

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

A CONVERSATION WITH CHAIRMAN OF THE
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF GENERAL JOSEPH F. DUNFORD

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Introduction:

JOHN R. ALLEN, President, The Brookings Institution

Discussion:

MICHAEL O'HANLON, Moderator, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution

GENERAL JOSEPH F. DUNFORD, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

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P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL ALLEN: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Brookings Institution. My name is John Allen. I am the president of Brookings and I am very, very pleased this morning to welcome our honored guest, the 19th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and my friend, General Joe Dunford.

General Dunford has been the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff since October 2015, and prior to that he served as our nation's 36th commandant of the Marine Corps. And he commanded all U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan before that.

General Dunford and I have known each other for many years, since we were captains, in fact. I can say with complete certainty and sincerity that he is one of the finest Marines to have been minted in the modern era of the Marine Corps. In 1996 Lieutenant Colonel Dunford would take command of the Second Battalion, 6th Marines from me at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, and in years later in Kabul we would repeat that ceremony as he would take command of the war effort in Afghanistan.

His storied career spans more than four decades of brilliant service to our country and to the world, in peace, in crisis, and in war. And as the U.S. navigates multiple crises today, as we sit here this morning, I can think of no one -- no one -- better suited to the burdens of this moment than Joe Dunford.

And, general, let me say you are the very definition and embodiment of an American leader. And we are so grateful and so honored that you would be with us this morning here at Brookings.

Shortly General Dunford will take the stage for a conversation on many of the issues we face as a nation, and he will be joined by Brookings senior fellow and director of research for our Foreign Policy program, Mike O'Hanlon. And they will talk for about 30 minutes and then we will go out to you for questions and answers.

I will close by saying we are joined today by a large number of the world's media. And as I always do, ladies and gentlemen of the press, you are most welcome at the

Brookings Institution. Thus, we are also on the record. (Laughter)

So, with that, ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the 19th chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, General Joe Dunford, and Mike O'Hanlon. (Applause)

GENERAL DUNFORD: It was probably less than an unbiased introduction, John. Thank you.

GENERAL ALLEN: Just paying off an old bar bill. (Laughter)

GENERAL DUNFORD: And I'm not sure if you picked up on the subtlety of his comment that I followed him into both battalion command and then at ISAF. So to any success I had in either of those two assignments, I can attribute it to my predecessor. (Laughter) The secret is out, the secret is out.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, it's great to have you here, general, and I just want to say how much it has been a privilege for me to interact with you over the years at Brookings and to learn from you. I think you've been not only a great military leader, but a role model at a personal level to a lot of us. And apart from your support for the patriots, pretty much an unblemished set of ethics and leadership skills. (Laughter) So thank you very much again for the chance to speak today.

And I wanted, if I could, to begin by taking stock of the four years that you've been chairman, just asking you to reflect a little bit on how the world has changed. Because when you came into the position in 2015, we had had a pretty rough 2014.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Right.

MR. O'HANLON: And a lot of the troubles that you have been coping with manifested themselves acutely that year, or thereabout. Everything from the Russian aggressions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, ISIS and its success in Syria and Iraq at that time, China's ongoing militarization of the South China Sea, even as President Xi promised it would not happen, but it did. And you, with Secretary Carter in the Obama administration, and then Secretary Mattis in the Trump administration, changed the way we thought about defense priorities. You came up with the 4+1 framework for four threats, Russian, China,

North Korea, Iran, and transnational terror. You and Secretary Mattis created the National Defense Strategy focused on great power competition. I guess I want to ask, do you see progress because of all those changes and do you feel that the world, while still dangerous, clearly, is stabilizing a little bit in 2019 relative to 2015, or do you feel we are in just as tense of a moment as ever?

GENERAL DUNFORD: You know, Mike, one of the quotes that I use a lot, as I was coming in this assignment, I tripped over something that Henry Kissinger had written, and he said that this was the most complex and volatile period of history since World War II. So to answer your question, if I think about the problems that you mentioned, since 2015 the Russians went into Syria, since 2015 their presence in the Donbass has been more overt, since 2015 the GRU conducted an operation inside of the United Kingdom, since 2015 they attempted to interfere with our elections, and since 2015 they have been quite open about their path of capability development, to include modernizing a nuclear enterprise.

You mentioned China in the South China Sea, and then of course the economic friction that we see today.

North Korea probably is the one area of those three that I would say was probably worse in 2015 to 2016 -- 2016, unprecedented numbers of tests, two nuclear tests. People can be skeptical of the current diplomatic track, but obviously it's not what it was in 2016. Much remains to be seen in the wake of the summit in Vietnam.

With regard to Iran, probably don't need to speak much about that right now. I'm sure a question will come up about that later, but certainly the tension with Iran is greater.

Violent extremism, with General Allen sitting here, the situation in 2015 obviously much worse. ISIS has been cleared from the ground that they held in Iraq and Syria. Iraqi security forces are by and large providing security in their own country. The partners that we have in the ground in Syria with a relatively small U.S. footprint are securing

that area that has been cleared from ISIS. But I would say we describe violent extremism as a generational conflict and I wouldn't take issue with that characterization. And so while we have made great progress against ISIS, that fight remains.

