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A CONVERSATION ON DEFENSE POLICY
WITH REP. SETH MOULTON

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PARTICIPANTS:

Introduction and Moderator:

MICHAEL O'HANLON
Senior Fellow and Director of Research, Foreign Policy
The Brookings Institution

Keynote Address:

THE HONORABLE SETH MOULTON (D-MA)
U.S. House of Representatives

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Brookings. I am Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy Program and it's my honor to MC this event with Congressman Seth Moulton today. Seth is beginning his third term in the sixth district in Massachusetts, which includes his native town of Marblehead. He is, as many of you know, a four-time Iraq War veteran who joined the Marine Corps after graduating from Harvard, and before that Phillips Academy, studying physics at Harvard and deciding that with all that background what he wanted to do most was serve his country, not knowing that 9/11 was just around the corner.

I think many of us know about Seth's very important work in congress. He has received awards for among the most effective -- I think the most effective freshman member a couple of years ago. Also he has worked on issues such as getting veterans their healthcare faster, making government more efficient in seemingly mundane but important matters like travel. These are some of the bills and subject areas that he has worked on. He has been important, of course, in the last few months in kicking off a big debate in the democratic party, or contributing in a way that's often been controversial, but I think admirable and necessary about what the Party's should be. And now he's even getting mentioned occasionally in the presidential speculation about 2020. And I will leave it to you to decide if that topic comes up today. I'm going to focus more in my discussion with Congressman Moulton on national security.

But first he will give some remarks to frame his thinking about the Nation's defense priorities and foreign policy priorities in this important time as the democrats have now taken charge of the House and we have a need for a whole new debate with new people and new voices. We all still mourn the passing of Senator

McCain, which just underscores the importance of having new voices in a national security debate.

And so let me just briefly add one more word of introduction before the Congressman starts with his remarks. I just want to add a word about how I first met him. I was lucky enough to be on a research trip to Iraq in the summer of 2007 which my good friend and colleague, Ken Pollack, and Congressman Moulton, who I think was then on his third tour incoming, had been chosen by General Petraeus, along with my good friend Ann Gildroy -- Ann Gildroy Fox now -- to go an essentially do a small team deployment with just one or two other Marines to an Eastern Shia dominant province of Iraq where there was hope that perhaps some of the same Sunni awakening dynamics that had begun in Al Anbar could be spread to other parts of the country. And Seth was ultimately involved in the so-called March of the Knights, or the effort to try to liberate Basra from many of the Shia militias, which was a crucial moment in the Iraq war in those following months.

So Petraeus chose Seth and Ann Gildroy for this job because he recognized their bravery, their ability to deal at a military and a tactical level, but also at a strategic and a political level with the important Iraqi actors. And at this point Seth Moulton is at the tender age of about 28 years old back in 2007. So this was an indication of just how much General Petraeus knew he had a remarkable talent. And I was grateful to be able to spend the better part of 10 days learning about Iraq with him at my side and as my mentor.

So please, without further ado, join me in welcoming Congressman Seth Moulton to Brookings. (Applause)

MR. MOULTON: Mike, thank you very much. It is an honor to be here,

it's an honor to be here with you. And this weather we have today, this dreary, rainy day is 100 times better than the average day in Iraq with the heat. So it's a nice change.

Thank you all so much for having me. And I'll be brief with my remarks because I want to get to a discussion with all of you. But not too long ago I was speaking at an advanced manufacturing facility up in my district, a place that actually made some of the gear that my Marines and I used in Iraq. And a group about this size gathered on the factory floor, the factor workers who did this work, and I praised them for their contribution for our national defense, and then I opened it up to questions. And there was silence. And I implored them, I said you don't have to ask easy questions, you can ask the hardest questions on your mind. Ask whatever you'd like. And there was still silence. And then finally a woman in the back raised her hand and she said who are you. (Laughter) And so I realized that I should start with an introduction and explain a little bit about who I am, why I'm here, why I've signed up for one of the most unpopular jobs in the United States, U.S. Congressman, and what I'd like to speak about this morning.

The reason I got into politics goes back to my time in the Marines. I decided to serve the country while I was in college, and I picked the Marines a few months after graduation, in June of 2001. I had no idea that 9/11 would happen a few months after that, or that I would serve four tours in the Iraq War. But while I was over there I learned a lot that has helped make me who I am today. I came to much more deeply appreciate what we have here in America, a free press, law and order, individual rights, have so much more meaning when you come to know people who don't have those things every day. I also realized that I loved serving, that having a job with a purpose bigger than myself meant a lot. And I enjoyed going to work every single day to serve our country. Even in the midst of a war I disagreed with, my work impacted the lives of

other people every day. And fundamentally that's what motivated me to get back into public service and to come to congress.

But there is a third lesson that I learned in Iraq that's a little bit harder to come to terms with, and that is what it means to feel let down, even betrayed by political leaders in Washington. Playing politics with war and foreign policy takes on a whole new meaning when you know some of the people who die as a result. We must do everything we can to prevent that from happening again, and that is why I care so much about our foreign policy and about moral leadership. And I have never been more concerned about both.

Two years ago, in the early days of this Administration, I gave a foreign policy speech called No Better Friend, No Worse Enemy, centering on three themes. We need to be a stronger ally to our key partners, like NATO, we need to be a stronger adversary to our key foes, like Russia, and to do so effectively we need to embrace next generation defense technologies. Now, it's very difficult for a young democrat in Washington today to get the Trump Administration to pay attention to anything you say. Even as one of the most bipartisan members of congress, I haven't been even invited to the White House for a single meeting in the last two years. But the Administration must have read my speech quite carefully because they have succeeded in these two short years of doing the exact opposite of everything I prescribed. The Administration has alienated our allies, cowered to our key adversaries, and abandoned our alliances.

In so doing it has torn down the foreign policy values that two generations of American leadership built. In that earlier speech I called for reassuring our allies and confronting our enemies more forcefully; basically I wanted to rebuild the foreign policy that we had before this Administration. But now I realize that that's not

possible. And inherent in this disaster is an opportunity. When your old house gets damaged by a bad renter, or in this case, a terrible president, you don't just restore it to look like it was built in 1950, you take the opportunity to renovate it. You don't just rebuild, you build something new, something more relevant, something better. That's what's required of our foreign policy today.

To do so requires a reexamination of our assumptions and a re-grounding in our core principles. In with the new and, more difficult but as important, out with the old. This means recognizing the new arms and new alliances we need and the old weapons and old wars we don't. I'll focus on these three areas where we need next generation thinking, where we need newer, smarter, stronger arms, alliances, and arms control.

First, our arms. There were times when I was fighting on the ground in Iraq at the pointy tip of the spear, as we like to say, and our insurgent or terrorist enemies were beating us on the internet. That was unacceptable then and it's worse now. We have to stop fighting today's battles on yesterday's battlefields. Today we face great power competition from two adversaries like we haven't seen since the lead up to World War II. And we run the serious risk of being entirely leapfrogged by China and Russia with new technologies. China is not trying to compete with our 11 carrier Navy by building 12 or 13 or 14 of their own. One thousand two hundred thirty-eight -- that's the number we should have top of mind. That is our best estimate for how many Chinese anti carrier missiles you can buy for the price of one U.S. carrier.

Here's another way to look at our colossal surface Navy. I ask a CNO in a hearing a couple of years ago how many times have the Chinese attacked a U.S. carrier. Never, sir. How many times have the Chinese attacked us through the internet?

In the last 24 hours, sir? The punch line is this, we're investing 16 times more in carriers than in cyber. We need to reexamine that balance. And I'll also point out with regards to the South China Sea, that it's a lot harder to sink an island than an aircraft carrier.

We need to ask the same questions of our massive financial commitment to the F-35. I'm more worried about how soon we can field the F-45 or PCA, which many not be manned. And so on with the other services as well.

