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A DISCUSSION WITH CHAIRMAN OF THE
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF GENERAL JOSEPH DUNFORD

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Well, good morning, everyone, and welcome to Brookings. My name is Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program. I have the extraordinary honor today of welcoming the 19th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, to Brookings for a conversation that we'll begin up here and then include you in this period between 10:00 and 11:00 today. Happy spring to all of you on this 70 degree day in Washington.

There's been a lot going on in the world. I'll begin with the fact that just to prove how nice of a guy he is, General Dunford, even though I'm Georgia guy, has not taunted me about the outcome of the Super Bowl yet. He's about the least obnoxious Patriots fan I've ever met. (Laughter)

GENERAL DUNFORD: I was actually waiting for a larger audience. (Laughter) Why would I waste that anxiety? (Laughter)

MR. O'HANLON: He's a native of Boston, as you might have gathered. He grew up there, went to Boston College High School and St. Michael's College, and then Officer Candidate School. Joined the Marine Corps after college graduation. He's a Marine infantry officer by background and profession that commanded at all different levels throughout his career, including the first Marine Expeditionary Force.

As many of you know, he's had four jobs at the four-star level, including commandant of the Marine Corps, commander in Afghanistan, and now again 19th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I could go on, but I think a lot of you would rather hear from General Dunford. So before we get into questions and discussion, please join me in welcoming the chairman to Brookings. (Applause)

So, General, one of the things that I've really benefited from as an analyst trying to make sense of the world is your framework for thinking about threats, the 4+1 frame. And I think many of you, most of you, undoubtedly know it, but it's a straightforward simple frame that there are four major countries we have to worry about: Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran. There's also one transnational threat, which is probably a combination of ISIS, al-Qaida, and broader Salafism or whatever term you want to use.

I wondered if you could just do a quick tour for us of the world. You've been in Azerbaijan recently meeting with the Russian chief of the general staff. You've been dealing with these

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4+1 sets of problems for a year and a half now as chairman. I wonder if you could describe a little bit about how those four threats plus the one have evolved, how you take stock of them right now.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Sure, yeah. First, Mike, maybe just give you a little background on what the framework is and what it isn't. I mean, last year, just like in every endeavor, you need to benchmark yourself against something, and so last year, as we were trying to decide what our priorities would be moving forward for Joint Force development, as we were trying to assess the risks that we currently had in meeting our national security objectives, we came upon looking at the four state threats that you talked about -- Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea -- and violent extremism.

It's important to say that we didn't look at that as a predictive tool. In other words, that wasn't to imply that we were going to fight Russia, China, North Korea. We certainly are in a fight against violent extremism. But what we believed was that if we prepared the Joint Force to deal with one or a combination of those challenges, we would have the right amount of capability and capacity to deal with, most assuredly, the unexpected.

I mean, what I tell people is that if there's one thing I've learned in 40 years of active duty it's a degree of humility about our ability to predict the future. So the one thing I know is that what we'll deal with in the future is probably not one of the 4+1. But again, when you look at the capabilities represented by those 4+1, and particularly today violent extremism, it gives you the full spectrum of challenges we may face.

And so what I tell our folks is, look, you have to buy into the assumption that if we build a Joint Force benchmarked against that 4+1 framework, we'll have in it the inherent capability, responsiveness, and flexibility to deal with the unexpected. So it's probably important to stipulate that.

So what do we see? When we looked at Russia, we saw Russia modernizing their nuclear enterprise, full range of maritime capabilities, modern conventional capabilities, cyber capabilities, space capabilities. And then within the maritime category, even improvements in their undersea. And we also see operational patterns that really we haven't seen since I was a captain aboard an amphibious ship in the mid-1980s in terms of where Russia is deploying to and the nature of their deployments.

And the other thing we see when we look at Russia, of course, is that I believe that we do have a competitive conventional advantage against Russia. I think Russia knows that, particularly if you

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look at the aggregate political, military, and economic capabilities of NATO. And so what do they do? They operate below what I call the threshold of conflict. I describe it as adversarial competition that has a military dimension that falls short of conflict, where they employ unconventional operations, information operations, cyber, certainly a military posture aspect of it, economic coercion and political influence to advance their objectives. And so that's what we see.

And at the end of the day, I think in doing all that, what they seek to do is undermine the credibility of our ability to meet our alliance commitments with NATO and then the cohesion of the NATO alliance would be an objective when we look at Russian activity. And you've heard the term "anti-access/area denial." And so when we look at many of their capability developments, the implications of those developments are that it would limit our ability to move to Europe or then operate within Europe in the context of a NATO response.

And similarly, so I don't take too much time, when we look at China, we see the same types of capability development we see in Russia. Certainly, tracking Chinese investments is a bit more opaque than Russia, but we still see a full range of capabilities, many of them oriented to keep us from moving into the Pacific theater or operating freely within the Pacific theater during a crisis; we're continuing to see.

Clearly, with Iran, similar capabilities in this anti-axis/area denial range, obviously more focused on the Straits of Hormuz as opposed to more broadly as China and Russia's capabilities are.

And then most recently, in North Korea, clearly we see now a combination of both intercontinental ballistic missile capability, as well as an effort to put a nuclear warhead on that intercontinental ballistic missile. So North Korea not only threatens South Korea and not only threatens the region, but now presents a threat to the homeland, as well.

And when I look at probably the most important thing when we look at the implications, the first one is that we need a balanced inventory of capabilities and capacities. As a nation that thinks and acts globally, we can't afford to focus on one area or the other. And so, again, that 4+1 gives us the full range of challenges we may face to include the current challenge against violent extremism.

