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WEBINAR

A CONVERSATION WITH
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF GENERAL MARK MILLEY

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Introduction:

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GENERAL MARK MILLEY
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL ALLEN: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. And it is a sincere pleasure for me to welcome our featured and honored guest today chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark A. Milley, United States Army.

Since becoming the 20th chairman of the Joints Chiefs in 2010 General Milley has worked to realize the U.S. National Defense Strategy which prioritizes competition with China and Russia and American defense planning. Indeed, Chairman Milley has worked tirelessly with civilian and uniformed leadership towards developing the U.S. Armed Forces into a truly modern armed force capable of deterring and heading off the threats of all types that we may be facing today, including those emanating from near peer competitors that have now really pronounced once again the idea of great power competition.

He simultaneously kept a close and careful eye on the perennial defense issues associated with Iran and North Korea and violent extremism in the Middle East and elsewhere. And this way General Milley's tenure has coincided with — by any standard, could be considered a unique period in American military history. Wherein these threats are multifaceted, they're transnational, and they're multi-domain. And given the realities of domestic politics, questions about preserving the apolitical character of the Armed Forces and so on, these are all open for intense debate and conversation.

So being a great infantryman, General Milley has navigated to sometimes challenging terrain. Prior to his becoming the chairman, General Milley was the 39th chief of staff of the great United States Army and served in many of the storied divisions of the United States Army, including the 2nd Infantry Division, 10th Mountain Division. He would be a deputy commander of the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, he would command the 10th Mountain Division — climb to glory, sir —would command the 3rd Corps, and be the commanding general of U.S. Army Forces Command.

But there's one accomplishment that is not necessarily in his bio, but I'll have to mention it today, and I think it's one that he's very proud about, and he is the proud son of a Marine. And that picture behind me is of the 4th Division going over the beach at Iwo Jima, where I think his father was a

participant.

So, General, we are really proud of you and very proud to have you with us today. We know that a very difficult duty is coming up for you in the very near future, and that is for you to remain neutral at this year's Army-Navy game. I know it's tough. We're going to keep our eye on you, those of us from Annapolis have great expectations for your neutrality. But thank you for all that you have done for our country. I mean that sincerely. And all that you have done for our allies around the world.

And I'd like to turn it over now to a deal friend, a fellow here at Brookings, Senior Fellow Mike O'Hanlon of our Foreign Policy Program, who will kick off the conversation about the defense challenges that you face and we face as a nation. And the he will conclude with some questions and answers.

Now, let me also say that this session is very much on the record today. If you have questions send them to events@Brookings.edu or on Twitter #FutureOfDefense.

And with that, sir, God bless you. Thank you for being with us today. And over to you, Mike.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, John. Thank you, General Milley. And I also want to add my personal gratitude not only for you joining us today and all you've done for the country, but for all the men and women and the military families and veterans who have worked so tirelessly and sacrificed so much on behalf of the country that you, I know, are proud to represent and lead.

So thank you, sir.

And I thought the best way to begin our conversation today was to sort of take stock of how the military is doing in broad perspective in its readiness and the state of its people and its families. There have been a lot of stresses and strains obviously, COVID being only the latest. So I'd love any update you might have on how the military is handling the COVID crisis, but also more generally, since we're at this moment as 2020 winds down. It's been 40 years since you finished up at Princeton as an ROTC and hockey player star back in the day. So you've watched the U.S. military over four decades and you've been now in leadership at the chairman position a year and a half and before that for four

previous years as the Army chief. So I just wondered how you would take stock of the condition of the U.S. military today, and then we'll get into talking more about what you're doing to prepare for the future.

But, again, thank you for being with us. And over to you.

GENERAL MILLEY: Michael, thanks. Thanks for the opportunity. And I want to thank General Allen for those kind words. I think his picture was on the screen and over his shoulder was a painting that I noticed, and it was the assault landing on Iwo Jima. And that beach looks to me like it was approximately the beach my dad might have landed on with the 4th Marine Division. And General Allen's — I think it was his father-in-law — may have been the chief of staff of the 4th Marine Division. An incredible battle, bloodiest battle per square mile in American history. Almost 7,000 marines gave their lives in less than 30 days. So I'm very humbled. My dad passed away, as most of the veterans have now, but I'm very, very humbled to be the son of a World War II veteran who hit the beach at Iwo Jima. And also, I might note my mother served in the Navy at a hospital out in Seattle, so very proud of both of their service.

Michael, you mentioned 40 years ago at Princeton. I had no idea to make a career of the military, but I did want to serve. And 40 years ago, the world was a much, much different place, if we, you know, roll the clock back a little bit. We should recall that 1979 the Russians rolled into Afghanistan as part of an attempt to quell what they thought was a breakaway portion of what they considered their near abroad. They had the Iranian revolution in that year, you had the assaults in Mecca and Medina and the assaults in Saudi Arabia. And there were several other critical events that happened in that year, which was my senior year at Princeton, right before graduation.

And we in the military were utterly committed and in the middle of what we thought was almost a never-ending Cold War with the Soviet Union. And little did we know a decade later the wall would come down, or begin to come down between the inter-German border. But '79 to '80-time frame, when I got commissioned 40 years ago, it was fundamentally a different geopolitical world. If you look at things like technology, you know, 1971 I think or '72, '73-time frame, the early '70s, I think is your first email ever. I think if you go flash forward, call it 20 years, to '90 to '91-time frame, that's where you start

getting first websites. Then coming forward another almost two decades to 2008 and you get the iPhone comes out with Steve Jobs. So you had an absolute explosion in information technology that did not really exist when I was commissioned. You had all kinds of different radio systems, different munitions, and so on and so forth. And you had a different geopolitical environment. So a lot has changed, as you well know.

