

AMID GLOBAL THREATS THAT REMAIN (PUBLICLY) UNSPEAKABLE, TRUMP MAKES HIMSELF VULNERABLE

Christopher Wray and Alejandro Mayorkas managed to get Republicans and Democrats to agree yesterday – in condemning the two men after they blew off two public Global Threats hearings.

Top officials from the FBI and Department of Homeland Security on Thursday drew bipartisan fire for declining to testify in public at a Senate hearing on “worldwide threats” and instead offering to testify in a classified setting.

Both Democrats and Republicans on the Senate Homeland Security Committee expressed anger at what they called Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and FBI Director Christopher Wray’s “refusal” to testify in public.

“In a shocking departure from the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee’s longstanding tradition of transparency and oversight of the threats facing our nation, for the first time in more than 15 years, the Homeland Security and FBI Director have refused to appear before the Committee to provide public testimony at our annual hearing on Threats to the Homeland,” Chairman Gary Peters, a Michigan Democrat, said in a statement.

The jilted members of Congress (and NBC’s Ken Dilanian) seemed to believe the snub was simply

defensive. And while I wouldn't blame either Wray or Mayorkas for wanting to limit their public statements in advance of leaving government and being targeted by Trump's vengeance machine, it's possible that the two men had stuff to say that simply couldn't be said in public.

Given Mark Warner's alarming commentary about China's hack of the US telecom system and the shared jurisdiction Wray and Mayorkas would have had over that investigation, that's could be part of the explanation (though as a telecom guy, Warner's alarm may simply reflect his better knowledge of the exposure here).

The Chinese government espionage campaign that has deeply penetrated more than a dozen U.S. telecommunications companies is the "worst telecom hack in our nation's history – by far," a senior U.S. senator told The Washington Post in an interview this week.

The hackers, part of a group dubbed Salt Typhoon, have been able to listen in on audio calls in real time and have in some cases moved from one telecom network to another, exploiting relationships of "trust," said Sen. Mark R. Warner (D-Virginia), chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a former telecom venture capitalist. Warner added that intruders are still in the networks.

Though fewer than 150 victims have been identified and notified by the FBI – most of them in the D.C. region, the records of people those individuals have called or sent text messages to run into the "millions," he said, "and that number could go up dramatically."

Those records could provide further information to help the Chinese identify other people whose devices they want to target, he said. "My hair's on fire,"

Warner said.

Those details, some previously undisclosed, add to the alarming understanding of the scope of the hack since late September, when the U.S. government, after being alerted by industry, began to grasp its seriousness. "The American people need to know" how serious the intrusion is, Warner said.

The hackers targeted the phones of Donald Trump and his running mate, Sen. JD Vance of Ohio, as well as people working for the campaign of Vice President Kamala Harris and State Department officials.

The world is a mess right now. Donald Trump's victory makes it likely that authoritarians around the world will defeat the Western order – with Trump thrown scraps by those holding leverage, and phone intercepts, over him.

Which is why Trump's paranoia about the American "Deep State" is so foolish.

WaPo last week reported on the many transition services Trump has eschewed because those same services caught him engaging in misconduct last time around. Trump won't work with General Services Administration because in 2017 they turned over emails showing that Trump had secret contacts with Russia during the transition.

Presidential transitions are formally led by the GSA, which typically provides furnished office space and computer support to both nominees for pre-election planning.

Trump won't use State Department translators because transcripts leaked in his first term.

In calls with foreign heads of state, Trump has cut out the State Department, its secure lines and its official

interpreters.

[snip]

Government officials also traditionally rely on State to help create an official record of such conversations, in case disputes arise over what was said.

Trump's calls have raised alarms from some foreign policy experts – particularly his call with Vladimir Putin. He advised the Russian president not to escalate the war in Ukraine and reminded him of Washington's sizable military presence in Europe, as The Washington Post reported. The absence of an official transcript of the exchange already has created a challenge for Trump, said Daniel Fried, a retired diplomat now at the Atlantic Council think tank, because the Kremlin quickly denied that the call had taken place.

"It would be a lot easier for the Trump team if he were able to say that the Russia team was lying," said Fried, who played key roles in designing American policy in Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union. "So there's a cost to doing it this way. People are scratching their heads and saying, 'Somebody's lying.'"

Trump doesn't want the FBI vetting his nominees because they found disqualifying details on people like Jared (and it should be said but WaPo does not, Johnny McEntee and Boris Epshteyn).

As his team considers hundreds of potential appointees for key jobs, he's so far declined to let the Federal Bureau of Investigation check for potential red flags and security threats to guard against espionage – instead relying on private campaign lawyers for some appointees and doing no vetting at

all for others. Trump's transition team is considering moving on his first day in office to give those appointees blanket security clearances, according to people familiar with the discussions who spoke on the condition of anonymity to disclose private conversations.

Trump won't sign the Presidential Transition Act's ethics code because, well, he has every intent on looting government for his own profit.

Trump's team says its staffers have signed their own ethics code and conflict-of-interest pledge, although those documents do not cover Trump or meet the requirements of the Presidential Transition Act. Transition officials said they continue to "constructively engage" with the Biden administration, but have not provided details of the negotiations.

As a result, Trump can't access the hardened facilities that would protect his people from known, ongoing operations by Iranian and Chinese hackers.

Trump's transition teams cannot participate in national security briefings, enter federal agencies or speak with employees, and can't receive formal briefings about ongoing operations and projects. (Trump has begun receiving intelligence briefings.) The transition team cannot use secure federal email servers to communicate (a particular concern, security experts said, after the Trump campaign was hacked by Iran).

Trump hates his own government so much, he makes himself an easy target for hostile governments and disloyal appointees. Hell, he couldn't even get Pete Hegseth to honestly disclose the sexual assault allegation against him.

What Trump will do to the United States is awful.

But because he hates the US government so much, he'll also make "America First" wildly vulnerable to hostile forces, at a time when they're already poised to undercut America's strength.

It's why he's such a godsend to hostile countries: Because he will serve as a cancer within the US government, deliberately eating away at America's defenses from inside.