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PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

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## National Security Strategy

With Michael O'Hanlon, Admiral Mike Mullen, and H.R. McMaster,  
Moderated by Lieutenant Colonel James M. Harrington

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL JAMES M. HARRINGTON:** Let's start with Michael O'Hanlon.

**MICHAEL O'HANLON:** I'm mostly aboard with what we've heard this morning, but I'm worried about the broader debate going too far on talking about the US-China relationship in adversarial terms. I don't want to push them closer to Russia. I don't want to push our allies away from us because they think we're too locked in for a looming fight. But I agree with basically everything I've heard on the defense preparation side. And so, in that sense, I'll leave it there on the threat question.

But I wanted to talk about force sizing and how that relates to the overall purpose of the conference because it's a crucial point and it's actually very interesting. I'm delighted that H.R. [McMaster] is lined up to come in the discussion soon after me, after Admiral [Mike] Mullen, and with Secretary [Jim] Mattis here. I'm aware that in the last two national defense strategies of 2018 and 2022, we really did not talk that specifically or explicitly about force sizing as a function of which scenarios we are getting ready for or the operational plans that we're preparing. And that is probably a good idea for a lot of reasons, but I think it's worth just being explicit in this group about what the construct was. As best I understand it, and this is all at an unclassified level, but if you go back to some of the statements that people made in testimony or General [David] Goldfein made when he was chief of staff of the Air Force to explain the force sizing that's behind the 2018 National Defense Strategy and

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the 2022 National Defense Strategy, essentially what they said, and I hope people will correct me if I've got it wrong, is we want to protect the homeland. We all know our military is not fundamentally sized and structured for that purpose, but there are still some requirements in missile and air defense and so forth. That's one.

Maintain a strong nuclear deterrent while we're doing other things around the world with conventional forces. That's two. And again, that's a specific part of the force structure, but it's crucial. Defeat Russia or China. Deter North Korea and Iran and maintain momentum simultaneously in the fight against transnational violent extremism or global terrorism.

So it's those five things, but it's very interesting. The simultaneity question is, to my mind, not extremely explicitly considered, discussed, or clarified. I know Secretary Mattis, Lt. General McMaster, and others were writing your strategies in 2017 and early 2018, just as you were also working your tail off the rest of your time to make sure we didn't go to war against North Korea when we probably came closer to war against North Korea than at any time since at least the 1970s, maybe the 1950s. So there is an irony in the fact that we were trying to prioritize Russia and China, and we still are, and yet the more plausible fight at that moment was probably North Korea. And I'm not disagreeing with anything. I'm just noting the irony. This is sort of an ongoing tension in US force planning that we always come up with somewhat contrived, artificial, and inaccurate ways of considering the simultaneity question because we can't know the future, and what we're primarily trying to do is to maximize deterrence.

But it still strikes me there is this tension. I have only one modest suggestion about what the importance of this is for our future force planning and budgeting that I'll finish in just a second. But I do want to just again go over the five bases for force planning and invite anybody, including Chairman [Mac] Thornberry and others who have had a central hand in this, to disagree with me if they think I've got it wrong. But again, I'm quoting General Goldfein and some others who have gone public: defend the homeland, maintain nuclear deterrence, defeat Russia or China, deter Iran and North Korea and presumably also Russia and China, whichever one you're not worried about fighting at that moment, and then finally maintain momentum in the counterterrorism struggle. That is sort of four missions at the same time because, with North Korea and Iran, we say we're deterring the other ones. We're either doing things, fighting, or maintaining a very viable capability to defend the homeland and maintain nuclear deterrence.

I think that's probably the right way to think about force sizing. Interestingly, it doesn't lead to any big changes in the force structure. Maybe that's why people settled on it to some extent because they didn't really want the focus to be on changing the force structure. And today's conversation has not been primarily about changing the force structure. It has been about logistics, basing, survivability, space, C4ISR [command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance], and targeting. I think those are the more important areas of emphasis. But if you talk too much about the simultaneity question and the scenarios, you probably wind up driving the force requirements upward from a 1.35 million active-duty force, from a 300-ship navy, from a 312-squadron air force. In fact, we have heard the navy and the air force both say they want a substantially bigger force structure. The navy still wants 355 ships. Now they're starting to add to that number with unmanned vessels.

The air force under General Goldfein said they wanted to go to 386 squadrons from 312 because I think General Goldfein realized the navy did better at finding a single metric that people could rally around and understand, so he wanted to get into that conversation, too. But we actually haven't made that much progress toward growing the navy or the air force. I'm not sure we should, but to the extent we have these goals, those are still sort of the goals on record, expanding each of those services by roughly 20 percent in terms of force structure. So my advice and my bottom line are I think growing the force structures in those ways would probably not be the best use of our resources. We should focus on the agenda that has been talked about today, C4ISR, survivability, logistics, basing, allied interoperability, command and control, and cyber and intelligence.