You brought up the 4+1 becoming a 2+3. I would argue that we probably have put a better framework to deal with these challenges out there since 2015. But I wouldn't argue that the situation in the world is more stable, or that Kissinger's words don't ring more true to me today than they did in 2015.

MR. O'HANLON: Let me go a little bit one by one on each of those big threats, if I could, and start with Russia. And you have had an ongoing dialogue with General Gerasimov, and that has been in many cases the highest-level ongoing U.S.-Russia consultation. I know it has been professional and quiet and discreet and you don't want to talk a lot about it publicly, but has that helped to create any kind of a sense of stability? Because as I hear you survey the world, the one thing where I might try to give you a little more of a pat on the back than you gave yourself would be in regard to Russia, where it seems to me that despite all the disinformation campaigns and other serious concerns at that level, that the risk of military confrontation, to my eyes, looks less, because you've built up the European deterrence initiative, because NATO is more focused on the task of deterring in the East, and I think because of your dialogue with General Gerasimov.

Is there any way in which perhaps even though Vladimir Putin remains a wildcard and unpredictable, that we do have, as you say, a pretty strong framework now in place for deterring at least overt aggression against our allies in Europe?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Sure. So when I think about military to military relationships I think about it in terms of mitigating a risk and miscalculation and then managing a crisis in the event of a crisis. And in the wake of the Ukraine we went about two-year period with no military to military dialogue with Russia.

In December of 2015, about two months after I came into the assignment, we reached out for the first time and I think we have since met three or four times face to

face and routinely had conversations. It was in the beginning largely just a focus on managing the conflict in Syria and establishing what has been I think a very effective de-confliction mechanism in Syria. That was the initial nature of the dialogue.

Since then, we have had a conversation on virtually all of the issues that affect the security of our two countries. But as you've spoken about, Mike, the one thing we agreed to, and he has as a professional maintained confidence in this regard. We said, look, the last thing we can afford to do is politicize our relationship. If we want to mitigate the risk of miscalculation, if we want to be in a position to have an open dialogue to manage a crisis, we can agree to disagree on a whole number of issues, particularly policy issues, but we've got to as military professionals make sure that we don't politicize our relationship.

Each and every conversation we've had, we've finished with an agreement on the public affairs guidance. And with apologies to those in the back of the room, we've agreed not to share the details of our conversation in public so as to protect the relationship. And so as a result, four years now into my tenure, you know, we still have an open dialogue and I have the opportunity to work through some difficult issues that confront our two countries in a professional way.

But you said something else that's I think important. And I talk about NATO because you talk about Russia. I would argue in 2015, if you think about it, the discussion in NATO really revolved around assuring allies and partners and the enhanced forward presence initiative really was to give confidence to certain members of NATO that the alliance really would be there for them. We made a fundamental shift about 18 months after that to truly enhance deterrence as well as assurance. And I would argue that the investments that we have made as a nation in Europe over the last few years -- and it's been, respectively, \$4 billion, \$6 billion, \$8 billion, on what was the European reassurance initiative and has become the European defense initiative, has in fact improved our posture in Europe from what it was four years ago, has in fact improved deterrence. I think to cohesion the alliance, for all of the noise we hear, if you look at the results of the summits

over the last three years and then you look at the actions that have taken place in following up to those summits, I'd point to the most recent commitment by Europe to have 30 battalions, 30 ships, 30 squadrons available in 30 days and, in an unprecedented way, to expose those units to validation of their level of readiness by the Supreme Allied Commander of Europe, something that was never done in the past. We'd made a fundamental organizational change in the United States where we stood back up the Second Fleet and the Second Fleet was stood up in large part to make sure that the transatlantic link would be secure in the event of a conflict.

We also supported the reorganization of logistics enterprise in NATO and work with the European Union to work through some of the mobility issues in Europe. Much work remains to be done, but on the right path. And then we just completed, and the Chiefs of Defense approved it last week for submission to the Minister of Defense, the first NATO military strategy in decades has been written and it clearly articulates -- clearly articulates the challenges that confront NATO and provides the framework for the various plans that will be in place in the event that deterrence fails.

So I would argue that as an alliance, NATO is stronger than it was four years ago and, again, could walk through many other initiatives that have been taken to enhance real capability. Do we have more work to do? We certainly do. But when I look back at the four years, one of the things that stands out to me is the very meaningful changes that have been made in NATO to enhance such capability. And, again, four years ago, if you think about it, I had my confirmation hearing in July of 2015 and I was asked in that confirmation hearing, hey, what do you think are the most significant challenges facing our country. And I said well, if I had to point out someone who could pose an existential threat, I would have to point to Russia. And I went on to talk about their nuclear capability, their cyber capability, Georgia, Crimea, Ukraine. That was newsworthy in 2015 in a way that is not newsworthy today, and we were still debating in NATO how to deal with Russia.

And I think there is now, fair to say, general consensus that Russia poses a

threat to the NATO alliance and therefore we need to take steps to first and foremost deter, and if deterrence fails, defend the alliance.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

On this quick tour of the world, and again we're grateful for your willingness to expound on so many topics so quickly, but I now want to shift over to Asia and I want to ask a quick question on Korea, and then get to China.