And then the other point that we can perhaps explore more in other questions is that when I look at those challenges, each of those five, it tells me a couple things about the character of war

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in the 21st century. One is that virtually any conflict we'd be involved with would be in all domains: sea, space, air, land, cyberspace. The second is that it would be transregional, meaning it would cut across multiple what we call our geographic combatant commands, but global regions. And I can't imagine any conflict that we'd be involved with in the future being narrowly focused in one region. It would have transregional implications right away and then multifunctional.

So I think, again, when we look at those 4+1, it helps us understand what priorities we need to have for Joint Force development because we not only look at where we are today, but we look at their capability development, we look at our path of capability development. And at the end of the day, it's all about ensuring that we maintain a competitive advantage that will allow us to advance our interests. And so that's what we use that framework for.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. That's very helpful. I was going to follow up on a couple of those specific issues or threats and then look forward to letting others share in the privilege of asking you some questions.

So before I ask about Russia, though, and the Trump administration's emerging Russia policy, which I think is a complicated, multifaceted issue, I want to just give you a chance I think to reaffirm what I think I heard last week from the Munich conference, Vice President Pence, Secretary Mattis. It sounded like the United States stands fully behind its Article 5 commitment to its NATO allies at this time. Is that a fair reading?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah. I think it's pretty clear the administration, Vice President Pence, Secretary Tillerson, Secretary Mattis, have all reaffirmed our commitment to NATO over the past week. And I certainly, you know, in terms of where I spend my time, we're at least once a quarter meeting with all of my chief defense counterparts as a group. And then throughout the rest of the year, you know, probably 40, 50 percent of my time is with allies and partners, a large chunk of it with NATO. So, you know, I don't think there's any question about our commitment to NATO.

But equally important were the messages that were delivered, and this is what shouldn't be lost in translation. Yes, we're committed to NATO. Two other points. One is burden-sharing and the administration asking for more equitable burden-sharing, particularly meeting the commitments that were made in Warsaw for each of the nations in NATO to meet the 2 percent of their gross domestic product in

defense.

And then the third area which is also important is something we've been working on pretty hard even before the transition of administrations is to make sure that NATO continues to transform to be relevant to the security challenges that we confront today and tomorrow as opposed to the security challenges we confronted yesterday. And that, of course, in NATO terms, they talk about it as 360 degrees, meaning we not only meet the state challenges that NATO might face, but also the non-state challenges that have manifested themselves in terrorist attacks or immigration or other destabilizing activities that we know have had broad political and economic consequences in Europe.

MR. O'HANLON: So if I could, General, I wanted to ask you about the Trump administration's rush of policy. And I say this actually with some appreciation that President Trump is trying to improve the tenor of U.S.-Russian relations, even though that's going to be very hard. And his two predecessors had the same ambition when they came into office.

But if I were to just take a number of the snapshots in the policy right now, we've heard Mr. Trump want to get along with President Putin. We also have, however, the back story of what happened last year in our elections. We then have a number of other comments. U.N. Ambassador Haley has said that there will be no lifting of sanctions on Russia as long as the Crimea issue and more generally the aggression against Ukraine continue. We heard a clear statement on that. We heard, I think, something similar from Secretary Tillerson last week.

Secretary Mattis has said there won't be any military-to-military collaboration, but he was saying that at the same time that you were in Azerbaijan meeting with General Gerasimov, trying to establish at least military-to-military contact. I think I know how this all fits together, but I'd rather hear it in your words, recognizing it's a work in progress. And in fairness to any administration, one month in it's pretty hard to come up with something that's a cohesive, coherent Russia policy, but I'd love to hear you describe it as you see it.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah, first of all, and I'll talk to the military dimension of the relationship with Russia. First of all, for those who don't know, there's a law in place right now that prevents us from having military-to-military cooperation. So there's legislation in the NDAA that prevents that.

I started many months ago, so you should understand that my meeting with my counterpart, my Russian counterpart, last week was not in the context of any kind of a change in policy and had nothing to do with the administration. It really was, and it'd be hard for conspiracy theorists to believe this, that the day I met with Gerasimov that Secretary Tillerson was meeting with the foreign minister and General Mattis was speaking at NATO was coincidence, but it truly was.

And I began in December of 2015 a dialogue with my Russian counterpart on the telephone. We had wanted to meet for some time, and for a variety of reasons I had an opportunity to actually meet in January. I had to cancel that meeting because it was actually the day that the president came to the Pentagon for the first time. And so I cancelled the meeting in January and then we rescheduled it for last week.

My purpose in meeting with my Russian counterpart was to make sure that we mitigated the risk of miscalculation and we opened up lines of communication that would be effective in the event of a crisis contingency. And I think at a minimum our military-to-military relationship should be able to do that.

You know, from my perspective we should have mil-to-mil communications with every nation. And it runs the range of what I just described, mitigate the risk of miscalculation, open lines of communication in a crisis which can be useful, all the way up to relationships designed to develop interoperability and latent capability to integrate to respond to mutual challenges. In the case of Russia, it's in the former category, which is I wanted to make sure we mitigated the risk of miscalculation, open lines of communication.

And the only other area where I think we have some discussions is to say where are there areas of mutual interest where our actions can address those mutual interests? But I wouldn't use the word "cooperation." That was not something we discussed last week nor is it something I've been directed to do.