But we should remind our potentially skeptical fellow Americans when they wonder why we're clamoring for such big defense budgets that actually, as a community, most of us are not asking for a bigger military; 1.35 million is small by historical standards and by international standards. What we're really having a debate about is quality resilience, lethality, survivability, and deployability in this contested environment.

So I guess I'm concluding on the point partly to think about our role in the debate, this conference, and this community. And I think one thing we should bear in mind when we ask Americans pretty soon to sustain a trillion-dollar defense budget because we're pretty close to that, and we'll get there soon, is in the context of debt limit showdowns and other concerns about the deficit and the fiscal situation that you spoke so eloquently about this morning,

Kiran [Sridhar]. We should remind people we're actually not asking, for the most part, for a bigger military.

Some of you would probably want one, and some of the specific things we've asked for today about supply vessels might add a few tens of thousands here or a couple of thousand there. But for the most part, we're talking about improving quality, lethality, survivability, and resilience, and those are crucial. We are not actually talking about being able to fight and win multiple wars at the same time because that is not the force planning construct that is behind either of the last two national defense strategies, and not enough people understand that. Thanks.

**HARRINGTON:** Next is the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mike Mullen.

**ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN:** Thank you, James. One of the questions that is part of this panel is: Are we positioned for two MRCs [major regional conflicts]? That really gets to Michael [O'Hanlon]'s discussion. We are not positioned for that. When we were positioned for that in the nineties, we weren't really positioned for that, either. Those of us who went through those plans back then, basically, you could do one and hold on the other, whether it was Korea or Russia in Europe. So we have a long way to go, and even at 355 and 386 ships, it's going to take us a long time to get there. In fact, having been involved in building the number of ships for the navy for quite some time, we were well on our way in the early 2000s to a navy of about 220 ships. I mean, we were taking them out incredibly fast, and it was an in-depth analysis over a fairly extensive period of time, done by a number of CNOs [chiefs of naval operations] that at least started to put a floor on that and allowed us to start to build and hold what we have, which has been about the best that we can do.

We can't get to two simultaneous MRCs in the near term in any way. I guess one of the questions is whether we need to do that for the long term.

In terms of the strategic environment, my own view is Russia and China are together. I have feared them being together for the last twenty years. They're together. The idea that we could start to break them apart, I think, is fool's gold at this point. It isn't going to happen, and we have to, at least from a planning standpoint, make that assumption. Right now, Xi Jinping is pretty close to making a decision to help Putin with weapons, which is sort of a big leap from the standpoint of what's going on in Ukraine and what he hasn't done up to this point, just to give you one indication. I think February 24,

2022 [the day Russia invaded Ukraine], changed the national security structure globally for about as far as I can see into the future, and all planning needs to essentially emanate from that.

My own personal view is I think it's the most dangerous time since 1962. Focused on Russia, Ukraine, China, and Taiwan, Gary [Roughead] mentioned Turkey. I just never want to count them out. I've sat with [Turkish president Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan. Erdoğan is messianic. There are few people I've been with in my life where you look at them and sit with them, and you can kind of see to the back of their head. He is one, and he is going to play for a long time.

There isn't a European I've spoken with who doesn't think that Russia and Ukraine aren't existential to the continent. We are in a war on the continent, which has been something we have feared forever on the continent for centuries, not just in recent times.

One of the things I hope we don't get and that we don't lose, despite the criticisms that we have of the acquisition system and the weapons systems that we develop, is when you look at the performance of these systems in Ukraine right now; the HIMARS piece, I'll just use that one. It has been pretty extraordinary. They were not easy to develop, fund, and create, but they have performed magnificently, and we should not completely criticize a system that has produced that. My own view is Putin is undaunted. I don't know how long it's going to go. I didn't know at the beginning, and I have no idea how long it's going to last. He is going to stay. He will see it through and be alive to see it through until whatever version of it ends. We need to plan on that accordingly. Clearly, we're going to have more US forces in Europe and in Eastern Europe, and we need to do that.

Putin has a historical view. Gary mentioned the empires. I think that's really important. We are particularly lousy at history. And Michael said this early, we shouldn't just be talking to ourselves. We need to educate the American people on history. We need to educate ourselves on history in these parts of the world that are relevant to the security challenges and, quite frankly, the economic challenges that we have globally.

I actually took a trip to Taiwan. I'm not unfamiliar with the Western Pacific. I spent a lot of my life there, but I took a trip to Taiwan with a bipartisan delegation in March. It's the first time I'd been there since I was a junior officer in 1970.