On Korea I'd like to, if I could, ask about your overall assessment of alliance readiness, because there has been concern that in President Trump's diplomatic efforts to try to break the ice, so to speak, with Kim Jong-un and establish a little more positive momentum -- and I've been somewhat supportive of a lot of what he's been trying to do, even though obviously the style is a little different than the norm historically. But he has of course spoken critically of the big U.S.-ROK military exercises and he has suspended many, if not most, of the larger ones. And there has been some concern from some military officers that alliance readiness has suffered as a result.

Can you help us analyze just how much alliance readiness might have been degraded by the suspension of these exercises, or are we able to do enough smaller exercises that we've preserved most of the combat preparedness despite suspending the sort of signature events?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Sure. I'm glad you asked that question.

First, we have historically spoken about the need to be able to fight tonight with the ROK-U.S. alliance on the peninsula. And I can tell you right up front, that remains a capability that we have. And you talk about some military officers talking about impact to readiness as a result of changes in the exercises. I can also tell you those military officers don't include me, they don't include Admiral Davis, and they don't include General Abrams, who are the three officers that have responsibility for readiness on the peninsula.

And I'll tell you why. We have historically done exercises on the peninsula for two reasons. One was deterrence. So, in that regard, the exercises were very high

profile from a public affairs perspective. So we had large footprint of forces ongoing with command post exercises designed to deter. Inside of those exercises were also a number of activities that were designed to enhance readiness. We have adjusted the former in support of the diplomatic track, and so we have reduced the profile of exercises on the peninsula, we have reduced the public affairs profile of the exercises, we have in many cases reduced periods of time where there's a large footprint of U.S. forces reinforcing the peninsula, and we have gone to what I have described, without getting too esoteric, to a mission essential task based assessment of readiness.

So we have looked at the mission essential task for every organization on the peninsula and we have developed a two year training plan to make sure that those units could be ready.

The other thing I would tell you is at the squadron and the battalion level there has been no change to training on the peninsula. And of course that is the fundamental building block of the ability to integrate and combine arms and fight on the peninsula. There's been no change in that regard.

The big change has been to the high profile, higher headquarters exercises. And we have found ways to do that. You know, and there are reasons to do that twice a year. One is that we have high turnover with U.S. personnel in the summer and the Republic of Korea has traditionally high turnover in the wintertime. And so the exercise program is designed to ensure continuity in the ability to execute the campaign. And we still have that. And General Abrams knows -- he is our commander on the peninsula right now, the United States combined forces Korea -- he knows that at the moment he becomes uncomfortable with the framework that we have in place right now to maintain readiness, he needs to come back to us and we'll make an adjustment. But I would tell you, I am very confident today that we have not compromised the readiness of the alliance to go to war should that be required.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

Let me now ask about China. And I want to ask about the South China Sea in particular and our freedom of navigation exercises and the overall Chinese effort to build up military capability in the South China Sea. A lot of that happened in the 2013-2015 period in terms of the reclaiming of the islands. Then they put military forces on those islands, even though president Xi had promised President Obama he wouldn't. But the recent DoD white paper on China, the annual report, said that that process appears to have been plateauing -- if I remember correctly the wording that was used. But I know you're still very concerned about the South China Sea, you're still doing a lot of freedom of navigation exercises.

Can you give a sense of the state of play? Are things still getting worse? Is there at least a temporary lull in the deterioration? How worried are you about that theater?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Well, I mean, Mike, you mentioned the fall of 2016 President Xi Jinping promised President Obama that they would not militarize the islands. So what we see today are 10,000 foot runways, ammunition storage facilities, routine deployment of missile defense capabilities, aviation capabilities, and so forth. So, clearly, they have walked away from that commitment.

To the extent that the military capabilities haven't been increased in recent months, I assume that's because the islands have now been developed to the point where they provide the military capability that the Chinese required them to have. And so I don't know that I'd read much into no change over the last few months. You know, stabilized in terms of activity, perhaps achieved operational capability from a Chinese perspective.

But you and I spoke just before coming out here and I think it's probably worth repeating how I view the South China Sea. The South China Sea is in my judgment not a pile of rocks, as we have talked about before. And what is at stake in the South China Sea and elsewhere where there are territorial claims, is the rule of law, international laws, norms, and standards. And in my judgment, that is when we ignore actions that are not in compliance with the national rules, norms, and standards. We have just set, you know, a

new standard. And as you and I have spoken about before, that new standard is lower than it was the day before.

And so I think what really is necessary -- and I'm not suggesting at all that it's a military response -- but what needs to happen, in my view, to have a free and open Indo-Pacific, which is the aspiration not only of the United States but the expressed aspiration of all the ASEAN nations is a free and open Indo-Pacific, what needs to happen is there needs to be coherent collective action to those who violate international norms and standards and they need to be held accountable in some way so that future violations are deterred.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

I want to ask a couple of questions now, before going to the audience, about the state of the U.S. military, and then look forward to the broader conversation.