I would, in the context of Syria as an example, talk about deconfliction. So we have mil-to-mil engagement now with Russia in areas where we're enforcing treaties. People are familiar with that. And on the ground in Syria, we have communications with the Russians, and the primary purpose is to protect our airmen and our folks on the ground and make sure we have a safety channel opened to

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deconflict. And in an increasingly complex, crowded area in Syria, where operations are ongoing, one of the areas that we looked at is making sure that the current safety channel that we have with the Russians, the current communications link that we have between our air operations center and the Russian operations center in Syria is robust enough to mitigate, again, risks to the safety of our airmen and our people on the ground.

So right now, that's kind of where we are with Russia. And I think it's important for people not to read into the military-to-military communications any more than what I've just described. That's what it is. And, again, what's most important is I am restricted by law from cooperating with the Russians at the military-to-military level, which is completely different from a communications channel to do the things I just described.

MR. O'HANLON: Just one follow-up on Russia and then I want to ask a question about Syria and one about China before opening things up. But one of the things we've seen reports of is, of course, the ongoing Russian buzzing of NATO aircraft and ships. And I for one had hoped that some of this might decline a little bit in a Trump administration given that they were hopeful, presumably, that President Trump might be a little friendlier towards them and they didn't need to be quite as provocative. Were you able to raise that kind of an issue? Is that the sort of thing you're comfortable talking about?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Sure. And one thing I would tell you is that in the conversations I've had with my Russian counterpart, we've both agreed not to share publicly the content of those conversations because we didn't want our conversations to be politicized and limit our ability to do what I just spoke about, so that's really important.

However, we do have what we call Incidents at Sea and Air meetings with the Russians every year to address the kind of incidents that you talked about, Mike. And I did reemphasize the need for that ongoing dialogue to be robust. And so the next meeting will be later this year. Naval Forces Europe actually convenes that for us and we meet with the Russians to talk about these incidents and to ensure that there's professional safe conduct both in the air and at sea.

And so, yes, I did emphasize that. And I emphasized the need to make sure that the process that we have in place and the dialogue that we have in place right now is robust and effective in dealing with those types of incidents which we find unacceptable.

MR. O'HANLON: So now moving to Syria, if I could, I'm sure everybody here, like I, would be fascinated by any sneak preview you might want to give us of the famous 30-day review, so that's my first question. But it's not really my main question because I think I know what you're going to say, but I'm also more interested in a bigger question.

We've heard President Trump talk a lot, understandably so, about the need to intensify the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria and perhaps elsewhere. And the famous 30-day review is something he promised for a long time and I know you're working hard at that now. But for those of us and those of you who have fought the wars of the 21st century in the Middle East, one lesson stands out to me maybe even above all others, which is any tactical military success in the absence of a strong political foundation may not be permanent.

So we saw, for example, after the surge in Iraq, we had amazing military success, but then Prime Minister Maliki and others in Iraq were able to essentially eliminate the progress because of the way in which sectarian tensions brewed up again and the Sunnis essentially tolerated the arrival of ISIS.

So I guess my question really is after this 30-day review, which is an understandable first step, what has to come next to come up with more political-military strategies so that any success is durable? And specifically, do we need to bring in Secretary Tillerson and others to think about a strategy to end the Syrian civil war, not just make tactical progress against ISIS?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah. First of all, Mike, it's a great way to ask the question because this plan is a political-military plan. It is not a military plan. And even so far in the development of the plan we've been completely engaged at every level with the State Department. Secretary Mattis has spoken to Secretary Tillerson. I've spoken to Secretary Tillerson. His representatives have been part of the process. The intelligence community has been represented in the process. The Treasury Department will be represented in the process. So this is a military plan.

And as you correctly point out, I think all of us that have participated in this conflicts over the last 15 years realize that anything we do on the ground has to be in the context of political objectives or it's not going to be successful.

What I would tell you, though -- and I can't address the options. We're in the business of

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providing the options to the president and that means the entire team. So we're in the business of providing integrated to the president to deal with the challenge that he's articulated.

But I can tell you how this will be framed. Not only, you know, will it be a whole government approach, but let's talk about the problem we're trying to solve. This is not about Syria and Iraq. It's about a transregional threat. In this particular case we're talking about ISIS, but it's also al-Qaida and other groups that present a transregional threat. And so when we go to the president with options it'll be in the context of a transregional threat.

And I would highlight to you, from my perspective, the three things that make it a transregional threat. There's obviously the flow of foreign fighters. And we estimate probably over 100, 120 countries have provided 45,000 foreign fighters just to Syria and Iraq alone. So that's one element that makes it a transregional threat. The flow of resources is also an area that makes it a -- or a characteristic that makes it a transregional threat. And the third area is the narrative.

So, you know, our plan I think to be successful needs to, number one, cut the connective tissue between regional groups that now form a transregional threat. And so you've got to cut that connective tissue and that connective tissue is those characteristics I just described.

And then, working in combination with local forces and coalition forces, drive the threat down to the level where local law enforcement and security forces can deal with that threat. And therefore, first and foremost, it's incapable then of planning and conducting operations against the United States, which is, at the end of the day and I think unapologetically, our first priority is to protect the homeland and the American people from this threat. But also that's not inconsistent with trying to help our allies and partners to do the same.

MR. O'HANLON: I'm going to have one more follow-up on Syria and then my final question on China. So as people have started to think about political elements of a Syria strategy, the president himself has talked about safe zones. Secretary Clinton had talked about safe zones. Of course, that begs the question of how do you create a safe zone and protect it?

And also, we have the looming issue of President Assad's future, where President Obama and President Erdoğan and others were very, very adamant that he had to go. And yet, we haven't figured out a way to push him out and he seems like he's in a stronger position than before.