And what I learned in a very, very brief visit there was pretty extraordinary in terms of the detail of what is really going on in that country. I will say in the

four years that I was chairman, I spent not one minute on Taiwan. And so this is all in many ways for the national security apparatus new because none of us did that because we had a war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we had a pretty significant terrorism threat. That has shifted now. So we are learning as we go, and I think the point has been made. It's a big ocean out there. It always has been. Those of us who have operated out there know that, and that the logistics issue is absolutely vital.

Taiwan is extraordinarily complex, as actually were Iraq and Afghanistan, about which we knew very little before we went in. We need to learn more. More specifically, when I was there, 75 percent were for democracy. It's twenty-four million people. It's a thriving population. It's well led politically, although they do have politics. And the president just left as the head of the party, put in the heir apparent, if you will, who is the vice president, who has already said, "We need a trade agreement, and we need strategic clarity." That was his introduction to me when I met him.

I'm a little more confident that TSMC [Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company] can provide a deterrent to both sides because if they tank, our economy tanks, China's economy tanks, and the global economy tanks, and I think that has huge deterrent potential with respect to Xi Jinping and the whole idea of trying to understand how he's thinking and that Chinese perspective is absolutely critical.

The Chinese-US relationship is at the worst point it has been since 1972. The whole idea of the Bali meeting was to try to put a floor under it. And then, at least, that is the claim. Whether it happens or not or whether it actually continues to move in the wrong direction is an open question. We don't have an embassy in Taiwan, but we've got a group at AIT [American Institute in Taiwan] that's four hundred strong. It's bigger than I don't know how many embassies, but it's a big outfit that knows a lot. How do you extract from that their level of knowledge about what's going on?

The FMS [Foreign Military Sales] system: How do you get them ready? I mean, anybody that has worked with the FMS system and you come to me and say, "Now we're going to take care of Taiwan with FMS." It's a broken system. It has been broken for decades, and they have never been prioritized. Unless Secretary Lloyd Austin has it on his desk and checks on it once a month to start to move the FMS system in a way that helps them, it is not going to provide them with the capability. The will to fight in Ukraine has been instructive. That is certainly not new in history. But will the Taiwanese

actually have that as well? I think that's an open question. What I worry about is we're drifting into war. Tensions are so high, and we're both accusing each other of coercing each other.

To balance that, you have to move up the ladder again and create more capability and create more support. And what's the trip wire? When Xi Jinping, who I actually do believe doesn't have the desire to go in now, but when Xi Jinping believes Taiwan is going to be independent, he's going to go in. There is not a Chinese leader that wouldn't do that if he thinks that's the declaration. And that's something that we have to, I think, continue to support.

The allies piece. As I listened to this with Jim [Mattis] and H.R. and Gary here, who were colleagues of mine back in the day, we should remember that when I left the job in 2011, there were forty-nine countries with troops in Afghanistan. That's a lot of political will. That's a lot of support. I'm not arguing one way or another on Afghanistan. The point is allies will come in, and you'd be amazed at how they figure out how to fight despite the high-level interoperability challenges. They have been actually remarkably good. You don't want to wait until that point to have it happen. But the political support, the economic support, particularly in that part of the world with Japan and Australia and South Korea and those kinds of things are going to be very, very important.

Just a couple of things from the US perspective. One is Taiwan. And I haven't even heard this phrase. Is Taiwan a vital national interest? And that's an open question as far as I'm concerned. We certainly haven't made it that way. And if we're going to go to war, and this is the Iraq piece for me, I believe the American people have to make this decision. The American people can't find Taiwan on a map right now, just as they couldn't find Afghanistan before we went there. It is up to the political leadership to basically make the case that it is or it isn't and not then just, "Okay, we've decided to go. We'll throw the military in here, and we'll see how that goes." That's an absolutely key question.

Just a couple of other thoughts about the budget, and I know that's what we're talking about. One of the most ancient and antiquated rules is that we'll just divide this up to one-third, one-third, one-third to each service. And that has killed us over the long term. How do you change that? The services all argued for that as well. The only place that can change is from the Hill. And the only group that can change that is the two committees. So we don't have the right people in the room, quite frankly, to have this discussion. With

Chairman Thornberry here, that's one. But I have found in my career, if you don't get the appropriators on board, you are having a conversation with nobody. And they are the ones that have to make this happen.

It isn't going to happen from the building. It has got to happen from the Hill, and they need to be partners in this and work over time. That construct of one-third, one-third, one-third could change.

The space force is new, almost as new as the Taiwan problem, quite frankly. And so, how do we energize support and have them make a difference in terms of the assets that we now know are there? Ten years ago, you couldn't talk about weaponizing space. Now it's weaponized. It has been weaponized. And so, how do we counter that with this brand-new national force while the other services also try to survive?