When you became Chairman in 2015, and of course you had been Commandant of the Marine Corps before that, you had succeeded John Allen in Afghanistan, and then you had been Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. So you've had four four-star jobs and you have seen a lot of perspective from the service point of view as well as from the Chairman point of view. And we've been coping with a difficult decade in terms of military readiness, as the Chiefs have been saying for a long time, first brought upon by the intense deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, exacerbated the last decade by the budget problems in Washington, everything from the Budget Control Act to sequestration, but perhaps even more, the continuing resolutions, never having a budget on time, et cetera, et cetera.

But in the last two or three years I think there's been headway, if I read DoD's documentation correctly and your testimony and so forth. How would you assess the state of readiness of the U.S. military today as it tries to get on the comeback trail from, you know, a pretty rough first 20 years of this century?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Let me maybe reinforce the point you made about

how did we get there.

So I remember very clearly in 2010 the collective leadership -- and I wasn't part of it, so I'm not having an out of body experience and blaming somebody else here -- but we made two assumptions in 2010, we said that our operational commitments would reduce and the fiscal environment would stabilize. So those are two assumptions. And the decisions that we made in 2011, '12, and '13 were informed by those two assumptions. And, as you can remember, in 2010, '11, '12, '13, we still had some significant commitments. And so what we said was, look, our major priority has to be making sure our men and women in harm's way have the wherewithal to do the job and we're going to make sure we do that. And we will then address some of these other underlying readiness issues and modernization issues. And, by the way, at some point those become a distinction without a difference between readiness and modernization. We'll get after these issues.

By 2015 it was clear to all of us that, number one, the operational environment was not going to change and our commitments were not going to be reduced. In fact, they may actually increase and the fiscal situation wasn't going to stabilize.

So at that point we started to achieve what I think was a better balance, and I articulated this as what I viewed as one of my most significant challenges when I came into the job, getting the balance between today and tomorrow right. And so I think by 2015 it became clear to all of us that we were not balanced in that regard and we needed to be as attentive to tomorrow as we had been towards meeting the current operation requirements.

And then, fortunately, starting in 2017, I would argue that we began to see adequate levels of funding to be able to address those issues. And to put readiness in some context, you know, that was ammunition shortfalls, it was lack of spare parts, it was operations and maintenance money for training, and in some cases it also became lack of tails or vehicles, either on the flight line or in the motor pool. And that's why I say it's a distinction not a difference. At some point if you have only six airplanes in a squadron that rates twelve, it doesn't matter how ready those six airplanes are, you're still at 50 percent of

capability.

In '17, '18, and '19, we were able to address the ammunition shortfalls, we were able to rebalance our training for those units that were at home station, because the bill payer had been not the units that were deployed, it was the units that were at home station. So we were able to rebalance that and we began to invest in our aviation enterprise, ground vehicles, and so forth, to address some of the shortfalls.

So we're now, what I hope to be four years into stable and adequate levels of funding, assuming that we get fiscal year '20 at or about what the President's budget reflects. And that has made a quantifiable impact on the level of readiness that we have.

What I would say is this, though, that we described it as fill the holes. So we've addressed unit readiness, and I think unit readiness compared to 2015 is significantly better. The second piece of it is our overall competitive advantage to be able to project power and then achieve superiority in any domain when required to execute our campaign. So that would be sea, air, land, space, and cyberspace. And in that regard, our competitive advantage from where it was in 2000 to where it is today has eroded over time.

And so as I look forward and I think about readiness, what I think about is ensuring that we make the investments necessary to have a competitive advantage in 2024 and 2025, as well as today. I feel very confident today in saying that we can protect the homeland, we can meet our alliance commitments, and we have a competitive advantage over any potential adversary. I feel confident in saying that. I feel equally confident in saying that the path that we've been on in '17, '18, '19, and '20 has to continue for several more years in order for us to address that competitive advantage issue, which is separate and distinct from unit level readiness.

MR. O'HANLON: Just one last question, and I want to pursue this issue of resources because even though the fiscal '20 request wound up being at the higher end of what people expected -- and if you get that, as you say, you'll be I think fairly happy with your resourcing. If we look at the five-year plan, the buildup sort of stops, right, because the

projections for DoD's budget are basically 1 percent growth in future years, which would be less than the rate of inflation. And the reason why I noticed that is not because I think \$750 billion is too little for defense, but I wonder -- you know, people have called the 2020 budget proposal "the masterpiece". I wonder if there is a tiny flaw in the masterpiece, or at least one unanswered question, which is the Air Force and the Navy still have ambitious plans for restructure growth. And we have heard General Goldfein and we've heard Secretary Wilson last fall unveil a plan for the Air Force to grow by 25 percent. The Navy still wants to grow its fleet by 25 percent. And at the same time that we're trying to improve quality and innovation, those two services in particular want to improve or augment size.

And I wonder if there's a quality-quantity dilemma that we're prioritizing both and we don't really have the long-term resource trajectory that's going to be able to afford the modernization that you talk about, and also the restructure growth.