I think Russia and China actually have an inherent advantage over us by being more budget constrained and less politically constrained by the military industrial complex. They don't have the luxury of trying to compete with our big expensive legacy weapons systems, so they have to develop the smaller, cheaper, next generation weapons to defeat them. Having no real response to China's plan to be the world leader in artificial intelligence, or AI, by 2030 is unacceptable. We need to dramatically up our investment in autonomous, hypersonic, and cyber weapons to compete and win.

We also need to ensure that we maintain the fundamental investments in our country that have always been critical to our national security -- basic scientific research, education, and immigration. These policies have driven our defense dominance for a century, but today I'm worried. Paying for these investments will require us to make some hard choices about legacy weapons systems we can longer afford.

Second, I'd like to talk about arms control. While I feel we are woefully behind in making the commitment we need to next generation arms, at least we are starting to discuss it. I haven't heard anyone discussing next generation arms control at all. And here's why it's so important -- most people think of arms control as purely a way of making us safer by decreasing the number of weapons owned by everyone. But done well arms control also makes us stronger by giving us a strategic advantage. For

example, if the U.S. and Russia agree to comparable reductions in ICBMs but our missiles are more accurate or more reliable, then we have the advantage. That is why I was such a strong advocate four years ago for a worldwide convention to limit the proliferation of drones. Back then we were still far ahead of the rest of the world in that technology and limiting them may have solidified that advantage.

Now, this particular idea may or may not have worked, but the principle is one we need to pursue. Simply put, we need to start thinking of arms control not just with traditional weapons but with new ones as well. Authoritarian regimes have an inherent advantage in developing AI weapons systems because (1) surveillance gives them a bigger access to much bigger data sets, and (2) they are not necessarily beholden to the same moral principles controlling their employment. Much sooner than later, we'd be wise to consider what kinds of arms control over autonomous weapons powered by artificial intelligence will make us safer.

Third, alliances. This is where the analogy of the destructive house renter is most apropos and where an entire renovation is required. In the wake of Trump's handling of NATO many will call for re-strengthening that alliance, and I am among them. But NATO was established under 1949 rationale. Just as we're not going to counter Russia's amazingly successful work at undermining democratic elections by simply refurbishing our nuclear arsenal. We need to rethink the strategic role and purpose of NATO. Now is the opportunity presented to us ironically by this Administration to renovate and strengthen it for a new world.

Likewise, we should be reexamining our troop commitments to places like Japan and Germany and we should be asking whether it makes sense to establish a Pacific NATO to counter China. In the Middle East, as the War on Terror approaches the

two-decade mark, America's continued presence in Afghanistan and Iraq makes these the longest wars in American history, and the entire region is more disrupted and more disruptive than when we began. We attacked a grease fire with a pail of water and now the entire kitchen is ablaze. There are nearly four times as many Sunni extremists in the world today as there were in 2001. And although the Administration celebrates how little territory ISIS now controls, which is near meaningless measure of an insurgency's strength, Sunni extremists worldwide control more territory now than they did then. These facts compel serious questions about our continued strategy in the War on Terror.

Now, we can't simply abandon places like Syria without any plan because, as our experience in Iraq fatefully demonstrated, we'll just have to come back and it will take more American lives to do so. But for all our wars, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and those many small wars beyond, we need clear and achievable missions, approved by congress and transparent to the American people so that our troops can fight for peace and know what they must achieve to come home for good. Just as we admire President Roosevelt for leading us into World War II, we should admire President Eisenhower for leading us out of Korea.

Finally, climate change must be part of our thinking about alliances as well. Syria presents a particularly compelling example of how a conflict with origins in social upheaval, combined with the pressures of climate change, as mounting evidence focuses blame on the region's historic drought, can quickly become a multidimensional war. Climate change won't wait and neither should we. It's a threat to our national security and we obviously need to get back into the Paris Accord, but that isn't enough. The time to act is now and new alliances to prevent it are a good place to start.

In summary, it's time to completely re-imagine our arms, our alliances,

and our arms control for this new and rapidly changing world. All three are indispensable to meet the challenges of the new world order, which emphasizes the importance of an all hands-on deck approach to national security. Russia and China have embraced this, terrorist groups embody it, but here in America we have regressed.

To meet the challenge of Sputnik, congress made massive investments in education and basic scientific research. Today, this non-defense discretionary spending is politically divorced from our national defense, and, ironically, a prime target for cuts by so called congressional hawks. Yes, aircraft carriers fall under defense, but non-defense spending includes diplomats that help us avoid wars, USAID workers to tackle global health crises, like Ebola, and FBI and DHS professionals who keep us safe. All critical to our national security.

Too many times in Iraq I was asked to fulfill diplomatic roles essential to our military mission, for which I was ill equipped and never trained because our State Department was under resourced.

Last, I want to have one final word about the leadership that will be required to make these hard choices and new investments. In the immediate aftermath of the 2016 election a general officer came to my office on Capitol Hill and I asked him if he agreed with me that Russia was a great and present threat to our national security. He thought for a minute, and then he looked up and said no, sir, I don't think it's Russia. The salty old Marine general paused again and then he said, I think the greatest threat to our national security is the attack on our democracy right here at home. I didn't expect that answer, but he was right. And it brings new meaning to that same oath I swore as a Marine that I swore as a member of congress, to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

I'm heartened by the new leadership emerging in this country to meet this challenge, including more veterans in congress than we've seen in a generation. But the mountain we have to climb is steep, the choices are hard, and the political fight will be severe.

Just down the road in Quantico, Virginia, the Marine Corps taught me in 2002 about two kinds of courage good leaders need, physical courage and moral courage. In warfare we usually think of physical courage, but many of the most difficult challenges I faced in Iraq required both. We count on our troops to be courageous in every respect. The only form of courage we need to find here in Washington is moral. Moral courage is often in short supply around here, but we need it to meet these tough challenges. Our troops deserve it and our national security demands it.

Thank you. (Applause)

MR. O'HANLON: Congressman, that was outstanding. Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Thank you for the inspirational message as well.

I wanted to come back to these issues in contemporary defense planning that you highlighted in just a minute. But first I wanted to ask a couple of questions that sort of set the stage, first about the Iraq War and the also about something that I know is near and dear to your heart, the state of the all-volunteer force and how that relates to ideas of national service that people like you and General McChrystal and others have been talking a lot about, and then we'll get back to Russia and China and the defense budget in a minute.

But on Iraq, before we come up to today's debate, you've often talked about your experience, you've often talked about your views on the Iraq War. I just wondered if you could share with us a little bit more about your criticism of the war in the

first place. And my guess is there's a little bit of going to be both or all of the above to your answer, but obviously I'd like to hear you say what was the key mistake? Was it waging the war in the first place, especially without a clear UN authorization and without any proof that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction, that we now know he did not have, or was it the somewhat cavalier way in which many people think the invasion and then the occupation were conducted? In other words, was the war potentially a positive step forward if we had done things differently once we got there? I know you've spoken to this question a bit before, but I would just love to hear how you would frame an answer to that historical question.

MR. MOULTON: Well, I mean a simple answer is that it's all of the above. And Ambassador Barbara Bodine, who I served with at the same time in 2003, famously said once that we knew there was one way to do this right and five hundred ways to do it wrong. What we didn't anticipate is that we'd try all 500.

I think the key point here though is that it's very easy right now to look back on the disastrous war, in many respects, and say that it was just doomed from the beginning. There is a very good argument for never going there. But it doesn't mean that our military can't succeed in fighting portions of these kinds of wars in the future. It doesn't mean that we should forever say we can never deploy troops to a place like the Middle East, it doesn't mean that we can never rebuild a democracy, because there are times when it actually worked. And although Iraq still today doesn't look that great, the surge actually was a great success. Now, part of the reason the surge was a success was because Iraq had descended into civil war before the surge. It was total chaos. The bar for success was fairly low. But General Petraeus, to his credit, Ambassador Crocker, to his credit, truly led a successful turnaround of the war. Of course, then we abandoned

those games by withdrawing too quickly and now we have Iraq the way it is today.

