned him. The 2020 bill proposed to amend the Espionage Act to make it more difficult to prosecute whistleblowers who reveal classified information, allowing individuals to disclose even top-secret information if it is done without the specific intent to injure the United States or advantage any foreign nation. She answered that we cannot and should not have individual vigilantes in the intelligence community and explained that the 2020 legislation was intended to ensure due process for those charged under the Espionage Act, which she believes has been sometimes abused for political purposes. She affirmed that she would work to ensure that we do not have individual vigilantes making their own decisions on when to disclose information.

Gabbard, if confirmed, proposes four steps to prevent another Snowden-like leak: (1) ensure that we do not have unconstitutional programs within the intelligence community; (2) support security clearance reform to limit access to the nation's top secrets; (3) ensure that every person in the workforce understands their rights as whistleblowers and the legal channels available; and (4) establish a direct hotline to Gabbard. Gabbard agreed that intelligence community whistleblowers should have a clear path to the Committee without requiring agency permission. Finally, Gabbard reaffirmed her support of legislation prohibiting the government from mandating that Americans' phones or apps include mechanisms allowing the government to bypass privacy technology.

RUSSIA

Gabbard stated that Russia remains a strategic competitor, noting concerns about nuclear weapons. Gabbard was offended to be asked about Russia "get[ting] a pass" in her policy recommendations; she elaborated that her sole focus is our own national security, and that no country, group, or individual would "get a pass."

Regarding the war in Ukraine, Gabbard faced heated questions about her 2022 tweet that the Biden administration and NATO could have "easily" avoided the war by acknowledging Russia's "legitimate security concerns" regarding Ukraine becoming a member of NATO. Gabbard admitted to the tweet but also highlighted her statement criticizing Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

CHINA AND TAIWAN

Gabbard characterized America's relationship with China as "complex" given our linked economies. She stated that challenges and threats require attention, using as an example the cyber-exploitation that compromised major telecom companies.

Gabbard was also questioned about her previous statements that requiring domestic ownership of TikTok is a civil liberties violation and that national security concerns over the app are unfounded; Gabbard stated that her comments were centered around the protection of First Amendment rights and the lack of data privacy legislation that would apply to TikTok, Facebook, etc. She stated that she understands the concerns about TikTok but reiterated the importance of data privacy, stating that even data collected by U.S. owned companies can be sold to any country.

Regarding Taiwan and the CHIPS Act, Gabbard stated that she fully supports investing in strengthening our domestic capabilities. She said the CHIPS Act had other provisions in it that she felt were a potential obstacle to achieving that. But she committed to recommending that we continue to invest in the domestic semiconductor industry for our own national security.

JAPAN

Gabbard agreed that Japan has been a strong U.S. ally. She explained that she had previously raised concerns about how Japan's shift from a self-defensive posture to an offensive posture could result in escalation with China, which could have ramifications for U.S. security interests.

SYRIA AND LEBANON

Gabbard was questioned about her trip to Syria and Lebanon in January 2017, where she was accompanied by two brothers linked to the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, an ally of Hezbollah. She denied having any knowledge of the accusations of the brothers' links to the Syrian Social Nationalist Party until after the trip occurred. She also denied that she has ever knowingly met with any members, leaders, or affiliates of Hezbollah, labeling the accusation absurd.

When asked about her extended conversation with Syrian politician Bashar al-Asad in January 2017, Gabbard stated that after her trip, she met with people like Nancy Pelosi to answer questions and was surprised that no one from the intelligence community showed interest in her takeaways. She said she asked al-Asad tough questions about his regime's actions, including the chemical weapons used against his people.

Gabbard also met with Grand Mufti Ahmad Badreddin Hassoun; she stated that she was unaware of his threats to prepare suicide bombers in the United States. Gabbard elaborated that during the trip, she made it a point to meet

with different religious leaders in both Syria and Lebanon to hear their concerns and thoughts regarding the war at the time. In hindsight, Gabbard affirmed that the decision to go on the trip exemplified good judgment, stating that leaders can benefit greatly by engaging and meeting directly with both adversaries and friends.

Disclaimer: This information is strictly to provide public information on the administration's policy positions and in no way indicates an affiliation with any political party.

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