So to the extent you're leaving that question for the future, do you have guidance to offer as to which of those is more important, quality or quantity?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah. We view that as capability and capacity, right. What we can do and how much of it we can do. I've been pretty clear in testimony that we need to sustain predictable and adequate levels of funding in the future. I've been pretty clear that we've done some detailed analysis of what we call competitive areas, so we've look at ourselves through the lens of 14 competitive areas. And although it's a classified study, you can imagine what they are. They're the maritime domain, our cyber capabilities, our space capabilities, where are we in electronic warfare, and so forth. We've looked at the 14 competitive areas, we've looked at the trajectory of capability development that our peer competitors -- Iran -- we've made judgments in conjunction with the intelligence community about where they will be in the mid-'20s, we've looked at where we are today and where we would need to be to maintain an acceptable competitive advantage in 2020, and we have done the math to justify 3-5 percent real growth over inflation to meet both the capability and capacity requirements. Having said that, if the budget doesn't realize 3-5

percent real growth, you have to make tough choices.

What I would say to the issue of is it capability or capacity is it can only be capacity where you have capability. So I think the lesson that many of us learned in the 1970s and the 1980s is you can't have forestructure without proper training, without proper equipment, without proper leadership, without property funding to conduct exercises and provide maintenance.

So what I would say to those coming behind me is make sure that if we grow -- I don't dispute in many cases the requirement to increase our capacity to meet our commitments at an acceptable level of what we call deployment to dwell, how much time are our forces away, how much time are they home. But I would say this, if we're going to grow capacity you need to do it in a way where it is meaningful capability, balanced capability. And when you have to make a choice between capacity and capability, I would go with capability. I would make sure every unit that we have actually has a level of readiness to meet its requirements. And I wouldn't grow the Force in a way that exceeds what we predict is going to be sustainable.

That's a tough call, but I've seen us get that wrong twice in my career and in my mind the quality over quantity would be the most important thing I would recommend. And, in fact, if you look at our budgets in '17, '18, and '19, that's exactly the choices that we had made. We have invested significantly in space, invested significantly in cyberspace, invested significantly in electronic warfare, we've built back up our ammunition stores. All of those things designed to enhance our combat readiness, even at the cost of not growing perhaps to the degree that we wanted to to meet our commitments.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic. Thank you.

Well, I think I'll bring others into the conversation now as well. So if we could begin here perhaps in the third row. And please wait for a microphone and identify yourself if you could please.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. Reporter from Voice of America. I have two

questions for the General.

You mentioned in your speech that we need to do something to hold those who broke the rules in the South China Sea accountable. So I'm just wondering, could you elaborate on that? What steps can the United States do there?

And the second question, it's about the U.S.-China relationship. With the deteriorating U.S.-China relationship, what is the mil to mil relationship like?

Thank you.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Two excellent questions.

The first one -- and I want to emphasize what I said when I answered that question the first time is that I wasn't suggesting a military response. But there are certainly diplomatic and economic steps that can be taken to hold people accountable. And, by the way, I don't view that specifically on that one incident. That's one specific case, the South China Sea, that I do believe that there are territorial disputes that should be handled in accordance with the laws. So that's just my position.

But what I wasn't suggesting is that if it's still in dispute that there aren't other tools, primarily other tools to deal with it.

With regard to the mil to mil relations, I visited Beijing last year and for over a decade we had tried to get what we call "joint staff dialogue" ongoing. And we had been unsuccessful. So about a year and a half ago we implemented a formal process of engagement between the general staff, if you will, in China and the joint staff here in Washington, DC in a more routine engagement. And in addition to a personal visit to visit my counterpart, we have had some secure video teleconferences since then. And so we have worked very hard to have a mil to mil relationship that again can be stabilizing. And both President Xi Jinping and President Trump have characterized the military to military relationship as an aspect of a relationship that should be in fact stabilizing.

So we have worked toward the implement the President's intent in that regard and I think we have effective lines of communication and lines of communication that

could use some improvement and some maturation. And I would tell my successor that that would be an area where I think we've made some progress, but perhaps aren't where we need to be in terms of our military to military relationship with China.

MR. O'HANLON: The gentlemen just to your left, Adam. Yes, thank you.

MR. TUCKER: Thank you. Patrick Tucker with Defense One. I guess I'll ask the Iran question.

How has the threat posed by Iran to the United States and U.S. forces in the region changed over the last year? And how do you expect it to change in the future? And, of course, if you can be as specific as possible I think we'd all appreciate it.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah, I'll be very specific. In the last week of April I began to see more clearly things that I had been picking up on over a period of months. And what was qualitatively different to me about the intelligence -- and I remember very clearly it as the 3rd of May, it was on a Friday, and what was qualitatively different about the threat stream we had seen was it was multiple threat streams that were all perhaps coming together in time. And what's not new are threat streams. What was new was the pattern of threat streams that extended from Yemen -- so threats emanating from Yemen, threats in the Gulf, and threats in Iraq. We watched that very carefully on Friday evening. We sent the message at that time to Iran, just to make sure that they understood that we would hold them accountable should something take place in the region, that there was not an opportunity for them to do things and then claim that it wasn't attributable to Iran. So we wanted to mitigate the risk of miscalculation.

We also saw on the intelligence that perhaps there was a question about both the will and the capability of the United States to respond. And so throughout the weekend I had a dialogue with General McKenzie, who is our Commander at the United States Central Command, and by Sunday morning we recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group that was in the Mediterranean be immediately ordered to the United States Central Command. By the way, we averaged

more than two carrier strike groups on station in 2012 in the Central Command at any given time. We had zero on the weekend of the 3rd, the 4th, and 5th of May. And we also sent bombers there as well as some Patriot missile systems.