Putting all this together, does this require some -- that the Syria strategy options at least require or consist of not just the stepped up military campaign, but even thinking about maybe autonomous regions in the east and north of Syria that might be negotiated with Russia and Assad, that might allow the Sunnis to live in some sense under local governance, sort of like Iraqi Kurdistan under the Saddam period? Are those kinds of ideas even in the mix?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Mike, you know, I won't talk to specific ideas, but what you bring up is a really important point and that is this, and this is as we provide options to the president, this is something we're focused on. We need to think about how do the facts on the ground support the political process in Geneva that's going to address the long-term stability and security inside of Syria? And so the grievances of civil war have to be addressed. The safety and humanitarian assistance that needs to be provided to people have to be addressed. And then the multiple divergent stakeholders' views need to be addressed.

And I think we all know, I mean, it's about as complex an environment as it can be. If you just look at you've got Iran there, you've got Russia there, you have the Syrian regime obviously, Turkish concerns, Kurdish concerns, Arab concerns, Shia concerns, Sunni concerns. So all of that has to be -- and so what I think is what you're getting at is we do need to have a vision of how our military actions set conditions on the ground that actually then become the platform from which Secretary Tillerson goes to Geneva to come up with a political solution.

So, again, I think all those variables have to be addressed and I couldn't agree with you more.

MR. O'HANLON: so my last question's about China and then we'll open things up. And so as I look at China, this has obviously been a great concern of candidate Trump, President Trump, across all aspects of the relationship. And even though sometimes it's been a little unsettling to watch the process, I have to acknowledge the issues the president's raised are all pretty legitimate: the nature of the economic relationship, China's relationship with North Korea, China's behavior in the South China Sea.

So I wanted to put two things on the table and ask you to speak to China. In his confirmation hearings, at that time not-yet Secretary of State Tillerson talked about how we had to

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prevent China from further militarizing the islands that it had largely created or reclaimed in the South China Sea. And that was a pretty strong statement and that got me thinking, you know, how do you actually do that short of war?

And then Secretary Mattis went to the region on his first trip overseas as secretary of defense, a trip generally seen as very, very successful by most people, and he talked about the South China Sea himself. And he said I believe we can handle that largely through diplomatic means.

And so I'm trying to, recognizing that Mr. Tillerson wasn't even secretary of state yet when he made those comments in his confirmation hearing, I'm still trying to fit the pieces together and understand how and what kind of military enablers we have to provide -- you know, we the country have to provide -- the president so that he can successfully handle the South China Sea diplomatically and not have to revert to the kind of means that some people have alluded to, including Mr. Tillerson.

GENERAL DUNFORD: At least when I listen to him, Mike, I didn't see an inconsistency between what then Mr. Tillerson said before he became the secretary of state and what General Mattis said. I think most people know that there are a number of claimants to the territories in the South China Sea and we are not one of the claimants to the territory in the South China Sea. And we have for a long time said that the right way to handle that was through the framework of international law, and that was the -- you know, via the Hague ruling last year that specifically related to Scarborough Shoal, one of the contested territories in the South China Sea.

So I think what Secretary Mattis was saying was that these territories, which are contested, that needs to be addressed politically through a legal framework consistent with international law. And when Secretary Tillerson said something needed to be done with it, I didn't immediately jump to a military solution.

I think completely separate from the South China Sea we have to talk broadly about the purpose of U.S. military posture in the Pacific. And at the strategic level it's nothing more and nothing less than a posture sufficient to advance our interests in the region. One of our interests is meeting our alliance commitments in the region, deterring conflict in the region, and setting the conditions for us to have, which is what we always talked about with the Pacific, they're a Pacific nation, that we have, you know, very strong economic interests in the region, very strong social and cultural interests in the region.

And so the conditions that we set with our military posture are designed to advance those interests.

So it's not designed specifically for the South China Sea. Our posture in the Pacific as a whole is designed for our broader interests, one of which is, you know, the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes.

And in the meantime, the second thing we do, probably more specifically, is we exercise our right of navigation and the international community's right of navigation, and our military posture is designed to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows to make it clear that that's the regime that we recognize in the Pacific.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. I'm going to cheat and add one more question in a broad, sweeping, concluding way before going to you, which is your 4+1 framework that you've explained so clearly this morning I think is very helpful. And as you say, it really covers a lot of not just those five particular threats, but a lot of other potential threats. But if there was going to be one more threat that made your list of the top six that you didn't include, what might it have been?

And I think of Admiral Mullen famously saying that the debt was a national security threat. I think of a lot of people talking about climate change and rising oceans and the encroachment of, you know, those kinds of issues onto many coastal regions. We think of burgeoning populations around the world and megacities, something General Odierno talks a lot about. We think about Pakistan, not an enemy, mostly a friend we hope, but a complex country with nuclear weapons and a complex relationship with us in the Afghanistan theater, where you commanded forces, of course.

And so I wonder if there was one obvious next threat that if you were going to have a list of six top threats that you would have added.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah. You know, and your question was actually the answer. And the word that Secretary Mattis used recently, which I subscribe to, is "solvency" is what he's talked about. And so I think that that probably aligns with what Admiral Mullen said. And I think we all recognize that the economic strength of our nation is the foundation that we have to build military capability and advance security. So just speaking about it strictly in a national security context, our capabilities capacities, that is what we can do and how much we have to do it with, are inextricably linked to the strength of our economy and the stability of the budgets that we have.

And so I think I'd probably use the word "solvency" to say that, you know, if I had to add one more thing to the list, it would be that.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Okay, please wait for a microphone and identify yourself before asking a question. We'll start there with the gentleman right next to where you are. Yes.