As far as you mentioned taking stock of the military today, the United States military is a very powerful military. No one should ever mistake it for anything other than that — adversaries, friends, foes. The United States military is extraordinarily capable. We are very, very powerful. We're powerful in all domains, whether it's the traditional domains of air, land, and sea or whether it's space and cyber. But what's also important to know and to recognize as a fact is the gaps between us and potential adversaries, say China or Russia, for example, those have shortened and closed a little bit over the last 10-15-20 years.

The United States has been heavily engaged in counterinsurgency warfare in the Middle East that we're all very familiar with. At the same time the Chinese, for example, they took stock in our operations worldwide and they decided they would modernize. And it goes back to Deng Xiaoping in '79, another critical event from that fateful year. And he modernized his — he decided to reform the society of China, modernize their economy. And they had a run of about 10% for quite a while of their GDP growth. And today they've slowed down — they call it 6%, 7%, something in that range. But that's still extraordinary growth for an economy.

So for 40 years now — 41, the Chinese economy has really gone on a roll, extraordinarily powerful. And in its wake, has come a modernized reformed very, very capable Chinese military. So where the Soviet military was the pacing threat, if you will, back in the '70s and '80s sort of thing and when I was commissioned. Today I would argue that the Chinese military and the challenge from a rising China, if you will, that is really the pacing threat of today.

So a lot of geostrategic changes, a lot of changes in the environment in terms of technology. Urbanization is rapidly approaching almost 80 percent of the world's population by mid-

century. So there's a lot of change that's occurred at paces that are much more rapid than at any time period we've ever seen in history. So there's been a lot of change, but thanks for the opportunity to comment on it.

As far as our military goes, I don't want anybody to mistake, our military is very, very capable and we're ready for whatever comes our way. We will — we're determined to defend the Constitution of the United States and we will protect the American people and our way of life. No one should doubt that.

MR. O'HANLON: So if I could bear down a little bit on a couple of specific areas within that realm of broader U.S. military capability today — and these are areas where sometimes those of us who are defense wonks track the data — and I know you do too — on readiness, recruiting, retention, condition of equipment, condition of military pay and benefits. I wondered if you had any broad observations on those sorts of readiness trends? Is today's force — I mean some people have said today's force is of course very tired, it's been doing so much for 20 years in the broader Middle East. Other people say, well, but the burden is less than it used to be, we don't have any big deployments in Iraq or Afghanistan anymore and we sort of stabilized the budget environment. The Trump administration has, with the congressional support of both parties, managed to increase the budget a bit and maybe we're in better shape now.

I just wondered if you could put some of these, you know, trends of readiness in perspective compared to the last few years, compared to where you'd like them to be.

GENERAL MILLEY: Yeah, let me try to answer. Actual readiness data, as you know, is classified. So let me try to answer it this way, approximately — and this is an approximate aggregate comment about the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marines, Space Force, etc. — round figure, about a third of the force is at the highest levels of readiness at a moment in time. And that's about right, because we would have a certain amount of the force is in training, a certain amount of the force is refitting from previous deployment, and about a third of the force is ready to go at a moment's notice, so to speak, at a high level of readiness. Some organizations and some units that are much higher level of

readiness, others not so much. But a broad, you know, metric for you and for others in an unclassified format, I would say about a third. And it's factually correct. Again, some units higher, some units less.

In terms of recruiting, we're doing actually pretty well on recruiting. There's some areas of concern. Pilots and some of the higher tech skills such as cyber specialists, etc. that are in high demand in civil society, those are very difficult to retain. But our recruiting and retention across the board in all the services is pretty good.

Discipline, excellent. Morale — there's always comments about the force is, you know, tired, and it's been at war for 20 years. That's true, but — to a certain extent that's true, but most of your younger part of the force has not actually deployed. And if there's one common theme that I get as I talk to troops around the world, is they would like to deploy. And it's not that they are deploying too much, it's that they haven't deployed at all and they're just at their home station, they're training. And it's all important work, but they would actually like to deploy somewhere. And we do have forces that are deployed in a wide variety of situations — some in combat, some not.

One of the things that we started to do — and I think this is important, is a holistic review of our global footprint and a holistic review of the disposition of the force and the tasking purposes of all of the forces worldwide. There's a very strong argument to be made that we may have forces in places that they shouldn't be and we may have forces that are needed in places that they're not right now, and that we need to adjust our global footprint. In some cases, there's an argument to be made we have too many troops overseas in too many countries. And there are a lot of budgetary implications to all of that.

But broadly speaking, I would say that the normal traditional readiness indicators, the readiness metrics of recruiting, retention, and the standard of classified data of training and equip, etc., we're in pretty good shape.

MR. O'HANLON: I wondered if you could speak specifically — before we move on to the future, and you already had mentioned China and the National Defense Strategy, and innovation, modernization — but before we get to that, if you could add a word on COVID and how the force is holding up at this late juncture, late in 2020, after almost a year of the pandemic. I know that early in

2020 there were specific problems with certain Naval forces, the Teddy Roosevelt, the Kidd. There have been concerns that there was a need I believe to suspend basic training for a while back in the spring. But overall it appeared to me through the spring and summer that the force was holding up pretty well in the face of COVID. And mercifully there weren't that many fatalities within the U.S. Armed Forces from COVID either.

Could you give us a snapshot here as we near the end of the calendar year about how the military is holding up in the face of this terrible pandemic?