Keith [Alexander] talked about being with me in whenever that was; 2006 or 2007. I looked at the Iran war plan in 2006. This was in the navy. I sat with my cyber guy. It wasn't cyber at the time, I think it was C4ISR or something, and we started to talk about the war. I said, "So tell me how this starts." And this three-star who was working for me looked at me, and he said, "CNO, this has already started. The fight is already on, as far as I'm concerned. It's on in cyber. It's on in info. It's on in economics. It's how do you transition or how do you never go kinetic in all of this?" And I think the deterrence piece is critical, and I asked the question in 2005, "Okay, what are we doing? The wall is down."

I hate the term "peace dividend." It hurt us badly, and it was widely used. The wall is down. What does deterrence look like in the twenty-first century? I don't think we know. There can be a lot of work done and should be done to get that to the uniform leaders on what it means now. Some of you, I'm sure, have looked at Taiwan, the CSIS [Center for Strategic and International Studies] thing, the war game that they ran. One of the things, and Gary mentioned this, we haven't been bloodied in a long time at sea. But one of the things that was so underestimated and underresourced wasn't just logistics in Iraq and Afghanistan, it was medical. Nobody knows where the money is in medical. There is no uniform that's in charge of it. And when you talk about the thousands of casualties that are going to happen in that fight, that's not something you can make up overnight. And it gets short shrift in every discussion.

When I've seen jointness work, sadly, is when people are dying. All barriers come down. The sense of urgency that's associated with jointness as we fight together while fighting with our coalition allies, that sense of urgency is



right. The challenge is how do you create a sense of urgency without people dying? The programs, the leadership, they make the changes before people are actually dying because all the barriers come down. And that sense of urgency is what we need to do now with respect to this budget. I have, for a long time, over the last decade, said the Pentagon has got enough money. It's a matter of where it is and how are we allocating it. I am now no longer there. That \$858 billion [Pentagon topline budget] isn't going to be enough to do what we need to do within the system that we have. Can we dig it out and make it more efficient?

Absolutely. But we don't have a lot of time right now with where we are in the world. So that sense of urgency and this effort, Mike, that you put on, I think, is hugely important.

Lastly, on intel, listen, and it was mentioned, but I thought what [Jacob "Jake"] Sullivan did, and I'm sure it was Jake, I thought his breaking out that intel before Ukraine was an act of God, quite frankly, if you've ever been on the inside to try to get intel to give up any intel, make it public, and declassify it. The question is, how do we do that in the future? What does that mean with respect to China? Right now, should we be doing some of that very specifically? And I just want to give him and whoever did it, but I think Jake was obviously the one that made it happen, an awful lot of credit because it made a huge difference in the calculations, specifically with respect to Russia. Thanks.

**HARRINGTON:** Over to former national security advisor H.R. McMaster. Looking forward to your opening remarks.

**H.R. McMASTER:** Thank you, James. And thank you for authoring the two great papers, Nadia [Schadlow] and Michael [O'Hanlon]. I think what they do is help us think more clearly about the challenges we're facing and challenge the assumptions that we might be buying into. Just to answer the questions here that were posed to the panel, what is the most important of many challenges facing the US? It is that we don't know *how* to think about a future war. We don't think clearly about the problem of future war. Should the military be prepared to wage conflict in two contingencies simultaneously? I think yes. Right? Because we're not going to get to pick. I mean, we might want to win, hold, win. We might want to deal with only one thing at a time. But I think what we're seeing is the interconnected nature of the threats that we're facing today.

And we could maybe talk more about that and the really very high potential, I think, for horizontal escalation of conflicts. Do deterrents have to be from the military, or can principal adversaries be deterred by economic and diplomatic tools? I think the answer is that hard power matters, okay? And I think we've seen this in Ukraine.

Certainly, it's important to integrate all elements of national power to have a deterrent effect. But without the military instrument, without military forces forward positioned who are capable of operating at sufficient scale and for ample duration to ensure that that enemy fails or cannot accomplish his objectives at an acceptable cost, you're not going to deter. We've seen that with Ukraine clearly.

And then finally, what capabilities does the US military need in order to deter conflict in the twenty-first century?

And what I'd like to do to answer that is to propose a framework for thinking and learning about future armed conflict. And then, what are our gaps and opportunities that we can act on in the defense budget to build a military capable of deterring and, if necessary, fighting and winning a war?

So, first of all, why don't we think clearly about future war? I think it's because we tend to stress change over continuity. The historian Carl Becker said that memory of the past and anticipation of the future should walk hand in hand in a happy way. And we can convince ourselves that mainly because of technological advances that the next war is going to be fundamentally different from all those that have gone before it. Some argue that the next war will be fast, cheap, efficient, and waged from standoff range. And so, as we see in Ukraine and as we have seen in our own experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, that's not the case.