So the point is that there are lessons of failure to take from Iraq that people talk about a lot, but there are also lessons of success. There are times when it worked, there are times on the ground where individual cities were in good hands. General McMaster's success with Tal Afar, the success that my battalion had in Najaf in 2004 was actually a success story. But we weren't successfully able to connect these things into broader success for the war, and that's why overall it's been such a disaster.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. I really benefit and appreciate hearing some of that from you. So thank you for indulging me a little bit on the history.

Before we get to these questions that you emphasized in your speech, I did want to ask you about national service and the all-volunteer force. You're a person whose own story is really an inspiration on your desire to serve your country and then where it led you. And I know you've thought a lot and worked with General McChrystal on the broader question of national service. Is this something that should be a priority for the country much more, should this be something 2020 presidential candidates talk about? How do we make the next step happen? Should it be obligatory national service with a military option as one of the choices, or should we just be trying to encourage voluntary paths towards service? I wonder just if you could share a couple of thoughts on that because it relates ultimately to the men and women of our all-volunteer force and therefore the quality of our military.

MR. MOULTON: Well, Mike, I'll start by just going back to my own personal experience with this, which is that by the time I got to college I realized that I had had tremendous opportunities in my life but felt I hadn't done enough to give back. And it was my college minister, the Reverend Peter Gomes, who was the most important

mentor that I've ever had in life, who talked a lot in church every Sunday about the importance of service, about how it's not enough just to believe in service or support others who serve, you ought to find an opportunity yourself to give back.

And so I looked at different opportunities. I looked at the Peace Corps, I looked at teaching overseas, but at the end of the day I had so much respect for these 18 year old kids, younger than I was, a senior in college, who go out there and put their lives on the line for the country, that that's where I decided to do my part.

Fast forward five years when I got out of the Marines, I went to a national service conference down in New York City and it brought together military veterans with civilian service veterans, AmeriCorps veterans, City Year veterans. And I was amazed by how much we had in common, that share experience of making some personal sacrifices to serve a purpose bigger than yourself, to serve the country, whether it's in a tough school in New Orleans post-Katrina, or rebuilding schools in Afghanistan, whether it's working with the Peace Corps in Africa or South America, or working with City Year in the streets of Boston. That sense of giving back to the country is something that I think brought us all together and ultimately made us stronger individuals. There is no way that I would be a member of congress today if not for that experience in the Marines. I mean I didn't even grow up interested in politics. Mike and I studied physics in college. He got into a grad program in physics. For everybody in life who sees my resume and not my transcript, I sound very smart, but I wasn't good enough to get into a grad program in physics. (Laughter)

So I didn't expect to go into politics, but being in the Marines taught me how much I enjoyed serving. And I think that if more young people had that experience it would make us a better country, a stronger country, a more united country, a country that

just understands each other better in these incredibly divisive times. And I don't think you should expand the size of the military to do this, I think you need to have the military that's the right size based on our national security needs and nothing more.

But there are tremendous opportunities for civilian service. And, in fact, the last time I checked there were I think 5.5 AmeriCorps applicants for every 1 AmeriCorps slots. So there's already a lot of demand that's not being met. And I believe that if you expanded AmeriCorps, by 5.5 times, just to meet the existing demand, you'd see demand go up even more because it would just become more of an accepted thing. And this what General McChrystal talks about, not making it mandatory. We've had tremendous success with having an all-volunteer military and all these existing programs are volunteer as well. But just getting to the point to where it's an expectation. You know, when you interview for a job when you're 30, one of the first questions that gets asked is just where did you serve. I think that's where we want to go with national service, and I'm a huge proponent of it myself.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. That's a great answer. Let me now come back to the topics that you brought up in your speech and ask a little bit more about a couple of them. And then within about 10 or 15 minutes we'll include you in the conversation as well. So please be thinking of your questions for the Congressman.

You talked about both Russia and China. We know this is central to the national security strategy and national defense strategy of the Trump Administration. The Obama Administration was already moving in this direction in the last two or three years after Vladimir Putin seized Crimea and China built up islands in the South China Sea that you alluded to. And so we know that it's been in some ways a bipartisan trajectory and it will be with us well beyond the Trump Administration. I guess one question I would

frame, when you think about Russia and China, how do you think of them not just as part of a single big threat complex, but separately from each other? Do you fear one more than the other? Do you think of the kind of threat Vladimir Putin poses in different terms from the kind of threat the Chinese pose? You know, there are some people that say Russia is a decaying power, but it's got 5,000 nuclear weapons in 11 time zones. China is a rising power, but then some people will say well China is still sort of -- you know, needs the existing world economic order in some ways more than Russia, so maybe it will try to bend the order more than break it. Maybe Vladimir Putin is the more disruptive and ultimately more dangerous.

I wondered if you came down in one way, one camp or another, in how to think somewhat specifically about Russia and China as two separate types of threats?

MR. MOULTON: I think it's a great question because I do think they are different and you have to think of them in different categories. And it depends on what frame you're looking at. I think in terms of timeline, Russia, with its active and quite successful efforts to undermine Western democracies, is a more immediate threat to our country, because I think that is so fundamental to their strategy and fundamentally what makes us who we are. China is starting to do that, but they haven't done it much.

So in terms of immediate national security threats, you know, like is -- the next is the 2020 election, going to be trusted and respected, is the election result going to be trusted and respected. We've got to be very concerned about Russia.

But I don't think there is any question that longer term, China is the problem. China's rapid development of technology, both defense and non-defense technology -- because they all meld together -- is of grave concern. And this isn't just about China developing traditional weapons, like intercontinental ballistic missiles,

nuclear weapons, it's not just about China developing the new types of military weapons, like hypersonics, it's also about China developing the leading technologies for 5G, and just controlling the way that -- setting the standard and controlling the way that we all communicate here at home and across the globe.

So these are serious, serious national security concerns. And we tend to think of them in different categories, business threats, economic issues. But at the end of the day, they're all national security issues as well. China is starting to leapfrog us in technology. Their investment in basic scientific research, their investment in biotech, their investment in artificial intelligence is quickly eclipsing our own, and that should be of real grave concern.

MR. O'HANLON: While I'm on China, let me get you to talk a little bit about North Korea, while we're in that part of the world, and then we'll come back to the defense budget, maybe a quick word on the AUMF debate, the authorization on the use of military force, and then I'll be done and share the pleasure here of being able to ask you questions.

We have a big summit coming up between Chairman Kim and President Trump in Viet Nam in a couple of weeks. I'm of a very mixed mind. One the one hand, President Trump celebrating in the end zone that we've denuclearized North Korea is sort of demonstrably wrong, on the other hand, maybe there is an opportunity. And I wonder if you want to say anything about where we stand with the North Korea question, but also do you see China as fundamentally a partner in that kind of a problem or more of a sort of nefarious actor that's just going along with the bare minimum because there's no choice and ultimately it will be more in cahoots with Kim Jong Un or more of a problem to us than a partner in trying to address this problem.

MR. MOULTON: Well, I mean, let me start with that. I don't think that China is in cahoots with North Korea. I think that they have a lot of opposing interests. But the problem is that China's interests are not aligned with our own, so you really have three independent actors and it's getting those interests aligned, which has proven so difficult and so challenging. And I don't think anyone has really laid out a road map for success.

But let's talk about the Trump Administration for a second and what the President has done in particular. He has been credited for ratcheting down the tensions with North Korea I guess in the June timeframe last year when he has his initial summit. And before that we seemed like we might be on the brink of war and then the President came in and saved the day. But let's not forget, we were on the brink of war because of Donald Trump's rhetoric, because of his pressure, because of sending the armada to North Korea, although it turned out it was going to Australia. That's the kind of stuff that he did to ratchet up tensions so that he could then come in and say everything is good.