GENERAL MILLEY: Well, early on we took pretty aggressive action within the military. Now, we're unique. We're a subset of a free and democratic society, but we have a hierarchical structure. We have discipline, we issue orders and people follow them. So we took some pretty stringent measures early on to protect the force. And the reason we wanted to do that, we recognize that our job, our task as the military is to protect the American people. And we can't accomplish that task, we can't protect the American people, defend the Constitution if we're all sick. So we recognized the need to protect the force early on and we did that. We pulled off the shelf our global pandemic op order that has been in existence, we tweaked it a little bit, and we started doing certain conditions on our own force. We learned a lot of lessons from the TRs, as was known, and we started doing isolation and screening prior to getting on ships, for example, or any closed operating environment, like a bomber or a fighter, etc., where there's multiple people in a crew.

So we imposed a whole series of pretty stringent restrictions on ourselves that seems to have made some contribution. But I think one of the biggest contributions to why the U.S. military has fared fairly well — not perfect — we have had deaths, and those are tragic, we have had troops that are sick, etc., but statistically speaking, relative to the whole, the number of deaths and sicknesses within the military, within the force, has been relatively small. Probably the biggest contributing factor to that is our demographic. Our demographic is not the same as civil society. Our demographic, to no one's surprise, is mostly young people who are highly fit and they tend to fare reasonably well if infected.

So we, through a combination of our demographic and the control measures that we put

on ourselves early on, we have done fairly well overall. And I think we are at least equal to or better than any of the militaries in the world as it dealt with this particular virus.

Second part of that though is our contribution to helping the American people through the COVID crisis. And we deployed at the peak about 60-62,000 troops in support of COVID, to include troop ships. You saw the Comfort and the Mercy out there, you saw hospitals being sprung up in various cities, doctors and nurses. In fact we just sent a whole contingent of nurses the other day. So we still have today — at the peak we had 62,000 but today we have about 20-23,000 committed to the COVID operations around the country.

We're continuing to do that and then our contributions to Operation Warp Speed is significant. General Gus Perna is one of the senior logisticians, a great, great human being, and he's out there banging away. And he's going to make sure that we distribute the COVID vaccines nationwide here in a very short order. I think the next week or two or three they'll start the distribution of those.

So the military has made a contribution to protecting the society and also we protected ourselves in the process. So I think we've done reasonably well as a military.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic. I'd like to now turn to the future. And you've already teed up some of the big issues and mentioning China and the current and future global security environment. It's been almost three years since Secretary Mattis, with you and others as part of the team, wrote the National Defense Strategy under President Trump. That built on initiatives that occurred in the latter Obama years when you first became Army chief, like the third offset, as it was called. The Army has had its multi-domain operations. You helped create the futures command when you were chief.

I wondered if you want to offer some broad commentary on where we stand with this great effort in terms of preparing for a great power competition, hopefully not great power war, but nonetheless re-invigoration of great power deterrence, and just where you see us at this juncture at the end of 2020.

Over to you please.

GENERAL MILLEY: A couple of things. First, I think the NDS is a very, very good

document. And that will be one of the significant contributions that General Mattis has made of the many that he's made over the years. And that document I think is rigorous, it was well thought out at the time. Many people contributed to it, but it really was the pen of General Mattis who did that. And that's basing it — a solid understanding of history, of military history, of geopolitics. Is it perfect? No, it's not perfect. There's a few things that probably need to be tweaked, but mostly it's pretty good. It's not a bad document at all. And I think it's withstood the test of time here in the last three to four years.

Are there are some things that need to be modified for the next administration? Yes, and I think that they will likely do that. But right now, I would say it's a pretty good document.

One of the highlights in that document, it talks about a return to great power competition. Now, you could argue the word return. Maybe we've always been in a great power competition, but we were engaged in counterinsurgency warfare against violent extremism and terrorists around the world and we didn't necessarily recognize some of the changes that might have been happening the world. But, nevertheless, great power competition is in fact a statement of fact about the international condition as it exists today. And I would say we're not in a unipolar world, we're in a multi-polar world for sure. With China and Russia and the United States, all three being exceptionally powerful militaries, being very powerful — at least the Chinese and the American economies are very powerful economies. And there's other poles, the EU for example, and then there's India and Brazil. So we're in a multi-polar world.

What does that mean? What's the effect of that? Like during the Cold War, Cold War is arguably a relatively stable geostrategic situation, even though it was nerve-racking it was relatively stable in part because you had two poles that others gathered around, but in the international system there were two essential powers and they could establish procedures and policies and communications and SOPs with each other. And over time that acted as a stability or a stabilizing force within the environment. When you get into an environment that has multiple poles, it automatically becomes more complex almost by definition, and more dynamic. So that's one condition that we are in for sure and likely to remain in for a considerable length of time.

Another condition is this rapid emerging technology that has really occurred — if you look

back two — I don't know, call it — I think this was probably 1970-ish or so — that — towards the end of the Vietnam War is the introduction of precision munitions. And the United States basically had a corner on the market. Very few countries had precision munitions in those days. And precision munitions today are almost ubiquitous. Most of your significant powers in the world have precision munitions. So we can hit — most countries can hit targets at great distance with great precision. And then, in order to do that, you also have to be able to see.

So what has happened, say in the last — you mentioned 40 years, but let's go back even a little bit further — today we can see — and over the last 50 years we've had this information explosion — we can see globally better than at any time in human history. So right now, I've got a Fitbit on, I've got a little GPS watch on, there's probably iPhones in this room, there's 22 electronic devices here. I would imagine the Chinese, the Russians, and a lot of other people are listening in. So, you can actually pinpoint people through electronic devices very, very quickly. And we have an ability to image, we have an ability to see and hear, we have commercially available Google Earth that really if you go back 25-30 years, that level of technology was only available to very sophisticated militaries and now it's available to almost everyone.