MR. BERTUCA: Good morning. Tony Bertuca from Inside Defense. General, Secretary Mattis has discussed trying to create a new force-sizing construct for the military. How much larger do you think the military needs to be? How much do you predict it will grow? And what should that new force-sizing construct look like? Thank you.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah. Look, I think probably importantly, when Secretary Mattis spoke about a new force-sizing construct I think he also talked about a new defense strategy, which is his responsibility. And so I think what's important is that we get the strategy piece in place first and only then can we talk about a force-sizing construct.

I would tell you today that, you know, we have a national military strategy. We have requirements that we are meeting today. We have contingency plans against which we benchmark the capabilities and capacities of force. And we do have, as the chiefs have made pretty clear in testimony, we do have certain areas where we feel like the force is not adequate in capacity or size.

But I think what's really important before I would talk about growth with specificity is that we give General Mattis a chance to put his thumbprints on a defense strategy from which will flow the force-sizing construct, that is the size of the force and the capabilities of the force to meet that strategy. And then we'll make some specific recommendations as to what priorities we ought to have in growing the force to meet the defense strategy.

MR. O'HANLON: Over here, please.

MS. SLAVIN: Thanks, Mike. I'm Barbara Slavin from the Atlantic Council. General, I'd like to draw you out a little bit more on Iran. Have you seen any change in their behavior in Persian Gulf since General Flynn put them "on notice?" And I think the United States has the USS Cole now off the coast of Yemen.

And what is your view on the notion of designating the IRGC as a terrorist organization given that Iran is already a designated state sponsor? Is it really a necessary move? Thank you.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Sure. I'll answer the first part of your question and I won't answer the second part of the question, but I'll tell you why I won't answer the second part of the question.

No, I haven't detected a change in Iran's behavior. You know, one thing I say, and I don't say it flippantly, is that, you know, from my perspective the major export of Iran is actually malign influence across the region. They've got a very aggressive proxy war. We see that in Yemen. We see their influence in Syria. We see their malign influence in Lebanon as well as in Iraq and the rest of the region. So I haven't seen a change certainly in the past month. This is a pattern of behavior that has manifested itself over many years.

And as to what economic or political measures may be taken to moderate Iran's behavior, I'll leave that to others. My lane is the military dimension. And so what we have made sure is that within the United States Central Command that has responsibility for Iran, our military posture is there to make sure we have freedom of navigation through the Straits of Hormuz and that we deter conflict and crisis in the region, and we advance our interests to include our interests in dealing with violent extremism of all forms.

MR. O'HANLON: Over here in the fourth row -- or fifth row, I'm sorry. Thanks.

MS. VON HOHENSTAUFEN NOLL: Thank you. I'm Theodora von Hohenstaufen Noll. I manage a defense program for the Commonwealth of Virginia, and I appreciate your comments on our commitment to our NATO partners. I do have a question about that relative to is our support unequivocal? In that you mentioned there needs to be the greater burden-sharing and there's tremendous focus on meeting the 2 percent threshold of GDP. However, according to the 2014 Wales Summit Declaration, Section 14, it's the third bullet point under the second bullet point, relative to our partner states that do not meet that 2 percent threshold, it says that they should move towards the 2 percent guideline within a decade. So we're hearing a lot in the narrative of burden-sharing, that they need to meet the 2 percent threshold, but there's no mention of they have a decade within which to do so.

And at the point in time that the alliance is looking to expand and bring on smaller states, such as Montenegro, and their economies are not necessarily in the highest standing, are we creating problems in terms of adding to the Russian threat narrative by taking on these smaller countries that can't

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necessarily meet their 2 percent GDP currently? Should we look for alternate arrangements, some type of liaison office with them, so that we're not poking the Russian bear? Or are we really committed to NATO within the 10 years that we give them under Section 14?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Okay. First of all, with regard to our commitment to NATO, I think the administration over the past month has made it clear that we'll meet our Article 5 commitments and the full responsibilities that we have as a member of the alliance today.

The administration's been equally clear that they want to make sure all members of the alliance fairly carry the burden of defending. I think General Mattis' line was a pretty good line when he was over there, saying that he can't care more for the children of Europe than the European nations do.

Interestingly enough, my understanding is Montenegro already does spend 2 percent of their GDP on defense, which is an aside.

I'm well aware, without having spent as much time on the language as you have, although I have read it, that it was aspirational and a goal that was laid out for NATO. I think what we have seen with the Trump administration now is increased pressure, recognizing the challenges. Again, this is all about transforming NATO to be relevant to meet the security challenges that we confront today; a recognition that in order to remain viable, in order to remain credible, in order to deter conflict in Europe, we need to make sure that NATO meets its requirements for defense spending.

So I won't speak certainly or try to say what the president meant to say, I'm not going to do that. But I would say that what you've read is not inconsistent with what I heard from the vice president, the secretary of state, Secretary Mattis, or anything else President Trump has said. What he has said is that his expectation is that NATO nations carry their fair share of the burden in the alliance and that all 28 nations today inside the alliance, with Montenegro would be the 29th were that to happen, but all 28 nations in the alliance carry a fair share of the burden.

And as you know, the United States spends quite a bit more than 2 percent of their gross domestic product on defense. We represent the largest contributor to NATO. You know, I think it's fair to say we're the backbone of the alliance from a security perspective. And I think what President Trump has said and we've all taken to heart is he wants to make sure that the Europeans step up and contribute, you

know, more to our common defense.

MR. O'HANLON: Tony. Against the wall.