So we have not made any forward progress. In fact, if anything, I think that we have demeaned our credibility in the eyes of the rest of the world because we have a President with such a cozy relationship with this dictator and we really have not achieved anything as a result. In fact, the only really meaningful change in our posture vis a vis North Korea is the fact that the President gave away our ability to have exercises with South Korea. So at the end of the day he saved us from his own problem and gave something away that is essential to our national security with a key ally in that part of the world.

MR. O'HANLON: So let me now just ask a question on the broader Middle East. And you've already given us some guidelines on how to think about Syria

and Afghanistan and Iraq today and avoiding precipitated decisions, avoiding poorly thought through strategies. I wondered what role you saw congress likely to play in these next months and two years on broader Middle East policy. Is the essence of the congressional role going to be perhaps a big new debate on a revised authorization on the use of military force? I'm sure most of you know what I'm alluding to, but of course the legal underpinning for these ongoing operations in the broader Middle East dates back to 2001 in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. A very broadly framed resolution that President Bush requested of the congress that everyone was happy to provide at that time, but very few anticipated that it would still be the law of the land guiding our actions 18 years later with no particular time horizon or geographical or other specificity to it. Is that where the debate needs to go and is that where the debate will go?

MR. MOULTON: Well, I certainly hope it goes there. I mean it is fundamental, written into the Constitution by the framers, that congress decides whether or not we go to war. Congress is charged with the decision about whether or not we put our sons and daughters in harm's way across the globe. And congress has completely abrogated this role. We have failed to live up to it. And you can call it a power grab by the Executive, but really it's just a weakening of congress. So we have to have that debate about the authorization for the use of military force. It is ridiculous to be in continued wars in the Middle East based on dealing with the response to 9/11, 18 years ago. So that's the first point.

But we can start by simply having a debate about these things in congress. Last year, when democrats were still in the minority, I got sort of the one hearing I was entitled to as a ranking member of oversight investigations on the conflict in

Syria. And it was the first time that congress had had any hearing on Syria in months. And it brought up some really interesting things, like this serious debate within the Trump Administration about our purpose in Syria, whether it was to counter Iran or to deal with ISIS. And it was made pretty obvious in the course of that hearing that they don't seem to agree and they don't all seem to know. And, of course, if the purpose is to counter Iran, then it is illegal because that violates the authorization for the use of military force that we're operating under quite clearly. And Administration officials had even admitted this.

So congress' basic job at this point is just to have a discussion, have a debate on these issues, and to ask the question that I would ask when I go on CoDels to the Middle East of the troops on the ground, what is your mission? And I found in my experience when I asked the guys going into Syria what their mission was, it would be very short, it would just be well we're going to take out ISIS in this town. But there is no plan beyond that. You know, they couldn't tell what the purpose of their mission -- they couldn't understand what the purpose of that task was. Who was going to take over, who was going to ensure that there is governance, who is going to ensure that the terrorists or whatever group you're defeating doesn't come back? And, ultimately, how does this contribute to a long-term plan for Syria? No answers to any of those questions. And as a result, we're sending young men and women into situations in the Middle East where they don't even know why the hell they're there. They don't know what they need to do to achieve their mission and they don't know what they need to do to come home. So that has got to change.

And none of this is easy. It's not like anyone has a simple plan for Syria, but the very least that we owe our troops who are risking their lives there is an honest

debate about this and a plan that they can understand.

MR. O'HANLON: Finally, I wanted to ask about the defense budget and defense budget priorities. And I'm not going to ask you to predict exactly where we wind up, since we haven't even seen the Administration's request yet, and there have been reports it could be anywhere from \$700 billion to \$750 billion. The President himself used both those numbers in the latter weeks of 2018. And so I guess we'll find out pretty soon. But, you know, now we have a democratic congress that may have its own ideas about what the defense budget should be and we have a Budget Control Act that if there is no agreement will pull us back to a much lower number than anyone is really talking about.

So I guess a two part question and then I'll again go to the audience for their thoughts, but it sounded like from your speech that your top defense priority, irrespective of the exact number, would be advanced technologies. I think I heard you emphasize that. So I just want to make sure that that's the key message that I should be taking away from your speech.

And then, secondly, do you have any initial thoughts yourself on what kind of a number for the overall national defense budget function would be more appropriate -- 750, which is obviously the higher end and represents sustained real growth compared to where we've been, or something more like 700, which is still a pretty big number compared to where we've been, compared to historical and Cold War average, but it is on the lower end of where the Trump Administration has been talking.

So those two questions.

MR. MOULTON: Well, here's my point, is that any one of these numbers, whether it's 750 or 700, can mean growth or it can mean regression based on how spend the money. And even if we invest \$750 billion, but we're not investing in

these things that China is investing in, in AI, in hypersonics, then we're going to fall behind. On the other hand, we could be way ahead with a budget of \$650 billion if we invested in the right things. And that also means cutting the legacy weapons systems we don't need.

The challenge is that the latter part of that, cutting the weapons systems we don't need, is hard for everyone on both sides of the aisle because that's when parochial interests come into play. And I got in a big debate as a freshman in congress over the future of the A-10. Now, the A-10 is a very popular Cold War era airplane, it supported me when I was on the ground in Iraq, and it is support for ground troops that makes it so popular. It is also, candidly, very outdated. And its mission can be performed by other aircraft. And so the Air Force itself came to us and said we don't to invest in the A-10, but it was me, representing the Air Force's position against another congresswoman representing the I guess A-10 position. She happened to be an A-10 pilot representing the biggest A-10 base in the world, and having just gone through the closest congressional race in America, not that any politics were involved. (Laughter) But that's how we faced off. And a lot of people criticized me and they said well, Seth, this is an easy argument for you to make because you don't have anything to benefit from back in your district or whatever if they cut the A-10. Now, actually the single biggest city in my district has a GE aircraft factory, which is its biggest employer, and would be making the engines for the refurbished A-10. So this did have an impact on my district. I just think that our national security as a nation is more important than congressional district politics. And I had to explain that to the guys back home who work in this factory. I had to explain it to my constituents who not see as many jobs coming to the district because of this debate.

Now, look, I worked hard to get other contracts to the GE plant that I think are useful for our national security. They actually just won a big contract to re-engine Black Hawks and Apaches. But those are investments that make sense. We've got to be willing to cut the things that don't. And that's why we have to ask these tough questions. I mean nobody in the United States Navy wants to ask the question, should we still have carriers, or should we still have as many as we do.

Now, I'm not just completely opposed to carriers, but it's a useful example because it requires so much money, so much investment, and, frighteningly, they're becoming much easier to defeat because of advances in missile technology. So these are the questions that we have to ask. And so at the end of the day it really is not about what the top line number is, it's not about how many ships we have in our Navy, it's about how we're spending that money, it's about what kind of ships they are, what their capabilities are, and whether they're meeting the challenges of the future or they're just relics of the past.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. Thank you. Okay, so let's please go to you. And wait for a microphone, identify yourself, please. I think I'll take probably take two questions at a time. We'll begin with the front row here, Michael Gordon, and then the gentleman over to the side.

MR. GORDON: I'm Michael Gordon, *Wall Street Journal*. Seth, two arms control budgetary types of questions.

I think that most democrats were probably regretting the demise of the INF Treaty, but it's pretty clear the INF Treaty is going away and it's not going to be revived. And it does open up new defense possibilities for the United States, particularly in the realm of conventional land based intermediate range missiles, which could be --

there's a whole school of thought that says these could be applicable in a China scenario. They're cost effective, they're a lot cheaper than air or sea-based systems because you don't have to buy the platform. Given your emphasis on cost effectiveness, is this a new technology, is this something that you think should be considered?

And my second question is for the congress strategic modernization, arms control seems to have gone -- they're paired, they're linked, they've gone hand in hand. In a scenario in which it's not clear if the Administration is going to extent New START -- they haven't even specified what their future arms control strategy is -- how is the HASC going to respond on spending for new strategic systems if the Administration has yet to define an arms control strategy for New START or post New START or for the future?

Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: And while we're passing the microphone I'll just clarify for those who don't know, that New START is the prevailing U.S.-Russia strategic arms control treaty that's due to expire in 2021 unless renewed. So that's the context here.

MR. CHECCO: Thank you very much. Larry Checco, senior advisor to Serve USA, and working on national service. And I want to thank you for your service, sir. In full disclosure, I have a son who is a sergeant in the Marine Corps Reserves and had the same experience you did. No, it's an amazing experience for him.

My question revolves around national service. It seems to us that we're churning out better consumers than we are citizens. And I think that's going to leave a poor legacy in the future as we go forward with America. And my question is a lot simpler than the first question. I'd love to have a meeting with you at your office. Can I give you my card? Can I give your aid my card? (Laughter) We want to push this thing with

through. We think we have a valuable -- I know Brookings may be doing a special event on national service. There's a lot of interest this and a lot of powerful people who want to have something happen here, so I'd love to have your support.

Thank you.

MR. MOULTON: well, if we get to pick the easiest question, I'll just say I'm delighted to have you come in, sir. (Laughter)

But Michael Gordon is another friend from Iraq days and so, Michael, delighted to answer your questions as well. First of all, the demise of the INF, the first point I'd make is that you shouldn't just respond to violations of a treaty by giving up on the treaty. I mean that's not the point. The point is to try to enforce the treaty. And so I disagree with the Administration's approach here. But given where we are and the fact that INF is going away, I think the right thing to do is to look at a new INF that includes China. And I take your point that there might be some strategic advantages to us and some of the weapons we could develop. That should be part of the discussion and part of the strategy. But ultimately, I don't think we're well served, I don't think our Western European allies are well served, I don't think our allies in the Pacific are well served by having vast proliferation of intermediate range missiles. And so this is a place where we should look at new arms control and we should recognize that the old treaty, whether it was violated or not, was a little bit out of date for the new challenges since China was not included in the INF. And we should develop an INF that includes China.

With regards to New START and other arms control in general, yes, we need to continue to pursue these priorities and I think it's congress' role to just pursue them regardless of where the Administration is headed. I don't think the Administration knows where it's headed. I think that's pretty clear from observing it. But we've got to

have a discussion about arms control that's not limited to 1950s nuclear era weapons. We've got to be talking about what arms control means for autonomous weapons, what arms control means for drones, surface, under water, and in the air, what arms control means for artificial intelligence. You know, we need to be thinking ahead and we need to be thinking ahead of China and Russia on what kinds of essentially robots are allowed to participate in warfare and what are not. We should be setting the rules of the game for that, not waiting for Russia or China to develop the technology first and then decide what kinds of treaties they want to enter into.

MR. GORDON: Can I just have a quick follow up?

MR. O'HANLON: Do a quick follow up. Go ahead.

MR. GORDON: Just very quick. If the Administration doesn't support extending New START will the democratic congress support all the strategic nuclear spending the Administration wants?

MR. MOULTON: I highly doubt it. I can't speak for every democrat in congress, but I highly doubt it.

MR. O'HANLON: So let's work a little further back here. We'll take the question over here, the woman in the third row, and then the woman in the tenth row for this round please.

QUESTIONER: Hi. Thank you. I'm Monica with the VoiceAmerica. So my first question is, if I remember correctly, you mentioned the importance of creating new NATO to counter China, so I would like you to elaborate on this issue.

And my second question is President Trump signed an AI Executive Order to promote AI development in the United States. And it's reported also that he is going to sign another Executive Order to ban telecom equipment made in China. So I

would like to ask how do you think that will -- how that will make up for the lack of investment in AI and other like 5G build out in the United States?

Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Those are great questions. And then here. Yes, please.

MS. KIM: Hi, I'm Soyoung Kim from Radio Free Asia. I have a question regarding North Korea. So we all know that there will be a second summit in two weeks and there was actually the first working group meeting last week, and then there will be another one the following week I guess. And do you see this time it will be different from the past?

And follow up question is you mentioned a little bit about the cancellation of the joint military exercises with South Korea and then there were a few cancellations already. And then the one is supposed to happen next month, it hasn't been confirmed yet. I mean conversation is going on. How do you see the impacts or potential consequences of these few cancellations or downsizing of these joint military exercises?

Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Congressman, over to you.

MR. MOULTON: Okay. So we'll start over here with your questions about new NATO to counter China. I'm not the first person to bring up this idea and a lot of people have expressed reservations about whether it's practical in the Pacific. We don't have the natural alliances that we've traditionally had in Western Europe. But I think it's unquestionable that NATO has been incredibly effective for us and for our allies for a very similar challenge to what we face now in the Pacific. And so maybe it doesn't look exactly like NATO. Obviously, it wouldn't be called NATO. But we should be

exploring that kind of alliance for formalize the informal alliances that we have in the Pacific right now.

And I spent some time with a bipartisan delegation in the region last year and it was very clear that a lot of our allies are nervous because they don't understand what our real commitment is, they don't understand our plan, they don't know exactly when we'll be there for them and when we won't. That doesn't make for a strong alliance. And I think that we would be much more effective in dealing with China if we had a stronger presence in the region.

With regards to the AI Executive Order that the President just released I think in the last 48 hours, I mean obviously it's a positive step in the right direction, but it does so little. I mean if you look at it compared to what China has done, there's no commitment of funds, there's no real commitment to how we're going to lead. China's commitment is so much more serious, so much bigger, that this will not be effective in stopping it. I feel that we're nibbling around the edges and we need a much more concerted all on deck, whole of government response.

With regards to the second North Korea summit, I mean it's just really hard to tell what will happen, but my concern is that once again our side will give away something that we shouldn't be giving away, just like we did the last time with these exercises. I mean if you think about it, think about all our allies around the globe, I can't think of any ally of ours that is in more daily threat of annihilation than South Korea. And we just gave up exercises with them. I mean it's like literally the ally that should be last on the list for giving up joint military exercises, and that's what the President did.

Fundamentally, the reason why the situation with North Korea is so volatile is because of the personalities involved. You know, we've got an erratic,

narcissistic leader with authoritarian tendencies, who has strange sort of father issues -- I'm talking about Kim Jong Un of course. (Laughter) And these are the people making these decisions about whether to go to war.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay, we've got another question here. The second and third row please. And that will be round three.

MR. SCHOGOL: Thank you. Congressman Jeff Schogol, Task and Purpose. If the U.S. does pull all its troops out of Syria, as it looks it will, do you expect the U.S. military will have to return to Syria as it did in Iraq when ISIS rose?

MR. O'HANLON: And then one more here please.

MS. ROQUE: Hi, Ashley Roque with Jane's Defense. I had two follow up questions. First on the INF, if the U.S. officially pulls out, there are possible weapons to modify that are already in the arsenal, ATacMs, the follow-on PRISM, and maybe Tomahawk. From a democratically controlled House, will there be some challenges to this?

And then also you the move to push for modernization of programs. The Army has said it's going to cut at least around 200 programs right now. What can we see from the House coming out? Any challenges to that?

MR. MOULTON: Thank you. Okay. So let's start with Syria. I mean this is my fundamental concern. Having spent as much time in the Middle East as I have, there's no one who wants the troops to come home more than I do, but we've got to make sure they can come home for good, and that if we have to go back it doesn't cost more American lives because we got out too quickly. Because that is the lesson that I think we should all take from our withdrawal from Iraq. And it's a very painful lesson.

When we talked to the military leaders, the people who have been on the

ground in Syria, it's very clear that there is no plan, there's no plan for this withdrawal. They're not even clear what their mission is. And there is widespread fear that as soon as we withdraw everything we've tried to maintain in Syria, the gains that we've made with the SDF and other forces, will immediately go away. I questioned General Hecker from the Air Force at a hearing last week about this and he made it very clear that we need to keep up the pressure on Syria and he admitted very clearly that pulling out from Syria will fail to do that, will fail to keep up the pressure on ISIS.