So you've got an ability to see and an ability to hit at range that has never existed before in human history. So those two facts — just those two alone — indicate that we are having a fundamental change in the character of war. The nature of war doesn't change. The nature of war — at least we think it doesn't change — has to do with politics and imposing your will and friction and the human functions of war. But the character of war does change. And that has sometimes to do mostly with technology. There are other conditions that change it. There's political conditions, there's, you know, demographic conditions, etc. But technology drives often times through our history change in the character of war. How we fight, the doctrine we fight with, the organizations we fight, the weapons we fight with. And we are undergoing a real fundamental change in the character of war.

I mentioned two that have been going on for 30-40 years or so, but add to that some technologies that are emerging and that are coming very, very fast — the robotics for robotics. Now, it's

already widely available in the commercial sector for a lot of different uses. We use it to a limited extent in military operations. You hear about UAVs or drones, you see explosive ordnance disposal teams use them in small penny packets. But you also see some experiments going on in the United States Army and the Air Force, the Navy to create robotic ships, robotic planes. And it's conceivable, theoretically conceivable that in some point in the future you could have entire tank units without crews or entire squadrons of airplanes without pilots or ships, a carrier striker, without sailors. I'm not saying it's going to happen, but it's theoretically possible. So, robotics is coming on and it's going to have a military application in the not too distant future.

Add in another technology, like artificial intelligence. That's an incredibly powerful technology that is coming very, very fast, not only in civil society and the commercial world, but it's going to have tremendously powerful applications in the military. Hypersonics is another one.

So there's five or 10 rapidly approaching technologies that are going to have fundamental significant impact on the conduct of military operation as we move into the future, in combination with precision munitions and the ubiquitous nature of sensors and the ability to see.

So what does all that mean? What's the so what? So, I would argue that the country that masters all of those technologies and develops the proper military doctrines with the proper organizations and the proper leader development will have a decisive advantage in the next conflict. We've seen this before in history and I have no doubt that although the specifics are different, I think we'll see that again in the future. When does it all happen? Not really sure. It depends on who you listen to. But I think it's reasonable to think that sometime in the mid to late '30s, early '40s, perhaps midcentury-ish maybe at the latest, you'll start seeing real significant use of those technologies in combinations by advanced societies. And it's incumbent upon us, the United States, if we want to continue to be a free and independent nation, to master those technologies and make sure that we do the proper application with our doctrine and organizations, etc.

And that's what you see happening today, right now. The Chinese, the Russians, the United States and many other countries are developing these systems and putting them together in

different ways that will have some sort of military application in the future. And I think we're on the right path I believe, but the key here — you're not going to — none of us are going to get it perfect. The key is to get it less wrong than your enemy is Michael Howard the military historian said one time a long time ago. So the (inaudible) going to be a great dynamic, Michael.

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah. And one more question before I get to — I want to talk about the budget environment and then get to some audience questions. We have a lot coming in.

But I wanted to take a different angle on the defense innovation and modernization or revolution question. How do you feel about the vulnerabilities in the U.S. Armed Forces today that some of these technologies are already creating? Leave aside what would be the situation in 2030 or 2040, as you just mentioned, but I'm talking about our command and control systems, cyber systems, the electronic warfare environment on the tactical battlefield and what that could do our radios, or dependence on satellites, on fiber optic cable — an issue that my colleague Frank Rose often harps on.

Do you feel like we've been making progress in mitigating some of the vulnerabilities that perhaps we allowed to develop partly because we were fighting, you know, in the Middle East against very, very violent, but nonetheless technologically less sophisticated adversaries, and in that period of time perhaps took our eye off of some of these concerns a little bit? Have we made progress at addressing these kinds of Achilles heels in the American Armed Forces, as well as the broader national infrastructure that supports the Armed Forces?

GENERAL MILLEY: Well, you hit all the key ones right off the bat in terms of the vulnerabilities. Yes, we have made improvements. No, we are not there. There are whole series of very serious key vulnerabilities out there. Most modern societies — in fact all modern societies — depend on electricity, for example. And each of these societies are very complex systems of systems, but they all at the end of the day depend on some form of electricity to make all the radios work and planes and trains and automobiles drive. So that's key. We have to also protect the internet, if you will, which wasn't built originally thought of as sort of a military system that needed to be protected. So at the very beginning the internet, through Darpa and all that didn't have the protections built in at the very beginning. Today that's

a vulnerability and we're quite aware of, you know, cyber threats to the United States and to our friends and allies. And, you know, not only from criminals but from nation states.

So all of those areas that you cited are key vulnerabilities. Space as a domain, for example, is critical. There's an argument to be made, and many have made it in various unclassified writings, that a country might try to seek a first move or advantage, for example, to blind the United States. The next Pearl Harbor could happen in space, many people have written. So if you took out say a series of satellites that were key to our communication systems, our command and control systems, or our navigation systems, our precision and navigation and timing systems, that could potentially have a devastating effect and could encourage some country to try to do something like an electronic Pearl Harbor, with either electronic warfare systems or an attack in space.

So we recognize those threats, we recognize those vulnerabilities, and we are moving at a very, very quick pace and putting a lot of money into shoring up those defense systems and redundancy, protecting them, hardening them, and also training. We're assuming that we're going to operate in an electromagnetic spectrum that's degraded. There's no way — if you go — if there were a war, and hopefully there never will be, but if there was a war with a very sophisticated adversary, the probably of the electromagnetic spectrum being degraded is almost a certainty. So we have to get comfortable with operating without perfect command and control systems, we have to get comfortable with operating with degraded GPS systems, with mimicking and jamming on radio nets, etc.

So these are all things that you have to do to protect, but also to operate within a degraded environment, and we're working on all of those right now as we speak.

MR. O'HANLON: So before my last question on the budget, I want to ask you a little bit about the overall state of the world as you see it. The several years now into the National Defense Strategy and the greater U.S. focus on great power competition. And I guess I'll ask a little bit of a leading question, because maybe I'm a little unusual among some strategists and foreign policy thinkers in believing we're actually in a somewhat better place than we were five years ago. And I was going to ask you to comment on that.