MR. CAPACCIO: Hi, Tony Capaccio with Bloomberg News. To what extent does your plan, this military-political plan, for Iraq assume an enduring U.S. troop presence à la what we have in North/South Korea albeit on a smaller number? Will the U.S. maintain a footprint there in perpetuity?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Tony, I'm going to disappoint you and just go back and say that, you know, we're in the business of providing options to the president, and that's what we're doing. So with regard to specificity as to what exactly we'll do and what our force posture will be, I'm not in the position to talk about that.

MR. CAPACCIO: But conceptually, has the Iraqi government signaled they think there's a need for an enduring U.S. troop presence?

GENERAL DUNFORD: We have, as has NATO, begun a dialogue about a long-term commitment to grow the capacity, maintain the capacity of Iraqi security forces, but no decisions have been made yet. And again, we'll bring options to the president and he'll have an opportunity to choose those options and that'll then involve a dialogue with the Iraqi government.

But, yes, Iraq has begun to speak and you've heard Prime Minister Abadi speak about the international community continuing to support defense capacity-building in NATO terms, building partnership capacity in our terms. But no decisions have been made.

MR. CAPACCIO: Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: We'll stay here in that same row, the gentleman in the blue tie.

MR. TOMLINSON: Lucas Tomlinson, Fox News. General Dunford, for Americans watching at home can they expect more U.S. troops will go to Syria to defeat ISIS?

GENERAL DUNFORD: So the same answer to a different question. (Laughter) I'm in the business of providing the president with options and we're prepared to do that. And we've been given a task to go to the president with options to accelerate -- accelerate -- the defeat of ISIS specifically, but obviously other violent extremist groups, as well. And so we will go to him with a full range of options from which he can choose.

MR. TOMLINSON: That includes more U.S. troops, sir?

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GENERAL DUNFORD: I will go to the president with options. (Laughter)

MR. O'HANLON: We'll go over to the first row here to the woman in purple.

MS. WERTHEIM: Thank you. I'm Mitzi Wertheim. I'm a social anthropologist by training, so I'm going to ask a very different question. I'm going to give you a challenge, which is Apple Computer has the best saying, which is, "If you don't know, ask. We all learn together."

I came to the Pentagon 40 years ago. My sense, and it still holds, that asking a question shows your ignorance. I think we have to reward curiosity, but you are going to have to give people permission. So if you were to send out a message to all of the defense departments saying I want you to put on the wall of every room that we own, "If you don't know, ask; we all learn together," you would change the behavior and increase the speed of learning in defense. And in a world that is changing so fast, this might be worth it. They're a good model.

GENERAL DUNFORD: So let me maybe just say something that would set that tone and I would say this sincerely. So 40 years ago, I was a second lieutenant, right? And my level of confidence that I had all the answers was right up here. (Laughter) And my level of experience was down here. And I think arguably, if nothing else, today my level of experience is up here and my level of confidence that I have all the answers actually has an inverse relationship right now. (Laughter)

And immediately following this, Mike's been kind of enough to get some experts on Russia together so I can talk to them. I spend a fair amount of my time asking other people questions because most of the problems that we're dealing with today don't lend themselves to simple solutions. The only people that have simple solutions to complex problems are refugees from accountability. If you're actually responsible for something, you actually have to take into account all aspects of the problem.

So I take your point, that is a tone that we need to set in the department. Intellectual curiosity should be viewed as a strength.

MS. WERTHEIM: It should be rewarded.

GENERAL DUNFORD: And rewarded, I couldn't agree more. And I like to think in our -- and one of the areas I'm responsible for is joint professional military education. And I like to think that we've instilled that in our schoolhouse. But I will take your challenge and your question as an opportunity

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to ask some questions about whether or not we really are taking that to heart and how we're doing. But I couldn't agree with you more.

MS. WERTHEIM: It needs to be advertised.

GENERAL DUNFORD: We need to be a learning organization.

MR. O'HANLON: The gentleman in the back row standing.

MR. HAIDI: Thank you so much. My name is Haled Haidi from Al Ghad TV. There's few reports, especially in Wall Street Journal, mention that the Trump administration has asked Egypt to host a combined Arab force that would work with Israel against Iran. How true is that?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah, I can't comment on that. I don't know anything about it. I'm not failing to respond because I'm hiding information. I don't know anything about that.

MR. O'HANLON: Over here in the sixth row, the gentleman in the gold tie, my friend. And then after that we'll go to Pete Chutley and then we'll work back this way.

MR. TABEL: Thank you. Joe Tabet with Al Hurra. General, talking about the new plan to defeat ISIS, should we expect major alterations in the U.S. strategy in Syria? For example, should we expect a reduction or elimination of the U.S. support, U.S. military support, to the Kurds or the Syrian opposition?

GENERAL DUNFORD: You know, honestly, I'm not trying to be evasive, but I find myself answering this question similar to a couple of previous questions. This is an incredibly complex environment. Everything we do or fail to do will have second and third effects. What we are trying to do in outlining options for the president is to outline the options that exist for dealing with the ISIS threat, you know, the most immediate and most virulent strain of extremism right now that we're dealing with, but also to clearly outline for him the consequences, the opportunity cost, the risk associated with each one of the options that we present him.

So I think it is fair to say that we'll provide him a full range of options. And when we provide him options, we'll talk about the importance of a Turkish ally and making sure that our plans are consistent with maintaining a strong alliance with Turkey. We'll talk about the implications of the Kurdish challenge in the region, which, as you know, is not isolated to one particular Kurdish group, but any Kurdish groups that have interests. We'll talk about the complexity of dealing with Turkish versus Iranian

interests in the region, the presence of Russia, and all of those things.