[Halford] Mackinder and [Nicholas] Spykman would recognize this world today from a geostrategic perspective as we face two major powers, revisionist and revanchist powers, on the Eurasian land mass. So how can we maybe think more clearly about future war?

I think we have to study war and warfare in the way Michael Howard suggested, in width, in depth, and in context to look at conflict over time, so we identify those continuities, human continuities in the nature of war. What were those qualitative elements of Russian combat power or lack thereof that many analysts missed before the war?

So in width and in depth, look at what's going on in Ukraine. Look at our experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. Look at the 2006 Israeli fight in southern Lebanon. So the tidy outlines of war dissolve, and you recognize

the complex causality of outcomes in war and the full range of combat capabilities you need to succeed in combat. And then in context, obviously, to recognize that war is really waged to overachieving political outcomes. Russia has a political outcome in mind. The Taliban had a political outcome in mind in Afghanistan, and we kept saying that there was no military solution in Afghanistan, but hey, the Taliban came up with one, and it was tied to their overall political aim. So pay attention to those continuities in the nature of war.

Consider war and defense strategy in width, depth, and context, and make sure that the idealized vision of future war is consistent with continuities in the nature of war. We can learn from when we got it wrong in terms of thinking about future war. And Secretary Mattis was, I think, the lead dissident in our joint force in the 1990s when the orthodoxy of the revolution in military affairs and catchphrases like rapid, decisive operations were all the rage, right? Who's going to be against that? Are you for ponderous indecisive operations? And all this stuff looked great on PowerPoint slides, and it was completely disconnected from the nature of war and continuities in the nature of war. And we forgot what Nadia reminded us of with her book, that the consolidation of gains to get to sustainable political outcomes, that's never been an optional phase of war. But we want it to take the George Costanza approach to war and just leave on a high note, right?

Well, we wound up in Afghanistan and Iraq for a hell of a lot longer than we thought we were going to be there. So I think we have to ensure that we are considering both the continuities and changes in the character of warfare and continuities in the nature of war. And what are those continuities? I think there are four of them. And these should be almost evaluation criteria for national security strategy and national defense strategy. Okay, war's an extension of politics. It's like the GEICO commercial: "Everybody knows that," right? [Carl von] Clausewitz said that. But again, what that means is that there has to be a consolidation of gains. War is human. People fight for the same reasons Thucydides identified 2,500 years ago: fear, honor, and interest. And we see how those reasons are driving the will to fight among Ukrainians and have hindered Russia's real ability to fight because there isn't that rationale, that emotional drive to fight in Ukraine.

And then, of course, war is uncertain. War is uncertain because of the interaction of opposites, as Clausewitz would have said it, but it's uncertain because you're interacting with an enemy, multiple enemies. But we also have to recognize that we're interacting with potential enemies in between

conflicts. So when we develop a future force capability based on stealth, for example, or some other kind of capability, we have to recognize that our future enemies get to develop countermeasures. There's never been a silver bullet in war—the machine gun, the tank, the antitank missiles, the submarine and the sonar, the bomber, the radar. And so in the nineties, remember, everybody talked about leap-ahead capabilities. When somebody starts talking about leap ahead, you should leap out the window, because what that means is they're setting us up for vulnerabilities. We're not engaged in developing the range of capabilities that joint forces need to play what is essentially the game of rock, paper, scissors, which is joint warfare.

If you don't have one of those three components, if you can't operate together with a range of capabilities, some of them older, some of them newer, then you're not going to be able to seize, retain the initiative, and fight and win in war. And finally, war is a contest of wills, and this gets to Admiral Mullen's point. It has a lot to do with national leadership explaining the rationale for the war. But that also gets to the human dimension of conflict and the need to sustain will and [create] cohesive, confident, and tough, resilient teams, which I think we might be losing focus on, too. We could talk about this as well from a range of perspectives. So the first thing I think we have to do is to think more clearly about future work.

So how can we do that? How can we drive that thinking and tie it to the budgeting process? First, it's through the defense planning scenarios, which are terrible. I haven't seen them for a number of years, but I bet they're still terrible. And some of the problems with them is they lend themselves to just being a targeting exercise. They don't take into consideration these continuities in the nature of war. I mean we target the enemy with our weapons and munition systems, and then we just call it a day and look at the ledger. How we did, do we have enough systems in place? And then also the scenarios don't account for simultaneity and for the geographic range that a conflict may take on. I think it's worth pointing out the Chinese have a base on the south side of the Bab al-Mandeb [Strait]. The Iranians have proxy forces on the north side of the Bab al-Mandeb.