For example, in regard to Russia, NATO has now established a more forward position in the Baltic States and the United States, largely under your leadership as both Army chief and chairman, has beefed up its presence in Poland, which makes me fear a little bit less that Vladimir Putin could have any designs on NATO territory. In the Western Pacific — and, again, I'm not trying to be partisan. I think Obama and Trump administrations both contributed to this dynamic. We've maintained freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea and I think it's increasingly clear to China they're not going to be able to claim that or any other water way as their own internal lake if it's a place where the world depends for the sea lanes and for open access.

And, finally, for North Korea, even though that's obviously a work in progress, not to mention Iran being a policy that's in flux and work in progress, nonetheless we have some pretty robust deterrent postures that have been maybe even strengthened in recent years. So I'm not suggesting you want to spike the football in the end zone — I know you wouldn't go there and I know you've been emphasizing the need for continued vigilance, but do you feel that some of the policies of the last few years have at least given us a measure of greater stability than what we had maybe a half decade ago?

Over to you.

GENERAL MILLEY: I think there's a couple of things I'd mention. One is we want to stay in great power competition. You're going to have great power competition. That's the nature of the world, right. Go back 5-10,000 years in human history. Great powers are going to compete against each other in a lot of different spaces. So that's okay. There's nothing necessarily wrong with that. But make sure it stays a great power competition and it doesn't shift to great power conflict or great power war.

In the first half of the last century, from 1914 to 1945 we had two world wars. And in between 1914 and 1945 150 million people were slaughtered in the conduct of war. And you heard John Allen talk about my dad hitting the beach at Iwo Jima along with three other islands. Massive amounts of blood and destruction and we're still obviously feeling the effects of World Wars I and II. And it's unbelievable to think of great power war. And now if you think of great power war, with nuclear weapons it's like, my god, you've got to make sure that doesn't happen.

So we want to make sure that the conditions stay at great power competition. That's an important thing for the military to do. Now, how do you do that? You mentioned it up front, you said deter. That's the key thing. You want to deter your potential opponent from even thinking or contemplating that they could have a war with the United States or that they could be successful in a war with the United States.

So it's important that you maintain considerable levels of military power, economic power, and that you engage diplomatically. And I think those three things in combination can ensure that your opponent knows that you're a powerful capable country and that it's not — in a cost-benefit analysis with a rational actor, it's not going to make any sense to have a war with the United States. That's an important fact that need to be continued and sustained, you know, today, yesterday, and tomorrow. We need to continue to do that.

The other thing we need to do to make sure I think is important, is that your opponent knows your capability. It doesn't do any good if your opponent in the theories of deterrence has no clue to what you're capabilities are. So it's important that they know that. Another key part of that is will. Your opponent needs to know that you have the will to use the capabilities that you have. And part of that is communications. It's also behavior, but part of it is communication. So it's important that you have lines of communications, even with your enemies and your adversaries so that you communicate back and forth.

Part of the job I'm in right now as the chairman is to communicate with our adversaries in very close hold, classified back channels, but I do that, and so do a few other members of our government in order for our opponents to clearly and unambiguously know that if action A were to be then reaction B would happen as a result.

So those are all key components I think to deterring. But another piece I think that needs continuous maintenance, and it's mentioned in the NDS, is our allies and partners. The United States has a critical capability with our allies and partners. We've always had a strong capability for the last 100 years or so with our allies and partners around the world. We have always been a believer in — we're

unilateral if we have to be, but we prefer to be collective, a collective security arrangement. We fight with our allies and partners. Is that difficult? Sure, it's difficult. I had an opportunity in Afghanistan to command and there were I think 42 flags underneath us from different countries. Is that difficult? Yes. Does it require a greater degree of consensus and a much different sort of style of leadership? Yes. It is difficult to do that, but you're much more powerful when you have numbers. There's great power in NATO as an alliance with all of those countries together. There's great power with the United States and Japan and South Korea and Australia and the Western Pacific, etc.

So allies and partners are key to deterrence as well. So not only do you have to have capability and communicate your capability and make sure that your opponent understands the will, but if you have a lot of allies and partners with you, that goes a great deal towards creating a stable environment, if you will. And I would argue that in the last, I don't know, five or ten years, we're not in a terrible position by a long shot, but there is room to improve and we have to keep banging away. We should never be complacent. It's a dynamic world. And as the old saying goes, the enemy gets a vote sort of thing.

So we've got to continually assess the situation and we've got to continually emphasize some of the basics. The basics of deterrence, the basics of assurance, and the basics of operating in a collective security arrangement.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

And then my last question is on the budget environment. And, again, it appears in a bipartisan way that the United States congress and the last two presidents, and particularly the Trump Administration, have boosted up the defense budget to the point where it's now almost $750 billion a year, the national defense budget, which is substantially higher than the Cold War average, even after adjusting for inflation. That's the good news. But the more difficult news, from the point of view of yourself and the service chiefs and others, is that it now appears that budgets are likely to remain flat, perhaps at best, going forward given the size of the deficit and the debt, the COVID environment, and even the world that we saw before COVID, because the Trump administration's own projections a year

ago were that the buildup would end and that defense budgets would probably at best keep up with inflation. And yet we know Secretary Mattis in 2018 when he released the National Defense Strategy, and the commission that followed, bipartisan commission that followed, they all said that we needed 3% to 5% annual real growth indefinitely to properly implement the NDS. And that doesn't appear to be likely to happen.

So could you give us some sense about your degree of concern about the budget environment and any words of advice for the incoming congress and the new power brokers in Washington about how to think about the defense budget?

Thank you.