Those were designed to address what I saw as a gap in perception. So we wanted to make sure that we addressed three things to mitigate the risk of miscalculation. One, we wanted the Iranians to know that if they did anything, it would be attributable to them. Number two, we wanted them to know that we had the capability to respond in the event that deterrence fails, and that was the force elements that we sent in on the weekend of the 3rd to the 5th of May. And the last was to make sure that those force elements then were a manifestation of our will to respond.

This was all designed to enhance deterrence. And, again, what I would argue was qualitatively different was we saw something that looked more like a campaign than individual threat. And it was the geographic span and the perception that that activity would try to be synchronized in time that caused us to look at that threat differently than 40 years, by the way, of malign activity by the Iranians. So malign activity in threats to our forces by the Iranians were not new, but a more widespread almost campaign like perspective for the Iranians was what we were dealing with.

In any event, by the way, people can question the veracity of intelligence, all I would say is since that weekend there have been ships that have been hit with mines, there have been UAV strikes, there have been rocket strikes in the proximity of the United States embassy in Iraq. All that activity has happened since the weekend of the 3rd, the 4th, and the 5th. So I viewed this purely through a military lens. And then last week's force elements that we sent in the wake of that weekend. General McKenzie and I continue to have an ongoing dialogue about what might be the proper posture in the light of tensions that exist today. And we all can see that there is a difference in the tensions that exist. And General McKenzie and I had a conversation and we focused in on what do we need to ensure that we have a proper level of force protection for our people in the region. And so if

you look at the specific capabilities that we flowed to the region, those were designed to enhance our force protection and they were accompanied by a message that this is not intended to be a provocation, this is not intended to reinforce our offensive capability in the region, this is designed to protect our people, much like the previous force elements were sent in to designed to enhance our deterrence.

And so that's where we are today.

MR. O'HANLON: Let's see where we can go next. We'll go here to the fourth row please, the gentleman in the red tie.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. Karl Golovin retired special agent, U.S. Customs, 911 responder, domain reference, anidealiveson.net.

My question concerns the potential for false flag terrorism, leading us into war with Iran. As background, in 1962 your predecessor, Lyman Lemnitzer, prepared Operation Northwoods, presented to John Kennedy, proposing various false flag attacks on various U.S. persons to be attributed to Cuba, used as pretext for war with Cuba. More recently, Dr. Alan Sabrosky of the Army War College and former defense minister of Germany Andreas Von Bulow, have written credibly about aspects of false flag terrorism in the events of 9-11.

My question is, today, are there even allies of the U.S. that would like to see a conflict of Iran, the utter destruction of Iran, and would perpetrate a false flag event on U.S. interests in order to cause that to happen?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah, look, I'm not going to answer the question directly. I don't know what others want, but I'll just tell you this, I am very familiar with the consequences of going to war and take the responsibility of providing military advice in that regard very seriously. And I know the consequences of going to war, both from an economic, and more importantly, from a human perspective. And so I can assure that any military advice that I would provide would be carefully measured by, you know, checking the intelligence multiple times, ensuring the veracity of intelligence, and then make a

recommendation for a response that's appropriate to whatever the provocation may be, whether it's vis a vis Iran or any other conflict.

Are there people who might like to get the United States to do something? Certainly you can see that even in the open source where that speculation is out there. But I can guarantee you, that's not going to inform the military advice I'm going to provide, and it's certainly not going to warm my perspective when I make a recommendation.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Let's see, looking for -- go here in the third row, please. Another gentleman in a red tie.

QUESTIONER: Thank you for coming. My name is Mitsuo Nakai, a Japan native, U.S. citizen.

Japan is trying to purchase more of F-35, trying to beef up their defense and so forth. Can you talk about our alliance with Japan just a little bit?

GENERAL DUNFORD: I can talk about our alliance with Japan. I probably meet, conservatively, seven times a year with my Japanese counterpart, either in Washington, DC or in Asia, and I will be there in about three or four weeks again. Admiral Kawano and I, who was my counterpart until a week or two ago -- it would be hard for me to identify a week that went by where I didn't have a conversation.

Clearly, the Japanese-U.S. relationship, as highlighted by the President's recent trip, is a cornerstone to our strategy in the Pacific and in a country that shares our vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

And from a capability perspective, as you suggested, the Japanese self-defense force is making significant investments to modernize and enhance their defensive capability and their ability to deter in the region the F-35, the B-22 ballistic missile, defense ships, Patriot System, THAAD systems, and so forth.

So, you know, that is in my view one of the bright spots in my assignment has been the bilateral relationship with the Japanese. And, by the way, the various multilateral arrangements that we have in the Pacific that involve both the United States and

Japan.

MR. O'HANLON: I want to just stay on that for on quick second, if I could, General, throw myself back into the queue and ask about -- the Japanese are doing this by spending just 1 percent of their GDP on their military. It's a long-standing ceiling that they have essentially imposed on themselves. And it gets to this question of how do we best measure burden sharing. I'm not against the 2 percent goal for NATO. A lot of people before President Trump supported that. I think it makes sense. But of course the bigger question is often how do you spend the money.