I also asked Assistant Secretary of Defense Owen West, a fellow Marine, if he disagreed with Secretary Mattis in his view that we should not be leaving Syria so precipitously, and he paused for a second and said no, sir. Now, that's an example of moral courage. It's pretty hard to do that as a Trump Administration official, and I have a lot of respect for Assistant Secretary of Defense West for being so candid and honest in that hearing. The fact of the matter is that he is representing a view held by almost every national security professional.

So I am all for getting out of the Syria in the long run, but I want to make sure we do it with a clear mission and a clear plan so that we don't have to send the troops back.

MR. O'HANLON: Could I follow up on the Syria question myself? And you've got to come to the other --

MR. MOULTON: The INF thing.

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah, that thing. But while we're on that point, I just wondered, you talk about clear mission and what our goals should be, what kind of a tolerable or least bad outcome could we aspire to in Syria at this point? Obviously, it's been a hugely frustrating war; two American presidents have struggled with it. It's not

fundamentally our fault, but I don't think our policies really helped under either President Obama or President Trump, with the exception of the two of them defeating ISIS, at least in its territorial holdings -- as you point out, that's not really the whole game against ISIS. But what kind of outcome would be even realistic to aspire to? Some kind of autonomy for the Kurdish Northeast with some protections? I mean do you have -- and I ask this as somebody who has probably had more time to think about it in my job than you have in yours and still struggles, but do you have -- I mean obviously trying to negotiate President Assad out of power seems like a pretty unrealistic standard at this point. So do you have a different kind of political vision in mind, or is it more that you just want to give our diplomats the opportunity to have some assets from which they can create new ideas? And you don't see it as your role to propose those, you have an intuitive sense that a little bit of American leverage, a little bit of ongoing American support for allies will help them in their job.

MR. O'HANLON: I mean we could have a five-hour discussion about this, but here's the bottom line, the troops right there, right now who are risking their lives, it's not clear what they're fighting for. And so we've got to make that clear, whether it's autonomous regions, whether it's some sort of diplomatic leverage to achieve X, Y, Z results. You know, even in Iraq when the war was going terribly, we knew what we were doing. When I took my Marines out on patrol I understood that I was patrolling a certain neighborhood in a certain city to bring stability to support the government of Iraq. And we had made a tough strategic decision between some different options, like are we going to divide Iraq into three parts, which people like Vice President Biden were arguing for, or are we going to keep Iraq whole. Well, we made the decision to keep Iraq whole, we made the decision to support the government of Iraq, and that's what we were trying to

achieve. I think ultimately it was the right mission. But the point is at least we knew what we were fighting for. What kind of government are we fighting for in Syria? We haven't even laid that out, we haven't made it clear. So we've got to give much more narrowly defined missions to the troops there.

And it doesn't just apply to Syria, it applies to Afghanistan as well. Are we fighting in Afghanistan to bring democracy to Afghanistan or have we given up that mission and we're just fighting a counter terror fight there? No one seems to know, including the troops on the ground. It seems like one minute I go there and we're talking about just doing counter terror, and the next, oh, no, we're really still supporting democratic institutions. We've got to make a clear decision. I think Afghanistan might be a place where we make a hard choice and say that democracy building is such a long-term investment that we're just not willing to make, that we just have to resort to counter terror. But let's be clear about that and let's resource it appropriately.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. Thank you. And then I --

MR. MOULTON: So I want to get back to the INF Treaty question as well and modernization in the Army. I mean, look, there probably will be some resistance from a democratic congress to going right ahead and modifying weapons, but the point is that our goal should be a renovated INF Treaty. It should not be just a new arms race, which is what Russia is clearly pursuing. And I would have to imagine that Russia is pursuing this because they see a strategic advantage in getting out of the INF Treaty. I mean to me this is perhaps a little bit simplistic, but when the INF treaty came into being you had Russia able to annihilate us with its long-range missiles, us able to annihilate Russia with our long range missiles, but Russia also able to annihilate our allies in Western Europe with their intermediate range missiles. And so you can see the strategic

advantage we had in pursuing that Treaty. I think that strategic advantage, although perhaps a bit oversimplified, still exists for us. And you can make a similar argument in China, or in the South Pacific. So that's the strategic advantage that we should be pursuing, not starting a new arms race with modifying Tomahawks or whatever else.

With regards to modernization in the Army, you know, the services are trying to lean into this, but it's congress that should be leading the way, it's congress that should be pushing the services to think about what next generation weapons systems we should be investing in, and what tough cuts we have to make to legacy systems.

You know, I visited Eastern Europe and visited with an army tank company commander in 2015. And they were doing tank exercises in Poland ostensibly as a show of force to Russia. But when we sat down and talked about what Russia was doing, it was very clear to this tank company commander that they weren't worried about American tanks. What the Russians were doing was through the internet, was through social media, was through the political undermining of Eastern European states. And doing tank drills was a pure distraction from that. You got the idea that Putin was sitting there and laughing about the United States' response to their hybrid warfare in Eastern Europe in the form of tank drills. But the problem is for that company commander, he didn't have the authority to take his funds that were given to him to conduct tank drills and put them into cyber or anything else.

You know, that's the role of congress, to make some of these strategic decisions about our national defense. And it is our role to hold the generals accountable for what missions they're pursuing. But because we're the ones dragging our feet, we're the ones who are dragging us into the past, hanging onto these old legacy weapons systems and the old types of wars that they allow us to fight, that we're really missing the

boat. And as a result, some of our troops are fighting on the wrong battlefield. This was a great example in Eastern Europe of how we were fighting yesterday's war on yesterday's battlefield.

MR. O'HANLON: By the way, before we go to the next --

MR. MOULTON: Or I guess a better way to put it -- sorry, Mike.

MR. O'HANLON: No, go head.

MR. MOULTON: We are fighting today's war on yesterday's battlefield.

MR. O'HANLON: You talked about strategic leadership in congress, and I thought maybe it's a nice moment to give you a chance to talk about the young members on both sides of the aisle that I know you've championed. Obviously with your political work, it's been more democrats, but I know you've been a supporter of seeing some young veterans come into congress and start to create the new generation of strategic leadership. Obviously, there are some current leaders, established leaders, who are very, very effecting -- Mac Thornberry, Jack Reed, Rick Larsen, a few others. But there's also a young generation that you're in many ways leading.

Could you just mention to us a couple of the maybe people, or at least groups that you're excited about that you think we should be looking for strategic leadership from in the years to come?

MR. MOULTON: I mean there are some amazing new members of congress. I mean just to go through some of the new members of the Armed Services Committee, Mikie Sherrill, Navy helicopter pilot from New Jersey, Jason Crow, Army officer from Colorado, Elissa Slotkin, who comes out of the Department of Defense and asks a lot of these strategic questions and also works in the CIA, Chrissy Houlahan, Stanford engineering degrees -- might be smarter than both of us put together and has

done amazing work not only in the Air Force but in the private sector as well. I mean there are some great new thinkers who are sitting in places like the Armed Services Committee who understand I think what a commitment to national security, to our national defense means above they're just political commitments. They understand what it means to put country ahead of party. They are all people who ran for congress truly to serve the country again.

And the ones I just mentioned are several of the candidates that I supported through my own Serve America PAC to help get more veterans elected to congress. And I was very clear with that mission, that it was twofold. Yes, I was trying to help the democrats take back the House, but I was also trying to bring new, better, more moral leadership to congress, people who understand what it means to put the country first. And that's what I hope to see out of this new generation. And it means not only providing great leadership for their constituents back in their district, but really making some of these tough choices for our national defense that will move our country forward.

MR. O'HANLON: Super. Thank you. Let's go to the gentleman here in the fifth row on the aisle and then we'll come up here to the gentleman in the third row.

MR. CLEARFIELD: Hi, Alex Clearfield with National Journal. I have two quick questions.