GENERAL MILLEY: Yeah, I think in order to be a great power in the system I believe you have to have a very strong and capable military. But you also have to have a very strong and capable economy, you have to have a very resilient country as a whole, you have to have a great education system, you've got to have great infrastructure. All things well beyond the purview of the Department of Defense. But you have to look at it as a whole, of which the military is one piece of the whole. And we do cost an enormous amount of money for the American taxpayer. As you mentioned, $750 billion, and at a 3-5% growth rate annually, not too long, it would be a trillion and so on.

So in an ideal world, I believe that we would need 3-5% sustained level of real growth in order to continue the modernization programs and the readiness programs and so on that we have. That's desired. And we would want to have a sustained predictable adequate budget in a timely way every year. And, again, that's desired. But that's also not necessarily going to happen, and I don't anticipate that it will happen.

So we have to — we in uniform, we here in the Pentagon, civilian and military alike — we've got to do a quick reality check on the national budget and what is likely to happen in the not too distant future. And I suspect that at best, the Pentagon's budgets will start flattening out. There's a reasonable prospect that they could actually decline significantly, depending on what happens in the environment.

Again, your military is dependent upon a national economy. And we have had a significant pandemic, we've had a downturn on an economic situation nationally for almost going on a year now, we've got significant unemployment, and so on and so forth. So the most important priority that you need to do is to take care of the COVID piece, get that behind us, and breathe new life into the economy. Once you do that, then you can put additional monies into military.

So these aren't things that the chairman does or the Pentagon does, these are more national type priorities. But I expect for us in uniform, I anticipate in the coming years that it's like to be flattened, it's possible to decrease a little bit. So what does that mean? That doesn't mean that the world is going to end for us. What that means is that we have to tighten up and take a much harder look at priorities and where we put the monies we do get. And we've got to make sure that we're absolutely optimizing the money we do get and we get the most we possibly can in the most efficient and effective way for the defense of the United States. And that's what we're going to have to do. We have to really, you know, take a hard look at what we do, where we do it.

That's what I was saying about our overseas disposition, for example. There's a considerable amount of money that the United States expends on overseas deployments, our overseas bases and locations, etc. Is every one of those absolutely positively necessary for the defense of the United States? Is every one of them tied to a vital national security interest? Is every one of those exercises that we do really critically important. Hard looks, real hard looks at everything that we do I think is warranted. And I have no problem in leading us through that, to the extent that we can.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. And that's a nice segue into some of the audience questions, which I'll now turn to and try to weave into our conversation.

There are a few questions about our posture in the broader Middle East, which you've alluded to already, and the questions are diverse in their concern. Some people wonder why we still have such a big U.S. military presence in the broader Middle East, but others are worried that going down to 2,500 forces in Afghanistan by early in the New Year and maybe pulling forces out of Somalia, for example, may put us at risk.

I realize that these are charged questions and a lot of considerations go into them, but is there any way you would help us understand the U.S. military posture and the trends that are ongoing in the U.S. military posture towards the Middle East?

GENERAL MILLEY: Yeah, I think, again, we have to roll the clock back quite a way here. You know, why is the U.S. military in the Middle East to begin with? And you've really got to go back to the '30s and the discovery of oil and the British footprint that was in the Middle East at the time. And then the United States coming on the stage as a world power in World War I and then, of course, with World War II. And at the conclusion of World War II, towards the end of it, a set of rules were drawn up on how the world would be run. And, you know, U.S. diplomats, along with the diplomats of several hundred other countries, all met and decided on a structure, a world structure. The rules of the road so to speak. And today in the media people refer to that as the rules base liberal world economic order, or words to that effect.

So there's different monikers to it, but the bottom line is rules were set up and the United States at the end of World War II — we suffered grievously in World War II, but nothing compared to other countries. You know, the Soviet Union suffered 20 million killed, in Germany and Japan, 20 million, China I think was 20 or 30 million. Just horrendous destruction in some of these countries and most of them economically were just laid flat. The United States had an enormous amount of aggregate power as proportionate to the whole by 1945 and we wrote the rules and other countries signed up to it. At least one other country didn't like it — the Soviet Union. So they wrote their own rules and they broke apart and called it the Warsaw Pact sort of thing and the world broke into two.

That all ended in '89, '90, '91. And then the world came down and pretty much everybody, to include the Chinese, subscribed to the rules that we wrote back in 1945 sort of thing. So if you have a set of rules, you had to have someone to enforce the rules, and that became the United States and our allies and partners. And that's, you know, the open seas, for example, and to make sure – – and you mentioned freedom of navigation — to make sure that the global commons were properly policed. All of that fell to the United States as the main enforcer of this set of global rules.

Now, today, people are wondering why we are where we are. Well, that's why we are where we are, because we set up a set of rules and we, the United States, through various administrations — and there was a broad consensus that we would in fact enforce those rules with our allies and partners. But we were the enforcer of the rules.

It's a fair question to ask if those conditions still obtain and if we still as a nation want to do that sort of thing. If the answer is yes, then that requires a certain degree of budgetary output and a certain degree of military capability, etc. If the answer is no, then that requires a different solution. So that's an open-ended question for the American people and the American electorate and our civilian leaders to decide. And I think there is actually a bit of a debate going on in our society right now on what our role is, broadly speaking, in the world. But right now, that's the reason why we are where we are. And in the Middle East specifically, everything has to do — at least initially, everything had to do with the protection of oil because oil, and the free flow of oil, that was the primary means by which the industrial world ran itself. You know, we, the United States actually were never really dependent on Middle East oil, we only got a percentage of it. But all of Western Europe and all of Asia, Japan, for example, and South Korea, were very dependent on Middle East oil. So we were the guarantor of the secure lines of communication to make sure that the oil transported from Point A to Point B. That's why we were there originally.