And do you think that Iran would not take advantage of US preoccupation with the conflict with China to maybe do what it wanted to do in the Strait of Hormuz, for example, or what they did in the eighties? So I think that the defense planning scenarios don't allow for that kind of simultaneity, which gets to one of the questions posed here. And I think we have to recognize that

our enemies, potential enemies, and adversaries now will at least take advantage of our preoccupation in one area to pursue their interests at our expense in another. And so the defense planning scenarios, make them not targeting exercises, make them consistent with the nature of war. The second part thing we can do to think more clearly is to lay a strong conceptual foundation for joint warfare. Often these concepts, Joint Vision 2010, Joint Vision 2020, look at those documents. They're, in retrospect, silly documents.

And why were they silly? They were silly because they didn't recognize that there are two fundamental ways to fight wars, asymmetrically and stupidly. This is Conrad Crane's observation, and what our enemies have done, potential enemies have done, in this time when we were pursuing the revolution of military affairs or whatever offset we're on now, is not to develop those same capabilities but to find ways to take apart what they saw as the differential advantages we were trying to achieve in the development of the future joint force. So the interactive nature, again with potential enemies, must be considered when prioritizing defense capabilities.

The third recommendation is to establish a framework for learning. I think what the Department of Defense should do is what the joint force did years ago. And I think Secretary Mattis might have pioneered this at Joint Forces Command, to reinvigorate the joint warfighting challenges, bring those back, and I think we ought to just limit them to twenty first-order challenges. For example, how to sustain freedom of movement and action for the joint force at the end of extended and contested lines of communication.

Just pose that question: How to maintain a high degree of situational understanding against elusive and capable enemy forces in restricted and complex terrain? Just ask the questions. Then we can work on those problems, those challenges together across the joint force, and we can develop integrated interim solutions. We're never going to solve these problems forever because potential enemies will adapt as well.

Interim solutions to those challenges combine multiple technologies. As we know, there's no silver-bullet technology. Any military innovation is based on a combination of several technologies along with new doctrine on how to employ those technologies combined with training and leader development. And so the framework for learning that the warfighting challenges provide allows us to assess how well are we doing in the joint force in coming up with an interim solution to each challenge. Who's lagging behind? What do we need to accelerate? And I think that then you can begin to see and audit the budget back to what you're trying to achieve in terms of your warfighting

capability. So, third, bring back a framework for learning in a focused, sustained, and collaborative manner.

And finally, what we're going to hear more about today is we have to be able to implement. We have to be able to implement these solutions. Our presenters have already alluded to the major impediments to innovating within the cycle of technology and fielding these capabilities as rapidly as we can.

To close, as we look at our ability to deter and fight and win, we obviously have to look at the range of capabilities we need to develop and field the force. But we also should consider the capacity and the size of the force. I think the armed forces are too small. I mean, we have a problem now already with recruiting to make them larger, but I think that's also a leadership issue in terms of asking young Americans to volunteer and helping to bring in the most talented of our young people. And the capacity actually matters a lot. We can talk more about that, but I do think that the assumption on which we've been developing forces has been that we can trade off capacity for more and more exquisite, expensive, and fewer weapons systems.

Mackenzie [Eaglen]'s done an amazing job on this. Her paper ought to be read by everybody. And then, of course, it's readiness as well as capabilities and capacity. You can look good on paper. You could look good in the May Day parade if you're the Russian army. But it turns out they can't fight competently. They can't sustain themselves, they're not well trained, they're not disciplined, they don't have leaders in place. So anyway, I think as we look at the budget, audit the budget, the way to audit it is to get back to the capabilities we need, those interim solutions, and to look at the range of funding lines, a whole bunch of them will be relevant to that particular interim solution, to that challenge that we have to overcome. And then you can really evaluate the degree to which you're adequately invested to ensure the force has the capabilities, capacity, and readiness level necessary to deter conflict and then, if necessary, to fight and win.

**HARRINGTON:** Questions? Comments?

**ROGER ZAKHEIM:** Thank you, I really enjoyed this discussion of the papers. Because time is limited, my comments may come across as glib and provocative, but that's only because of the limitation in time. Wish I had more time to develop them.

First, Michael, I'm glad you pointed out the force planning construct and the continuity between the defense strategies of the Trump and Biden

administrations. One area where I disagree, and I think it follows what H.R. just spoke about, is our force is too small. It is unable to carry out what the strategy calls for, full stop. It simply can't do it. The simultaneity issue is actually focusing on an important decision that Trump's strategy made, which was we're not going to get into at all. I'm talking about today's force measured against the win one and hold another and deter today and prevail tomorrow. We're not even close, and it's getting worse, as H.R. pointed out.