You had mentioned the concept of national service in your remarks earlier and in terms of getting more young people involved in national service, would that involve something like the creation of a national service preserve, like Hillary Clinton proposed in her 2016 campaign? Or can that be accomplished through existing programs, like TFA and City Year and military service?

And my second question is, in terms of a 2020 campaign, which you said

a couple of days ago that you're actively considering, how do you go about kind of convincing primary voters that there are other defense and foreign policy issues that are worth public attention besides Russia?

MR. O'HANLON: Sorry, say that last part again?

MR. CLEARFIELD: Sure. Sorry about that. How do you kind of convince democratic primary voters, if you do run for president, that there are foreign policy and defense issues that are worth serious attention besides alleged Russian interference in the election?

MR. O'HANLON: We'll come here to the third row. Yes, please.

QUESTIONER: Yes, I, Neil Shabon, the American Legion, National Security, and Foreign Policy Division.

So my question is that you mentioned a lot of new warfare fronts approaching between cyber, AI, hypersonic, all across the board. At the risk of spreading the resources too thin, is there any one of those warfare fronts that you that the horizon should be focused on, whether it be cyber, AI, hypersonic? Because many argue that the future wars will not be trench and bunker, it's going to be more long range and across satellites, across internets. It's a matter of where do we put our focus to kind of be -- instead of a little bit in every section, the best at one or the best at two.

MR. MOULTON: That's a great question. Okay, so starting with national service. You know, really the question is just how big we're going to make it. And I think that you can make tremendous progress towards the goal we're talking about where national service becomes an accepted standard in our country by just expanding existing programs.

There is also opportunity to have some sort of national service reserve.

And there were certainly times that I've seen in my work overseas -- you know, one of the more peaceful parts of it -- where it would be useful to have some experts just from different parts of civil society helping out with things. I mean my first mission in the very peaceful summer of 2003 in Iraq after the fighting ended was to work with the Iraqi media. And before I knew it I was co-hosting a TV show called Moulton and Mohammed with my friend Mohammed, who is now doing great things for our country and his. And it was an odd job, it was a fascinating job, because the mission was to bring a free press to Iraq. See, the Marines believe a free press is important to a democracy, even if some people in Washington don't. And yet I was totally ill trained for it. I mean I'd never hosted a TV show before. I was trained to be a Marine infantry officer, a platoon commander. I didn't have any business running a TV station.

So there are lots of place around the globe in doing different peaceful missions where I think other people in our country could help. And not just young people either. There is interest in having a national service corps that includes older folks as well.

With regards to 2020. Yes, I'm looking at a potential campaign. I think that we have to make the argument to people that there are serious national security concerns across the globe and that this has got to be part of the debate. But this is one of the things that I hope will be added to the conversation. I'll be the first to say that we have extraordinary candidates who have already announced and are running. I have admired Senator Booker for a long time. Senator Klobuchar and Senator Ward are friends. I was honored to campaign with Senator Brown a bit last year. And Mayor Peter Buttigieg invited me to speak out in South Bend the year before. And so there are amazing people out there who are running and contributing to this debate. And

ultimately, this has got to be part of the discussion as well. And if this is one of the things that I can add to the debate, then that's perhaps an argument for me to jump in.

With regards to warfare, I mean excellent question. The simple answer to your question is that we don't know what will be the dominant technology and so we have to make investments in all of these things at this point. But to go out on a limb and to make a guess, I would say AI, artificial intelligence, because it will literally be a part of every new weapons system that we imagine. And so if we are behind in AI, I think we're going to be behind in national security, period. Not to mention behind in business, economy, technology, all sorts of other places as well.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. We'll go here with the front row and then I'll go over to here -- and maybe we'll take hers and then both of these gentlemen, and then the next round we'll work back again.

MS. ELGIN: Thank you for your remarks. Catherine Elgin, Princeton University. First, I would be curious to hear your thoughts on kind of the discussions of the past few years about talent acquisition, talent retention within the armed services and what you think that should look like in the future. If you see any changes that should be made.

And, secondly, I wanted to press you a little bit on what you see as your strategic vision for how we interact with China. You seem too really aggressive on Chinese rhetoric against China and creating this NATO in the Pacific. I'd be curious how you see our dealings with China on some of the mission set level and how you think our allies might respond to that. So that's just looking at South Korea, who has major trade with China and can't necessarily take sides as simply as you might be portraying. I was just curious if you could expand on that.

Thank you.

MR. MOULTON: Okay.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. And then these two gentlemen over here please, in the second row.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Congressman, for being here. Hiam Belopas with The Charles Group.

My question is a couple of weeks ago at the Senate Intelligence Committee's worldwide threats hearing I believe it was Director Coats who brought up the notion of treating Putin as being separate from all of Russia in the way we deal with foreign policy, sort of more in the vein of how we deal with Kim Jong Un as opposed to all of North Korea. Do you put any sort of stock in that idea?

MR. O'HANLON: And then could we take one more?

MR. MOULTON: Sure.

MR. O'HANLON: Great.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Congressman. Jared Collig, University of Southern Mississippi.

My senior thesis was on North Korea and sanctions. And I'm curious to ask you the data shows that sanctions have been reactionary and don't really work. The GDP continued to grow and weapons testing continued. What would you suggest that we do in that theater short of deploying more troops?

And, for lack of a better term, there was another paper that called it just saber-rattling.

MR. MOULTON: Okay. So to start with talent acquisition and retention, I mean this is such an important issue. And I could give you countless anecdotal

examples of some of the most talented people that I served with who just get out. I mean it reminds me of the House of Representatives. There's this real problem in the United States -- well, that joke didn't resonate too well. (Laughter) It's a real problem in the House of Representatives as well. It's a real problem in the armed services where people don't see a path to success and fundamentally they're not recognized for excelling. You know, there was a time not that long ago, certainly World War II era, when you got accelerated promotions or you came in at a higher rank if you brought particular skills. If you're the best captain in the United States Marine Corps you might get promoted a few months ahead of your colleagues, and that's just not a way to keep people engaged and retained who we really need.

On the enlisted side it's a little bit better because we have bonuses, but it's not just about bonuses, it's not just about money, it's about opportunities. And we've got to be much more focused on that. So this is a huge problem that we talk about a lot on the Armed Services Committee, but, frankly, we haven't done much to address.

With regard to how to interrupt China and the effect on our allies, yes, of course you have to consider the effect on our allies, but China I think is such a major threat to us long-term that we've just got to make some much bolder decisions about how we're going to counter it. And that means not only investing in AI, but really solidifying our alliances in the South Pacific, even if that makes some of our allies uncomfortable.

And those are some of the hard choices that we've got to make. I think for too long we've just been trying to walk an easy line with China where we live under this false pretense that just because we have a good economic relationship with them or - - some will argue whether it's good or bad -- but certainly a mutually dependent economic relationship with them, that everything is going to be fine with national security. And all of

their trends in the last five years especially clearly indicate that that's not the case.

With regard to Director Coats, I mean he honestly knows more about Putin and his relationship with the rest of Russia better than I do, but I think that that is a reasonable assumption to make. Polling is very hard to get. Accurate polling of Russia is very, very hard to get, largely because if you call Russian citizens they don't trust the pollster, they don't trust that it's not Putin's government calling to actually hear their opinions. So they tend to be very, very favorable of Putin because they just think it's a sting operation, or whatever you might call it, you know, a part of their autocratic regime, rather than an honest assessment of public sentiment.

And so I think that the more nuanced views of Russia is that there are a lot of people in Russia who do not agree with Putin, who think he's dangerous, investing in the wrong things, and recognize his attempt to sort of distract from the problems at home by creating a lot of foes abroad.

So I think that's a reasonable way to look at it.