Today, the United States is self-secure in oil. So it's a fair question to say should we be there to protect oil or not. That's not a question for me to answer, but that's for people to ask and answer in some sort of national debate. But there are other things at play also in the Middle East besides oil. There are other things such as American values. Do we think that human rights matter, do we think that stopping terrorism is a good thing or a bad thing, and so on? Do we think support of Israel is good or bad, do we think support of various countries is good or bad? Those are questions and those are policy questions, again, for others to ask and answer. And then we execute the orders that are given to us.

But that's why we're there in many ways as to why we're in the Middle East to begin with.

The specific disposition that you're talking about with respect to Afghanistan and Iraq,

Somalia and some others, we are in those particular areas specifically today because of various terrorist organizations. We went to Afghanistan specifically with another reason, to ensure that Afghanistan never again became a platform for terroristic strike against the United States.

And to a large measure we have been, at least to date, successful in preventing that from happening again. But we did that through training, advise, assist program with the Afghan national security forces and the Afghan government. We believe that now after 20 years, two decades of consistent effort there, we've achieved a modicum of success. I would also argue that over the last — call it five to seven years as a minimum, we have been in a condition of strategic stalemate, where the government of Afghanistan was never going to militarily defeat the Taliban and the Taliban, as long as we were supporting the government of Afghanistan, was never going to militarily defeat the regime. So you had a condition of strategic stalemate. And the only way that that war should or could come to an end that was somewhat in alignment with U.S. national security interests and also in the interests of the people of the region, was through a negotiated settlement. Now, that's very odious for many, many people to think that we're going to negotiate with someone like the Taliban. But that is in fact the most common way that insurgencies end, is through a negotiated power sharing settlement. Those negotiations are ongoing right this minute as we speak. They're in a very critical stage in fact, in Doha. And we have made some national decisions to go ahead and reduce our military footprint in Afghanistan down to 2,500 soldiers by 15 January. President Trump has made that decision, we're in the process of executing that decision right now.

What comes after that, that will be up to a new administration that — you know, we'll find that out on the 20th of January and beyond. But for right now our plan, and the decision of the president and the plan that we're executing, is to go to 2,500 troops by 15 January. And that is also in support of the agreements that were signed with the Taliban back in February. So that's happening as we speak.

In Iraq, the Iraqi government wants the United States military to continue train, advise, assist program with the Iraqi military. We think that that's an important thing to do. We think that that helps to contribute toward the interdicting and preventing further aggression by Iran in the region. We

also think that that is important to continue to sustain the successes that have been built in the defeat of the ISIS caliphate so that it doesn't regenerate and come back, at relatively low cost. So the president has also made a decision to reduce our force posture in Iraq to 2,500, also by 15 January, and then further decisions after that will come from the next administration.

And then in Somalia, Somalia is an ongoing debate right this minute. Not so much as to what a footprint is, it's what the footprint will look like. We recognize that Al-Shabaab in the Lower Juba River Valley is a threat. We know that it's an organized capable terrorist organization that's an extension of al-Qaida, just like ISIS was, that they do have some reach and they could if left unattended conduct operations against not only U.S. interests in the region, but also against the homeland. So they require attention.

So we're taking a hard look at a repositioning of the force to better enable us to conduct counter-terrorist operations. Relatively small footprint, relatively low cost in terms of numbers of personnel and in terms of money. But it's also high risk. As you saw just recently in the news, we lost a very brave CIA officer who was a former SEAL in Somalia. So none of these operations are without risk, but we think we're approaching it rationally and responsible to adjust the footprint to what is necessary in order to continue the operations against the terrorists that are out there operating against the United States.

MR. O'HANLON: Just one quick follow up on the broader Middle East and Afghanistan specifically, and then there's a question about Korea, which I'd like to turn to next. And we only have about five minutes left, so I know we're wrapping up. But in regards to Afghanistan, to the extent that you can explain in an unclassified setting like this what that 2,500 U.S. troop footprint will look like, I think a lot of us would be curious. Is that essentially one major operating base and then some smaller capabilities with training and advice here and there interspersed with the Afghan forces? Is that a couple of big bases, maybe one near Kabul, you know, Bagram, and then maybe one in the east? To what extent have you settled on what that footprint looks like?

GENERAL MILLEY: We have looked at that. General Miller in Afghanistan, General

McKenzie, they've made their recommendations and given a back brief to the Acting Secretary Miller. And he's approved the plan to go forward. I'd prefer at this point, Michael, not to discuss exactly what bases are coming down. As a general comment, though, you're looking at a couple of larger bases with several satellite bases that provide the capability to continue our train, advise, assist mission and continue our counterterrorist mission.

MR. O'HANLON: So thank you.

In regard to Korea, there are a couple of questions that are focused on the need for vigilance in what's always a tense part of the world. Speaking of going back in time, we'd have to go back in time 70 years to the origins of that conflict. And there's obviously been a lot of history that's transpired in just the last few years under the Obama and Trump administrations in regard to Korea.

How do you feel about the overall situation on the Peninsula today? Are you worried about a North Korean resumption of nuclear or long range missile testing? Do you feel that our deterrent posture with the South Koreans is pretty strong? Any comments in particular in regard to Korea? There are a number of questions along that line.

GENERAL MILLEY: I think the alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea is very strong and it's very resilient. It's a Senate approved defense treaty. And we have 28,500 troops in South Korea with significant capabilities. And the ROK military is very significant. It's one of the better militaries in the world in fact. So I am very confident in the military capability to deter any provocations or attacks by North Korea.

It is also true that North Korea has advanced their nuclear weapon and missile delivery capabilities. But the deterrence capabilities of not only the Republic of Korea, but also in combination with Japan and most importantly with the United States is very, very significant.

