

Mr. Aaron Lukas
Nominee for the Position of
Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence
Statement for the Record
Before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
April 9, 2025

Chairman Cotton, Vice Chairman Warner, distinguished members of the committee: It is an honor to appear before you as President Trump's nominee for Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence. I want to thank the President for his confidence in me. I also want to thank Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard for her outstanding leadership of the organization.

Finally, most of all I'm grateful to my wonderful wife Carrie, who is here today, and my five children, who couldn't attend. Without their steadfast love and support over the years, I have no doubt I would not be sitting before you right now.

I will confess, it is a strange feeling to be in the public spotlight today. For the past 20-plus years, I've worked in the shadows as a CIA operations officer, most often overseas on the front lines of intelligence work. I've avoided calling attention to myself, stayed away from social media, and lived my covers – never talking about my real work, sometimes even operating under different names.

I was honored for the chance to serve my country in this capacity – to support America's political leaders and warfighters alike with unbiased, apolitical intelligence – and I was privileged to work with many, many dedicated patriots at CIA and across other U.S. government agencies.

Not long ago, Director Gabbard sat in this room and discussed her determination to rebuild an intelligence community with laser-like focus on our essential mission: ensuring the safety, security, and freedom of the American people. I wholeheartedly share this vision, as do countless other career intelligence officers.

What I have seen from the inside, unfortunately, is an IC that too often is aimless, bloated, risk averse, and disconnected from the core mission of intelligence. My aim, if confirmed, is to support Director Gabbard by giving a voice to those unknown and unsung officers doing the hard work of intelligence every day: The

operations officers, the analysts, the covert action specialists, the technical collectors, and all the people who support them.

The men and women of the U.S. Intelligence Community do dangerous, important work that is critical to our nation's security. But that doesn't mean that all is well with the IC.

Over the decades, America's intelligence agencies have morphed into large bureaucracies in which the majority of people have little to no connection to how intelligence is collected, analyzed, and presented to policy makers.

Reporting chains have grown unwieldy, paralyzing even simple decision making. Managers are incentivized to avoid risk and not rock the boat. Huge sums of taxpayer money is spent on technology projects that are either outdated before they are deployed or, worse, lack any connection to the actual needs of operators and analysts. Priorities that have nothing to do with intelligence have taken center stage, distracting us from mission.

President Trump and Director Gabbard have already taken important steps to reverse the decline of the IC, most notably by getting rid of a toxic diversity, equity, and inclusion political dogma that at best was a distraction, and at worst, pitted IC officers against each other.

I will never forget the first Chief of Station seminar I attended, where the senior most directorate of operations human resource officer blithely informed the attendees that, "It doesn't matter how good your Station's operations are. Unless you advance a major DEI project, you won't get promoted."

Think of that. Chiefs of Stations, who also serve as DNI representatives, are supposed to be in those positions because they've proven they're capable field officers. Because they're the best at doing real intelligence, at working with our partners, at stealing vital secrets. And until recently, the official message they were getting was, "Your job is to advance a political agenda, not protect the country."

As one of those field officers, and as a former analyst, I can tell you: There are huge numbers of dedicated patriots in the IC who are thrilled we have an administration that just wants them to get back to work. That wants them to use their talents and skills to protect the American people, to keep politicization out of

intelligence, to have high expectations and take reasoned risks. An administration that understands that risky ventures means there will at times be failures, but that timidity is not an option.

To those dedicated professionals in the IC, I promise you: If confirmed as PDDNI, I will always have your backs even when you fail, as long as you're doing your best for the American people. And I will be supporting a Director who feels exactly the same way.

ODNI has a unique role to play in leading the IC. It is the institution where all streams of foreign intelligence and law enforcement information come together. The DNI is the president's principal intelligence advisor and ODNI produces the President's Daily Brief. Taking direction from the White House, it sets collection priorities, deconflicts on budgets, works to fund and deploy cutting edge technology, ensures agencies are respecting the privacy and civil liberties of Americans, and keeps Congress informed so that legislative oversight is meaningful.

These are all important tasks. But since its creation, many have asked whether ODNI should even exist. My answer to that question is "yes," but like the other IC elements, it must be focused on its unique mission.

Too often, ODNI has grown without regard to that mission and it has engaged in business that properly should be conducted by other agencies. Director Gabbard has said she is committed to ensuring ODNI is focused only on what only it can do, which will make it a stronger and more effective leader of the IC. If confirmed, I will give her my full support in this endeavor.

I want to be clear: My aim is to make ODNI better, not to undermine it. What I bring to this role is the perspective of an intelligence officer who has worked both on the front lines overseas and as a consumer of intelligence at NSC.

For every program, every position, every taxpayer dollar that's spent, I will ask: How does this advance the IC's core mission? How does it support policy makers? And if it doesn't, why are we doing it?

I believe that's how we make the IC stronger and better able to do our duty to protect the American people.

Once again, I thank the members of the committee for their consideration and I look forward to questions.