So all these other things that have been discussed are additive to the force that we have today or to the strategy we have today. And even this, we have this huge gap between the force and the strategy that we talk about later that is not being addressed, actually getting worse with an army down to 450,000, less than three hundred ships, and the other numbers with respect to the air force and just the three services. So it's truly a hot mess.

Second, on the point about Ukraine and deterrence by disclosure. Admiral, I just don't see it. I mean, the measure for deterrence is whether the tanks do or do not roll in, and they rolled in. So I just have difficulty seeing how that ultimately helped or addressed the primary function of deterrence, which is preventing someone from going to armed conflict. The Russians did.

Last point, Admiral, I was pleased to hear the shift in your thinking, unfortunately, because the security environment has deteriorated so much. But I think we should all agree here today that it is no longer a national security imperative to make reductions to our deficit through cutting national defense. Let's just all agree. Now the politicians may decide that we have to cut defense. I'm hopeful that the great people at this conference will work hard to prevent that from happening. But the notion that people around this table could advocate that our national security is enhanced by taking defense dollars to reduce the deficit is of a different day and is absolutely not what anyone who's looking at the national security landscape should be advocating or be okay with. And no doubt they'll be elected officials who will try to make that argument, and we should hold them to account for that. Thanks.

**HARRINGTON:** Any of the panel members want to address the comments?

**NADIA SCHADLOW:** I just want to echo Roger's point about the US use of intelligence in the war. Initially, I thought it would be heretical to question the impact of the release of it. Now I feel better about doing so. It has been pointed out very consistently by the administration that the release of intelligence was very, very important. But I don't completely understand. There

were maybe some operational implications of that release, maybe we were able to move satellites as a result and do certain things in different ways, and it might have bolstered, a little bit, the political will of the allies to get them to take Russian actions seriously. But the operational implications of the release of the intelligence are still unclear to me for the reasons Roger pointed out. It did not deter Russia.

**McMASTER:** I think just to defend Admiral Mullen, I think what the intelligence release did do is it took away Putin's narrative that this was a war of NATO aggression. But I think the point that Nadia makes is really important, and it's relevant, too: hard power matters. And if you look at the withdrawal of our forces out of the Black Sea, that was a mistake. We did that because we thought we had to maybe allay Putin's security concerns. We listed all the things we weren't going to do and all the things we weren't going to provide the Ukrainians. Ambiguity in adversaries' calculation of the decision-making process is a good thing for deterrence. And I think we removed a lot of that ambiguity for Putin and, in many ways, in retrospect, essentially inadvertently green-lighted the war.

But the reason I think this is worth talking about just for a moment is it is relevant to deter China as well, vis-à-vis Taiwan. And this is why I'm not a huge fan of removing strategic ambiguity. I think Admiral Mullen said, for example, the American people are going to have a say in that through their representatives in Congress. So even if we were to say now, hey, a hundred percent we're going to defend Taiwan, is that really true? It depends on the circumstances and the American people's will. So anyway, I think ambiguity is a good thing in terms of deterrence. We didn't have that in February of last year.

**MULLEN:** Just briefly, I mean your comments with respect to the two MRC pieces or the win one and hold on the other. But part of that, and this goes back obviously decades for me to when that was a clear focus in the nineties of what we're supposed to do, and then you sort of fast-forward to this, and the forces are too small, and you look at production lines which are gone, you look at munitions we can't get, you look at how we stopped at some level. Even our own munition stocks right now are in trouble.

And there's an underlying piece, and this is what I think has to change and this is up to the political leadership, I think. There's an underlying piece to me that says, are we really serious about thinking we're going to go to war, or



are we just building what we think we might use? Which isn't enough to have a deterrent effect, quite frankly. And I'm not arguing deterrence was great. Clearly, deterrence to Putin, who's a tough nut to figure out, didn't work. It needs to work, in my view. It needs to work with Xi. We need to create the strategic ambiguity. We need to create doubt in his mind for as long as he can look into the future that today's not the right day and do an awful lot in that regard. And I don't think we are doing that in any way, shape, or form.

And then the other comments, the revolution in military affairs, leap-ahead technology, transformation, those are deadly words in terms of getting to the future, and you've got to get to the future. Clearly, we need to develop those capabilities, but everybody runs to those pots of money because people put money in it, and money does drive how the building works in that regard, and the services work, and you don't end up with capabilities.

And then lastly, back to the American people, I believe in the system. I believe we need to go to war if the American people think we should go to war. One of the things that I learned, or what I've argued for Roger, is we need to not increase the revolution in military affairs. I want the strength of the army, which went from 485,000 to 585,000 down to 450,000. And it's natural for the services to always want more force structure. That's how we react. My reaction actually coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan was the opposite for the army. We need to decrease the size of the army to about, I don't know what the number is, 350,000, and this has nothing to do with money. So that the next time we go to war, the president has to convince the American people we're going to go to war and that we'll have to call up a half a million kids to go to war. These wars last longer than three months or six months, they seem to go ten years at a crack.