Do you see the NATO alliance making good decisions about how to spend this increased money? Yes, there's a greater presence in the Baltic States and Poland, but overall do you see NATO nations making enough efforts to build more projectable deployable force? And maybe do we need to get the burden sharing debate to include also metrics of deployability, not just of overall economic effort.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Look, it's an excellent point.

First, with regard to your commenting on burden sharing, I'll be completely evasive, unsatisfying, and disappointing. (Laughter) And, seriously, I have never spoken about that issue publicly, nor with my counterparts. I have yet to meet a chief of defense who doesn't want to hire a top line in defense. And so, you know, typically brow beating my counterparts (laughter) about how much money is being spent in their countries on defense would be unsatisfying in itself. And we don't do that.

But you bring up a really important point about NATO. So I mentioned earlier the NATO military strategy. In our system we have a strategy and then we have an assessment process that helps us inform what investments from either a capability or capacity perspective are necessary to implement that strategy. NATO has historically not had that. We now have three things that I think will be the, you know, cardinal direction for us to go in in NATO. One is the NATO military strategy, another is an accepted concept for NATO operations, and the third will be an assessment process that helps us understand

where we are relative to where we need to be in executing NATO military strategy. That will never be direction in nature. I mean, you know, no -- every country is going to make its own decisions about defense investments. There are many, you know, domestic considerations that will always dominate any decision about what you buy or what you don't buy inside of a given country. But we can be informed as an alliance as to what the best mix of capabilities and capacities are. And my counterparts can then go back informed by that information into the debate that takes place in their own country. So I see that as a positive.

The other thing that we have done in a smaller group of other countries where we have robust intel sharing arrangements, we have leveraged those intel sharing arrangements to have an assessment process as well that we conduct at the top secret level to help us all collectively understand where the best investments may be for our respective countries to achieve campaign outcomes where we expect always to be fighting as part of a coalition.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

I'll go to the gentleman in the orange shirt, about the eighth row. Two up there, thanks. And after that the very back row, blue tie.

MR. BERTUCA: Thank you, General. Tony Bertuca from Inside Defense.

I wanted to ask you about something closer to home, about the border. So another issue that will be left for your successor. In what ways do you believe it would be appropriate for the military's mission at the U.S.-Mexico border to expand, if it were to expand? And then also is it right to be concerned about resources moving to that area when it was not identified as an unfunded priority by the Pentagon?

Thank you.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Okay. Let me start with the framework that I have used to provide advice on the border, and it's very simple. Number one, is the mission legal. Number two, do our people have the proper training. Number three, do they have the proper capability. And, number four, is the direction we're providing to our men and women clear

and unambiguous; do they know exactly what they're doing. And if we're meeting those four criteria and we are filling a legitimate capacity shortfall of the Department of Homeland Security, then the mission is whole appropriate and consistent with multiple presidents who have asked the Department of Defense to address shortfalls in the Department of Homeland Security.

So when you separate the politics and the emotion from it, you know, my military advice is benchmarked against those four factors. And everything that we have done to date is consistent with those four factors. Everything we're doing today is legal. All of our men and women are properly trained and equipped and they have clear direction as to what their mission is.

With regard to the money, you know, in my view it's the President's budget, right, and so this is a dialogue that takes place between the executive branch and the legislative branch about how to fund the President's priorities. So I'm not going to comment on the appropriateness of taking money from the Department of Defense and moving it to the border. We're certainly going to take operations and maintenance money when we're tasked to perform a mission to train those forces that are going on the mission and then to sustain those forces in the execution of that mission, and that's what we're doing.

Other than that, when it comes to the broader funding of infrastructure and so forth, again, I think that's most appropriately a dialogue that takes place between the President and the Congress, and then we go back and we execute the legal orders that we have been given.

And I would be happy to follow up on that question, because I think it's important to separate the emotion of the border issue and the challenges on the border from the employment of the U.S. military in what is fundamentally a legal and appropriate mission.

And let me address a question that you touched on but didn't ask directly, and that is readiness. So when people say to me, well, we're sending forces down to the border, doesn't that make them less ready. What I say is look, if we send someone to

respond to Mount Pinatubo or a tsunami in Indonesia or conduct operations in Afghanistan or conduct operations in Iraq, that unit by definition is not performing all of the tasks that are in the design of that particular unit. How do we accommodate that? We make sure that we rotate units routinely through different missions to give them experience and training and capability in the full spectrum of missions that we expect them to perform.

So I don't view the mission on the border with regard to readiness as any other mission that we've been assigned. Which again we look at missions in terms of a mission you've been assigned and a mission for which a unit was designed. Seldom do you get an assigned mission that -- seldom if ever, I would say, do you get a mission assigned that would allow you to develop proficiency in all of the tasks for which that unit was designed. If that helps you understand the question.

MR. O'HANLON: Yes, sir. Joe, in the back.

MR. TABEL: Thank you. This is Joe Tabet with Alhurra.

Chairman Dunford, I want to go back to your remarks on Iran. How likely you are in favor of having a hotline with the Iranian military just in order to avoid any miscalculation in the region?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Look, at the end of the day, our mil to mil relationship is fundamentally a policy decision. What I will tell you in general terms is I believe that military to military relationships and dialogue can be a stabilizing influence in a relationship, but there has to be a clear framework within which that military to military relationship is ongoing. And we don't, as you know, have a direct counterpart in Iran. And so we would have to work our way through that.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. The woman in the next to the last row.