So, yes, we'll address those issues, but I'm not prepared to say whether or not there'll be a change because the decider is going to be the president of the United States. Those of us that work for him -- to include the secretary of state, the secretary of treasury, the secretary of defense, and others in the cabinet -- are tasked right now with coming up with an integrated political-military plan that in the context of the threat, but also in the context of our long-term interests in the region, provides the best way to balance those two: the need to immediately address the threat to the homeland and to our allies from ISIS and, at the same time, do things in the region that make sense in a broader context and advance our interests in the region and advance stability and security in the region.

What we don't want to do is bring him options, and I would say options like this would not be feasible or acceptable, we don't want to bring options to him that solve one problem only to create a second problem. And we get tasked to look at that.

And, you know, what I've said to people is if you would, you know, take Webster's and rewrite it and take the word "wicked" and say describe the word "wicked," I think you'd have to look at the problem we're dealing with right now with regard to ISIS in the Middle East in terms of the various perspectives that have to be addressed in order to effectively solve that problem.

So I can tell you that in a very thoughtful way we're wrestling with all of those issues. But at the end of the day, we can't be paralyzed by tough choices. We've got to frame those tough choices for the president. We've got to clearly articulate the consequences of those choices and then give him a chance in the near future to select one of those, to do what he's tasked us to do, and that is to bring to him something that will accelerate the campaign.

MR. O'HANLON: I'm going to follow up on that before I go to Pete very quickly. And you may or may not want to answer this, but I'm just trying to, you know, understand where we are at this juncture. I remember that President Obama took three months to consider the proposal of General McChrystal for different options for Afghanistan and we were already there. We already had 68,000 troops. So that kind of a big decision had already been made, but he still took three months. He was criticized for that. I tend to think he had a good reason to take three months because it was a hard problem.

Is it fair to -- President Trump took a lot of criticism in the late fall for not taking his President's Daily Briefing and, you know, he had other things on his mind, understandably. Is he going to use perhaps some of these conversations with you to sort of learn about the region? In other words, is the presentation of options partly a way to do a deep dive on Syria that he maybe hasn't even had a chance to do yet?

GENERAL DUNFORD: I'm actually glad you asked that question because this response to the executive order is not the beginning or the end of the dialogue that we've had with the president. We've already, since the president has been the president, made changes in the campaign. We make them every day. It's a dynamic environment and we make adaptations. Some don't require his authority; some do require his authority.

I view the development of options now as an opportunity to integrate all of the government so that we're all on -- you know, part of it is setting a common baseline of understanding for this problem set. In the process of responding to the executive order, I think that's one of the positive outcomes of doing this. And you'd expect any new administration to do that.

But the one thing I would say is this is not -- I wouldn't at all compare this to a General McChrystal Afghanistan decision on troop levels. This is an opportunity for the administration to look at an enduring challenge, to reflect back on what we had been doing over the last couple of years, to think about this problem in a broader context, and then to move forward and do things in a way that accelerates our progress against extremism. Again, what is the most important thing we're trying to do? Mitigate the threat to the American homeland, the American people, and our allies and partners, and, at the same time then, move forward.

So I view this as an ongoing dialogue. Look, it's my responsibility. I think we'd be failing if it wasn't. Solving the problem of ISIS should be an ongoing dialogue to adapt to a very dynamic threat in a very dynamic political-military environment.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Pete.

MR. CHUTLEY: Thank you very much for coming. I'm Pete Chutley, retired State Department and retired from Brookings. You in the military for the last 20 years have borne a huge burden fighting constant wars. But it's only been borne by less than half of 1 percent of the country; 99.5

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percent of us are not doing anything other than paying taxes. So are you worried about that? Are you concerned that such a small percentage of the American public is engaged with you in supporting the military? Should there be something like national service so that other young people feel connected to the country and serving national interests?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah. The first thing I'd say, and I'm not pandering to the crowd here, but I would say, yes, there is less than 1 percent of the American people serving in uniform, but there's not less than 1 percent of the American people involved in trying to advance our national interests overseas. And when you look at the sacrifice of the intelligence community, you look at the sacrifice of your counterparts in the State Department, you know, quite honestly I don't think we ought to lose sight that they are an integral part of this. And frankly, I view us as in support of them, particularly those in the State Department.

My concern with the percentage of the American people that serve in uniform is less about the percentage of people that serve in the military than it is about the American people's awareness of the service, the sacrifice of our young men and women, and then the propensity of other young men and women to serve. I think what we all want to ensure is that we recruit and retain the highest quality men and women that we possibly can in the U.S. military. And so an awareness of the option of serving in uniform and appreciation for the value of serving in uniform, people viewing that as an honorable thing to do and something that's recognized and appreciated by the nation is much more important to me than the percentage.

And so what I'd want is young men and women across the country, you know, whether they want to pursue a career as an enlisted member of the force or whether they want to pursue a career as a civilian member of the force or as an officer would have the consciousness to have that in the front of their mind as they're making decisions about whether they're going to serve 4 years or 20 or 30 years. And so that's one of the things actually that I've asked our senior leadership to do is to stay engaged across the country so that we do continue.

And I'm proud to tell you, and I say this without hesitation, I'm proud to tell you today, yes, it's a small percentage, but I'm pretty proud of the quality of the men and women that we have in uniform right now, and I think equally concerned and focused on making sure we maintain that quality in

the future, which would be, again, my largest concern about that less than 1 percent.

MR. CHUTLEY: National service?