And thus there's a discussion at every dinner table in the country with an eighteen-year-old son or daughter about is this something we want to do? And that the president and the political leadership bring the American people to the decision, which then goes to Congress to say, yes, we should do that. We haven't done this since World War II. It's that serious. It is the most important decision any president can make. So I'm looking to create that output. And I don't know another way to do that except decrease the size of the army and then require a draft for whatever it's going to take to fight. Because we can put a hundred thousand somewhere for a year, but we can't relieve them. You'll need the draft. There's a host of issues associated with this from a readiness standpoint, from a guard standpoint, I get all that. But quite frankly, how do we motivate the political leadership to get the American people to say

yes, this is right for our future. And Taiwan's right in the center of that discussion as far as I'm concerned.

**McMASTER:** I'll just say this quickly, you can't build a capable land force overnight. I mean you just can't do it. So that's why I think the capacity issue is also relevant to whether or not you're going to win that war. And it's also relevant to how many casualties you're going to take. And you can't develop an NCO [noncommissioned officer] in a year. I mean, you can't do it. So I just think that the army, for example, I'm sure it also applies to other services, finds it's much easier to maintain the level of force than it is to build it up quickly. But I'm going to turn it over to James, I'm giving control back to you.

**O'HANLON:** Well, just one quick point by me. I think that, by the way, Jim Mattis, you also didn't like the term "effects-based operations" (EBO), if I remember correctly. So thank you for all you did on that as well as many other debates.

**McMASTER:** That saying was, just say no to EBO.

**O'HANLON:** Sounds right. On Roger's point, I'm picking up in this discussion, I think, and maybe broadening it for the purpose of the conference, that we probably don't have enough force structure to guarantee a win against China in a Taiwan blockade scenario in particular. However, I'm not sure what force structure does guarantee that win. And so I'm more interested in the kind of improvements to supply infrastructure survivability, C4ISR, etc., than we've been talking about, especially in Panel 1. But it's a good debate.

My point is I think the debate now is between people who think we have a very small but just barely big enough military and those who think we probably do need to push it up a bit. There is really not, to sort of go with the spirit of your earlier comment, a way to see a good, solid analytical case for going much smaller. And we just saw, actually, a good example of an attempt, but even that attempt is designed partly to maybe buy other things, and it's not enough of a radical cut in the army budget. So I think on that general point, I agree with you.

**MICHAEL J. BOSKIN:** My point that we are trying to make in our paper is closely related but with a little bit more nuance. Which is I think that the economics and the budget pressure, and political pressure of the budget are

going to be a big push against a major increase in the defense budget. I think we need it. I think the force structure is too small, but if you want to see one example of what's going on in that regard, the CBO [Congressional Budget Office] last month put out a report saying the force structure is much larger than we need for the 2022 strategy. And they have three alternatives for how to reduce the force structure service by service and unit type by unit type. Mostly double-digit and sometimes large decreases to be consistent with the 2022 strategy.

So just be aware that that's out there from the side I live in and the people I talk to, and I totally agree, there's not a single person in this room I haven't learned a lot from by reading, by talking, etc. And I think the case is very strong that the force structure is, at best, barely adequate and probably needs to increase.

But the other thing we're going to have to do is make a stronger case to the public and reassure Americans that their dollars will be used effectively and efficiently. And the basic thing that [House Speaker Kevin] McCarthy said the other day, well, we can always go after waste. Of course, there's some waste. Maybe some joker even put it in one of the five thousand line items in the budget. I remember what [former US Representative] David Stockman once wrote in the budget about foreign military sales. He said these are loans, which we do not expect to get paid back. He actually said that in the budget. I'm probably one of fifty people that read that. So, in any event, I just think being aware of that environment is going to be vital, but it's going to be a very, very big push against the political pressures in the budget.

**MULLEN:** Michael, can I just make one quick point? I'm just dying to do this. Can we get off the audit issue? And I'm not talking about the audit that H.R. was talking about. I started this with [Roger's] dad in, like 2001. This became a political cudgel to beat the Pentagon to death. If you want to find out how many contractors we have, make us do that, whatever the categories are. But to sign us up with the SEC [the Securities and Exchange Commission, which oversees the audit in the private sector], and I've spent a little time with them as well in the private sector and public company world. There is no guaranteed answer there as well. Make us tell you what you want. But given the amount of money, time, effort, and people since 2001, I think, or 2002, that we have spent trying to figure out how to audit the Pentagon would buy a lot of capability.

**BOSKIN:** Fair point.