And with regard to North Korea and sanctions, I mean first of all, thank you for writing your thesis on this because we need new, young, next generation thinking about how to deal with North Korea because, frankly, nothing has worked so far. And sanctions, you're right, are probably not all that effective, but the question is what can we do as an alternative. I think in the long run we do need to have more of a dialogue with China. I mentioned earlier that the fundamental problem is that our interests, China's interests, and North Korea's interests are not aligned much at all. But in the long run that is the kind of dialogue that we need to have. And that's not at odds with what I just said over here about the rise of China. I mean look at what President Reagan did with Russia, having a massive build up against Russia at the same time as negotiating some

real groundbreaking arms reduction treaties.

So that is the kind of dual track that we need to have with regards to China, and specifically with regard to North Korea.

MR. O'HANLON: So as we get ready to take one last round of questions, let me also add one new data point that I've seen recently on trade, because I don't know when you finished your thesis, but I think you were probably correct when you wrote it, that we hadn't yet seen meaningful reductions in North Korean trade or GDP from previous rounds, but in 2018 we did. In 2018 we did see roughly a halving of North Korean trade, which creates an opportunity that I hope and pray is not going to be squandered in these upcoming weeks, if you'll forgive my own editorial comment, even though it's supposed to be about you, Congressman.

MR. MOULTON: I don't disagree, I don't disagree.

MR. O'HANLON: So let's go here to the back. The gentleman right there in the blue and then we'll take one more. Maybe we'll have time for two more rounds.

QUESTIONER: Congressman, thank you so much for your service.
(Inaudible) from Free Muslim Association Center for (inaudible).

Two questions. One is, is combating reemergence of ISIS fighters into our societies something that we need to address as a defense policy?

Two is for how long are we letting our allies use the United States as a stepping stone to do ill things to their minorities? A six-year-old boy was beheaded in front of his mom in Medina in Saudi Arabia just because he was a minority Shia. So for how long are we going to be a stepping stone for that?

Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: we'll take one more. The gentleman right in front. I'm sorry, yes, yes, please; right there.

QUESTIONER: Yes, Congressman, I was interested in your view on the reform of CFIUS jurisdiction to impose additional scrutiny of foreign investment in the United States in sensitive technologies, emerging technologies. If you would care to comment on that, I think that's a very interesting hot issue in the trade bar.

MR. MOULTON: Sure. Okay. So with regards to ISIS's re-emergence, I touched on this briefly in the speech. The Administration is very fond of talking about how little territory ISIS controls, but that's really meaningless. I mean the question is whether there a lot of ISIS fighters who are still there, ISIS adherence, just Sunni extremists who are about to come back up and pop back up as soon as we pull out. In the same way that ISIS emerged from the remnants of Al Qaeda in Iraq after we pulled out so precipitously a few years ago.

These are the tough questions that we have to ask, these are the tough assessments that we have to make. And I think when you talk to the intelligence people, not just the military folks, not just the operational folks, but the intelligence folks, they're very clear that they view that this will continue to be a problem.

The analogy I use is that we addressed a grease fire in the Middle East on the stove there by throwing a pail of water and now the entire world in regards is ablaze. And that connects to your second question, which is fundamentally about America's moral leadership. And I ended my talk on this point because I think it is so foundational to our place and our role in the world. Either we're going to be a leader or we're not. And if we want to be a leader of the free world, if we want to be leader of the world period, we have to have moral leadership. Perhaps it's just the burden of

leadership that some Americans don't want to take on, but that burden of being a moral beacon is also an opportunity. And it's fundamental to who we are as Americans. It's written on the base of the Statue of Liberty, it's portrayed in our values across the globe, it's what young Iraqis saw in us when they came up and volunteered to work with us in the heady days of 2003. Because they know what the United States stood for. And I think that a lot of people have forgotten that, and there are people right here at home in Washington who have forgotten what the United States stands for. We've got to get back to being a beacon of hope and freedom for the entire world.

Now, with regard to CFIUS. There's a reason I write all these down. There have been some complaints from the business community about the increased regulations of CFIUS. And perhaps they're not perfect, but this is the kind of thing we need to be doing to protect our technology and to work on countering China in particular. So I think the CFIUS changes, while perhaps imperfect, are a step in the right direction. And in many ways my concern is that they aren't stringent enough, rather that they're too restrictive.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay, time for one more round I think. So let's see if we can just get a couple -- we have a lot of hands, so I apologize in advance that I'm not going to be able to get everybody involved. So, Adam, just to your left there, the gentleman in the purple tie, and then why don't we go to the gentleman with the white paper who has been enthusiastic and persistent. (Laughter)

MR. MOULTON: That's not always a good sign, Mike. (Laughter)

MR. O'HANLON: That's true.

QUESTIONER: Hello, Congressman, and thank you for being here. My first question is with regard to Silicon Valley. Google recently said -- a number of Google

employees just recently wrote a letter saying that they're not willing to work with the DoD on a lot of these AI technologies and there has kind of been -- the DoD has experienced difficulty trying to draw talent away from companies in Silicon Valley. So how do we address that issue?

And the second question I have is in regard to Yemen. The House is set to vote to end U.S. support for the Saudi led coalition in Yemen. And I was wondering if you're concerned if that will reduce American leverage on how the war is conducted there. General Votel recently testified to that in the Senate Armed Services Committee. So I would love to get your thoughts on that.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. And then finally over here.

MR. EVERETT: I probably won't need this, but I'll use it anyway. Hi, I'm Andrew Everett; I'm an employee at Booz Allen, but I'm representing myself as a disabled veteran and not my firm.

And my question, Congressman, is what you think the -- given the fact that post WWII a lot of congressman had served in the military, now way fewer have. What are the limitations you think that imposes on effective oversight of defense and security programs and issues?

MR. O'HANLON: Great. Thank you.

MR. MOULTON: Okay. Great question. Thank you. So starting with Google and DoD. You know, fundamentally, I respect the freedom of Google employees to speak out about this and about their concerns. It comes back to my concern about the moral leadership of the United States. And I think if the employees at Google saw the leaders at DoD and in this Administration as doing the right thing for the country and for the world, they wouldn't object to working with them. And it's a great example of how

falling back, foundering on our moral leadership affects our national security, and affects it right here at home.

Second of all, I think national service would help with this too, because it would help people understand what it means to serve the country, and how to do so in a moral way. I didn't join the Marines because I thought that it was a morally perfect organization. I didn't keep going back to Iraq because I thought it was a morally perfect war -- far from it. I kept going back to Iraq because I thought it might make it better. And I think if the Google employees saw that opportunity in working with DoD, to make our country better, stronger, and more moral in our leadership around the globe, then they would be more interested in working and partnering with them and ultimately serving the country.

With regard to Yemen, frankly, our leverage to date hasn't worked. I mean what have we gotten for our leverage? So, yes, we've made this argument, the U.S. military has made this argument, that by being involved, by being nominally in control of operations we have an effect over the war is fought. My experience in having witnessed this is that it hasn't been very effective, and so we need to be a bit stricter. And by clamping down on the war I think we'll actually have more leverage there.

With regard to fewer veterans in congress, the last five or ten years we've had fewer veterans in congress than in the nation's history. And although every veteran is a great member of congress, not every veteran agrees on everything. That perspective in the body that is charged with the responsibility for deciding when we go to war and how we pursue peace is incredibly important. And I do think that having more veterans in congress will make us better at providing oversight for our wars, for our arms control, for our alliances, and for ultimately the pursuit of peace.

I see consistently, on both sides of the aisle, that it's veterans on the Armed Services Committee who ask the toughest questions about whether we're making the right decisions overseas. In this Syria hearing that I described earlier, the first time that we had had a hearing on Syria in congress in months, maybe even years, it was a very bipartisan hearing, remarkably bipartisan, and it was led by veterans on both sides of the aisle who were asking the toughest questions of our Administration officials about what we're doing in Syria.

So I think veterans have a lot to offer the conversation. You don't need to be a veteran to serve again, you don't need to be a veteran to serve in congress, but it's a perspective that we need at a time when we're still embroiled in the longest war in American history.

Thank you for your own service.

MR. O'HANLON: On that note, please everyone join me in thanking Congressman Moulton. (Applause)

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 600
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190