So North Korea has a wide variety of challenges internal to their own society. Do I expect North Korea to do provocations at some point in the future? That's very possible. I mean they've got a long history of doing things like that. But I think we have adequate vigilance, we are monitoring the situation closely, as we always do with North Korea, and we have adequate military capabilities to deal

with whatever might come our way.

MR. O'HANLON: So the very last question, General, and then again thank you so much for the time you're spending with us today, and all of you, the men and women in uniform around the world are doing to defend us, and their families.

There are some questions about weapons of mass destruction. And let me put that in specific form with regard to two concerns in particular. One, have we learned anything about biological weapons or the potential of future kinds of biological weapons by watching this pandemic, a naturally occurring — as best we know — a naturally occurring outbreak, but nonetheless that may foreshadow things that could be done deliberately but future non-state actors or governments if they create more advanced biological weapons.

And then secondly, in regards to nuclear weapons — you've already touched on this. You've just discussed North Korea, but I wonder if in particular the concern about limited nuclear war that we've heard Russia threaten at times in recent years — that Secretary Mattis felt the need to in some ways respond to with the Nuclear Posture Review of 2018 — if the idea of limited nuclear war is sort of a bad idea that's being put back in a bottle or if that is of particular concern to you as well, that some countries, for example, might take it a little to cavalierly and assume they could do a very limited strike or two and still keep things under wraps.

So final set of questions has to do with weapons of mass destruction.

Over to you.

GENERAL MILLEY: Yeah, Michael, those are complex questions actually.

On the first one, it is clear the devastation that the Corona-19 virus has done, not only to the United States, but to the world. And it's incredible when you look back at the December, January, February time frame and you look at today and look at the devastation, economic devastation, and obviously, the loss of human life. So could that virus or any other type of virus, or other biological type systems, be deployed for nefarious purposes? To do that by intent, absolutely, yes, it could. And is that a concern? Yes, it is a concern. And is it a concern that a nation state would do that. Clearly nation

states have the capability to develop those kind of weapons and could deploy them, but that would be a very, very drastic move on the part of any nation state, which would be a complete and utter act of war, which would have a devastating response from the United States.

But of more concern would be a terrorist organization, someone who may or not maybe operating off of rational actor sort of rule sets. That's of great concern. And it's actually not all that difficult to imagine biological weapons being developed and then deployed by organizations that would in fact have no compunction whatsoever about deploying those sorts of weapons and causing the level of destruction that they've done. We know that some organizations in fact are trying to look at things like that. They don't have that yet, but that's a possibility.

So it's something that we need to be on the guard against in terms of interdicting and disrupting and destroying any capability like that, but we also need to take the lessons learned from this current pandemic and roll those into capabilities to defend ourselves so in the future we have stockpiles of PPE and we have organizations that are capable of rapid deployment and that we have protocols and procedures that we can quickly and rapidly impose upon ourselves in order to limit the effects of any sort of biological weapon.

All of that is ongoing. We have a very rigorous lesson learned program ongoing with the current crisis.

With respect to nuclear weapons, I have a very difficult time intellectually getting my head wrapped around a limited nuclear war. Nuclear weapons are so devastating, even these so called small yield nuclear weapons. I mean Hiroshima and Nagasaki, if I'm not mistaken — I'm doing this from memory — I think that they were a 10-kilo ton sort of thing.

MR. O'HANLON: Right.

GENERAL MILLEY: And it destroyed 8-90,000 people in a flash. Unbelievable, right. So if you took something like a 1 kilo ton, which someone would argue is a small nuclear weapon, that would still be devastating. That would take out like lower Manhattan. So I'm not sure what limited means in these terms.

I think any time anyone, any leader would decide to cross a nuclear threshold, that's an extraordinarily dangerous moment in time in international politics, in national security for any leader to even contemplate doing that. And we know some have. Actually, developed doctrines and weapons to do that. I think that's a very, very dangerous path to follow.

The other part of that, though, is, again, back to terrorist organizations or some sort of rogue organization, that if they were to get their hands on nuclear weapons, then they would use them. That's a problem. And it's still a problem in the world and something that we need to pay close attention to.

As nuclear proliferation occurs, and it is occurring — North Korea has nuclear weapons now and many other countries have nuclear weapons — we have to pay close attention to the proliferation of nuclear weapons because the more nation states that have them just by common sense, your probability of an accident happening, your probability of theft, your probability of use goes up and the calculations of deterrence become that much more complex.

So nuclear weapons is something that needs to have lots of people's very, very mature, very serious attention on the development, the use, the control, and all of the protocols and procedures that go along with those.

In certain ways, over the last five, 10, 15 years, probably since the fall of the Berlin Wall, a lot of our study and our rigor and our discipline with respect to nuclear weapons had atrophied a bit because the Cold War went away and the fear of nuclear war between great powers, United States and the Soviet Union went away. I think that level of academic rigor and discipline, we need to recapture some of that because the world is getting more complex, not less complex. And more actors — and there is a proliferation of nuclear weapons as we speak.

So I have a difficult time thinking of them as a limited capability, but I do think that there are various controls that we need to seriously resurrect and blow some life back into the study of the entire nuclear environment and the weapons systems out there.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, Mr. Chairman, you've covered a lot. We are so grateful at

Brookings and I know around the country for what you've done today and continue to do. We want to wish the very best for the holidays and the New Year to everyone in the American Armed Forces and their families and veterans.

And, again, thank you very, very much for being with us today, sir.

GENERAL MILLEY: Thanks, Michael. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you and all of those listening. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: So over and out, everyone. And best wishes for December and beyond.

Signing off from Brookings.

GENERAL MILLEY: All the best for the holidays, Michael.

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