GENERAL DUNFORD: You know, there are a number of initiatives that talk about National Service. In fact, I think ironically you mentioned Stan McChrystal, and he's decisively engaged in one of them. And, you know, I think that's very admirable idea and I'm fully supportive of people. And I grew up in a generation, you know, of people that viewed service as something you should do as a responsibility. I mean, that's certainly why I came in the U.S. military. I certainly never intended to make it a career, but when I grew up, you know, I was raised with, hey, you need to do something for people other than yourself. And so I think the idea of national service and the idea of contributing to our nation in whatever capacity your skills make you able to do that is a good thing.

MR. O'HANLON: Here in the fourth row, a woman two people in.

MS. HOUCK: Hi, thanks for coming. Caroline Houck, Defense One. I wanted to follow up on something you said just a bit earlier, that there have already been changes in the campaign against the Islamic State and terrorism. That doesn't quite reconcile with some of the messages we've been hearing coming out of the coalition and the Pentagon broadly that wait for the 30-day review. That was when we were going to start seeing changes. So can you just talk a little bit more about what those types of changes are and if they're coming down from the new administration? Thanks.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah. I'm glad you gave me a chance to clarify because what I really was referring to is that in Iraq and Syria and elsewhere it's a dynamic environment. Every day there's adjustments being made. Some of those adjustments are being made at the lowest tactical level based on the judgment of commanders within the authorities that they have. Other decisions are made by the secretary of defense; others made by the president.

I mean, I think since Secretary Mattis has been there, you know, we have a routine process called the -- I won't bore you with Pentagon process, but the Sec Def Orders Book, where General Votel will ask for a capability to deploy. We'll go to the secretary, he'll make a decision, and we'll deploy that capability. And we've done that probably three or four times since Secretary Mattis has been the secretary of defense.

So we make adjustments in the employment of our capability. We rotate forces on a

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routine basis. We change the force disposition. We change the posture. We change the communications. I mean, those things are being done every day. So I wasn't referring to the broader strategic vector of the campaign so much as trying to articulate that there's a tactical and operational and strategic level. And if you stay still in this environment, you are not competitive, and that's really what I was alluding to.

MR. O'HANLON: Question in the back, the gentleman in the brown jacket right in the middle, please. We'll have time for maybe one more after that, I think.

MR. NIU: Ping Niu for (inaudible). You know, USS aircraft (inaudible) Carl Vinson is sitting in South China Sea. And China's defense minister's spokesman said that we wish the United States could honestly respect the sovereignty and security concerns of countries in the region and respect the efforts of countries in the region to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea. So could you comment on this?

And the second question, what's the future of the military-to-military relationship between the United States and China in Donald Trump's administration? Thank you.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Sure. On the first question what I would tell you is that we do respect sovereignty in the region and we respect what we call access to the global commons, and that is, again, the air, space, and the sea that's accessible to all. And so the presence of that aircraft carrier is designed to do what I spoke about earlier, which is exercise our right to operate, to sail, to fly wherever international law allow. That's what we're doing and we demonstrate that routinely to maintain the sanctity of that framework which has served us so well for over seven decades in the Pacific.

With regard to our military-to-military relationships with China, I think that positive military-to-military relationships are important. I have spoken to my Chinese counterpart and conducted a video teleconference and I expect that we'll have a face-to-face visit sometime in the near future. I've met with the deputy and I'm sure we'll have a chance to meet my counterpart in the near future.

So as I described earlier, our military-to-military relationships are informed by our national objectives. And so the nature of our military-to-military relationship with China right now will be very consistent with our political relationship with China. But at a minimum open lines of communication to mitigate the risk miscalculation and to address some of the incidents at sea and in the air that we've seen,

much like we talked about Russia earlier, we've seen similar incidents with China.

And I want to do as a military leader all I can do to mitigate the risk of tactical actions having adverse strategic consequences. That's the framework in which we'll begin to develop our relationships with China.

And just as an aside, we just completed an exercise in Thailand called the Exercise Cobra Gold. And both China and India, as well as other nations in the Pacific, all exercise there. And one of the areas I think we can all agree on in the Pacific is the response to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief incidents. And so that's an area that we can find common ground with all of our friends in the Pacific, China included.

MR. O'HANLON: I think we'll take just one more question. The woman in the red hair just a couple of -- yeah, right there. Oh, Kim. Yeah, hi.

MS. DOZIER: Kim Dozier, The Daily Beast. General Dunford, several times you've referred to "violent extremism" as something that you fight, but I haven't heard you use the phrase "radical Islam" or "radical Islamic terrorism." Is that something that you would see the military adopt in a Trump administration? Why that choice?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah. Every time I've used that term, I mean, that is an element of it. You know, there's a Sunni brand of violent extremism that we've seen. There's a Shia brand of violent extremism that we've seen. You ought not to read anything other into my use of the words "violent extremism" other than really trying to articulate exactly the point I'm making now and you've given me a chance to, that it involves al-Qaida, it involves Hezbollah, it involves ISIS and other groups that present a transregional threat.

So, you know, again, if you talked about a specific group I'd give you a more accurate descriptor. I was using the term "violent extremism" to refer to all of those groups that as a result of extremists, that is individuals who take up arms to advance political and/or religious objectives, who use violence to advance those, that's what I was using the term "violent extremism" to imply. Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: So as we conclude here, and speaking of nicknames and such, I want to thank everyone for avoiding inside White House drama questions. But I'm going to try one, which is we know that President Trump likes the nickname Mad Dog Mattis. Maybe even more than the secretary

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himself does. Has the president learned that your nickname is Fighting Joe and does he like to use that expression?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Mike, the only one I've ever heard use that expression is my wife. (Laughter)

MR. O'HANLON: Will everyone please join me in thanking the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs? (Applause)

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