QUESTIONER: Chung ahn Kim, Washington correspondent for (inaudible), ETV, Korea.

In a recent interview President Trump actually said that he wanted five nuclear sites destroyed, asked that to Kim Jong-un, and he only said one or two. That's why

the whole talk at Hanoi failed. Could you tell us a little more specifically what those five sites represent?

And at the Hanoi press conference President Trump also said that he does not know when Kim Jong-un will be coming back to the table. If that's the case, where is the strategy at the moment?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Look, this is another area where I'll be a bit disappointing in my answer. I'll talk to you from a military dimension. We look at North Korea through the lens of the capability they represent. Our job is to make we have sufficient forces to deter a provocation and respond in the event that deterrence fails. We're also supporting a diplomatic track by disrupting ship to ship transfers of petroleum products that are inconsistent with UN Security Council resolutions.

And with regard to the framework within which we're negotiating a peaceful resolution to a denuclearized peninsula, that is absolutely in the lane of the President and the Secretary of State and I've got to be in complete support. I don't have my own view on the policy or the framework within which we're going to address denuclearization. My job is to support the diplomatic track, and that's what we're doing.

QUESTIONER: (Off mic).

GENERAL DUNFORD: Yeah, but I view that -- I'm not trying to be evasive, but I view the specificity that you got into as a policy issue. So if the President spoke about five and Kim Jong-un said two, I view that as all on a normal dialogue that's ongoing in a diplomatic effort to denuclearize the peninsula. And I'm not going to comment with specificity on whether five or two or whatever it ought to be should be addressed.

MR. O'HANLON: We've got time for a couple more. So, let's see, we've got the gentleman there in the white shirt. Yes, please.

QUESTIONER: Thank you very much. My name is Mira Mosher from Voice of America, Afghanistan service.

You talked about Afghanistan. My question is that, as you know, right now

peace talks are going on in Afghanistan with Mr. Khalilzad and the Taliban. The Taliban didn't accept government presence in direct talk. So if peace talks succeeded, one main demand is the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. And U.S. forces, the U.S. officials and Afghan officials all the time reiterated that there are not only Taliban threats in Afghanistan, other -- more than 20 (inaudible) organizations.

If U.S. accepts to withdraw from Afghanistan, how do we deal toward other terrorist organizations, as ISIS and others in Afghanistan?

GENERAL DUNFORD: Look, no one's suggested that the United States is going to leave Afghanistan without our counterterrorism interests being addressed. And although I think we are very helpful to the Afghan people -- and those of us who have served there are proud of that -- our fundamental interests are counterterrorism presence in South Asia in support of a broader South Asia strategy. And that's not negotiable in terms of our counterterrorism interests.

You have correctly identified the position of the Taliban, which is a complete withdrawal of all U.S. forces. Our interests are to make sure that our counterterrorism interests are addressed as well as some other principles that I'm sure that the State Department will insist upon in the dialogue.

And a very important principle that we have insisted on is an Afghan owned, Afghan led dialogue. In the initial work of Ambassador Khalilzad, who -- god bless him, because he's doing something that hasn't been done now in 10 or 15 years. And for all the skepticism people may have on what may happen on this diplomatic track, the fact is there is a diplomatic track. And so we ought to do all we can to reinforce that, and we are. But I think you need to make sure we understand that a key part of the current diplomatic framework is to ensure that the Afghan government, the Afghan people, inclusive Afghan people, are participants in that process.

MR. O'HANLON: And, finally, very last question to Marvin Kalb here in the front row please.

MR. KALB: General, first of all, thank you very much for being here today.

A two-part question. The first is, what is your judgment of Putin's end game? What does he really want? And, second, among those of us who study Russia there has been a feeling that when Putin has domestic problems, he seeks some -- what -- some way of getting out of that by moving externally. I'm wondering if there is any evidence to suggest that?

GENERAL DUNFORD: I think if you look at the demographics in Russia, you look at the economics in Russia, you look at, you know, some of the signs of disaffection in Russia, I can't necessarily get inside of Putin's mind and say that those three variable have affected how he reacts externally, but I think the evidence is pretty clear, the pattern of behavior is pretty clear. I don't think it's unique in Russian history to create an external challenge to accommodate a domestic issue. That's not also unique to Russia to do that.

And so, you know, I don't think there's any doubt that domestic politics bears on President Putin's calculus. And I don't think I'm too far out of my lane as somebody in uniform to make that assertion.

With regard to what I think Russia wants as well, I mean I think they want to be the preeminent power in Eurasia would be my judgment. I mean they've been very clear about that. If you look at the path of capability development, if you look at what President Putin has said, if you look at the actions they've taken in Georgia, in the Crimea, in the Donbass, you can't draw any other conclusion than that's what they are trying to do.

MR. O'HANLON: If I could ask a favor of folks to please let us have a minute to leave the stage before you get up. But please, on behalf of John Allen, all of us at Brookings, please join me in thanking Chairman Dunford.

GENERAL DUNFORD: Thank you. (Applause)

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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