THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

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MILITARY HISTORY FOR THE MODERN STRATEGIST:

AMERICA'S MAJOR WARS SINCE 1861

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WELCOMING REMARKS:

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DISCUSSION:

MODERATOR: MELANIE SISSON
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Suzanne Maloney Good morning to all who joined us here in the Falk Auditorium at Brookings. Good afternoon and good evening to those of you who may be joining us virtually from other parts of the world. I'm Suzanne Maloney, I'm vice president and director of foreign policy here at the Brookings Institution. And I'm really delighted on behalf of Brookings and on behalf of foreign policy, to welcome you to this very special event celebrating the release of "Military History for the Modern Strategist: America's Major Wars since 1861." This is the latest book by my colleague Michael O'Hanlon, who serves as the Philip H. Knight chair in defense and strategy. He also serves as the director of the Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy and Technology and director of research for the Foreign Policy program here at Brookings. In addition to his many Brookings responsibilities, Mike teaches at Georgetown and Columbia Universities, and he's a member of the Defense Policy Board. That's a lot of titles, but they only scratch at the surface of Mike O'Hanlon's contributions to here at Brookings and to foreign policy more widely.

In addition to being an exceptionally prolific and influential expert, he's just about the best colleague anybody could imagine. He's a mentor of emerging scholars, a convener of interdisciplinary conversations, an incredibly loyal friend and teammate, a true steward of the century plus mission of Brookings Institution, and of our values of quality, independence and impact. Amidst these amazing professional accomplishments, Mike is first and foremost a devoted family man and servant and servant of his community. And when a global pandemic hit and the world seemed upside down, Mike embraced this unprecedented challenge by throwing himself into a book project that expanded his intellectual horizons.

Let me say just a brief word about the book itself. "Military History for the Modern Strategist" is a comprehensive analysis of major conflicts involving the United States since the mid-1800s, including the Civil War, two world wars, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Deeply researched and masterfully written, the book explores enduring themes in military history and provides sound lessons for political leaders and strategists today. In this new book, Mike once again demonstrates why he's truly one of the leading defense and security thinkers of our time. "Military History for the Modern Strategist" is just the latest addition in Mike's impressive collection of more than 20 books over more than a quarter century here at the Brookings Institution. Mike, this is a truly impressive feat by any measure, but even more so because of the policy impact that these books have had. Thank you for your sustained and significant contributions to foreign policy scholarship. And congratulations on this

latest book. At an age of increased geopolitical rivalry, these kinds of insights couldn't be more vital for our leaders.

Before I hand the microphone over today to our moderator, please allow me to offer just brief introductions of our fantastic lineup of speakers who are joining Mike O'Hanlon here today. General Stanley McChrystal is a retired four-star general commander of U.S. and International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan and U.S. Joint Special Operations Command. In his capacity as General McChrystal, McChrystal developed a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan and a counterterrorism organization that changed interagency operating culture. He is also the founder, CEO and chairman of the McChrystal Group, a senior fellow at Yale University's Jackson Institute for Global Affairs, a member of several corporate and nonprofit organization boards, including his role as chair of the Board of the Service Year Alliance. He is also the author or coauthor of three books, all of which, all of which have reached bestseller status.

We're joined today also by Dr. Melanie Sisson, who is a fellow in the Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy and Technology. She served in government, academia and in the private sector. In 2020, she published a book, along with Barry Blechman and James Siebens, entitled "Military Coercion and U.S. Foreign Policy: The Use of Force Short of War." At Brookings, Dr. Sisson's research focuses on armed forces, the use of armed forces in international politics, U.S. national security and military applications of emerging technology, including artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Of course, this is a book launch, so it is my duty to encourage you all to purchase a copy of Mike's book. Several of his books, most recent books are available at the Brookings Bookstore, but also at a table outside where Mike will be signing books after the conversation today. Finally, before we begin, we're livestreaming this event and we're on the record. Please feel free to send in your questions to events at Brookings dot edu or using the hashtag military history on social media. For those of you who are joining us here live today in the auditorium at Falk, we will be hosting a Q&A period toward the end of our conversation today. Thank you. And I'll now hand the microphone over to Melanie.

Melanie Sisson Wonderful. Thanks so much, Suzanne. And good morning and welcome, Stan, it's a real pleasure to have you here to join Mike in conversation about his wonderful new book, "Military History for the Modern Strategist." Mike, I don't use this word very often, but when I use it, I

mean it really is an honor to be part of introducing this really excellent work to the Brookings audience and, of course, to the world beyond, because everyone here is immediately going to leave this session and tell their kids, their parents, their friends, their colleagues, their pets, that they need to go and read and, and learn from this really excellent new contribution. Suzanne rightly highlighted Mike's excellence of scholarship, and he's spent his career devoting that excellence to thinking and writing about how to make war, wars less likely to happen, and just as importantly, about how to make those wars that do happen less devastating. His work is invariably rigorous in its analysis, well-argued, thoroughly carefully researched, just of the highest quality. There is much, very much to admire about what it is that Mike does, why he does it, and certainly how he does it, not least because all of those characteristics come from somewhere. Nobody has a better work ethic than Mike O'Hanlon, nobody works harder and truly nobody works faster than Mike. And so he is an example very much to be aspired to in all of those regards.

On top of that, as Suzanne also mentioned, he's just a wonderful human being. As a colleague, he is thoughtful and generous and supportive and encouraging and curious and open and challenging in all the right measures. He also hates very much having nice things said about him at all, much less in full public view. So I know he's squirming and already planning ways to deflect and deny basically everything that I have just said, except the part about Stan, of course, and maybe the, the pets as well. But before he does that, I want to make sure that you hear me say loud and clear that this is the one area in which I say with complete confidence that you should trust my assessment over Mike O'Hanlon's assessment. So, Mike, it is with great pleasure, my wonderful friend and colleague, please tell us about your book.

Michael O'Hanlon Thank you so much, everybody. Hi. Thank you for being here. And I just want to first of all, thank Melanie and Stan and also, I'm going to come back to them in a second. But I want to thank a lot of other colleagues and I'll just mention a few by name, Alejandra, Alex, Adam, who was my research assistant, assistant before, the whole team, really, Adriana I'm just going to, I'm not going to give you a full list of full names, but the number of Brookings people who contributed so much to this, and of course, by Suzanne Maloney, our fearless leader, and also her predecessor, Bruce Jones, and Strobe Talbott, who ran Brookings for many years, John Allen, I'll come back to him in a second, too, because he like Stan and Dave Petraeus and and Jim Mattis are some of the military officers who inspired me to try to write this book, partly because they always knew military history

better than I did, which made me mad because I was thinking, these guys are out doing something with their lives. I'm just sitting in some ivory tower and they're all teaching me about the battle of Chancellorsville or what have you. But anyway, there are so many people who helped me with this, and I really want to thank them as well as my family and all of you for your interest in this topic.

Let me, what I'm going to actually impose about 7 minutes of civil war history on you in just a minute to start off the conversation. But I know we all want to hear Stan McChrystal talk about how military history has taught him, instructed him, inspired him, in a military leadership capacity over the years. So this is really a conversation about history and its uses, not so much about my book. We're just using that as an excuse to get started, at least that's how I look at it.

But I want to say also, Melanie is just so fantastic to have you here, the book that Suzanne mentioned earlier that you coauthored with Barry Blechman is outstanding, and I recommend it to everyone who's trying to think about the thoughtful and careful use of American military power at such a fraught moment in history. What it does is it looks at the post-Cold War period, last 30 years, and asks how we can try to evaluate outcomes in various kinds of crisis management relative to what forces we might have employed coercively, but generally non-lethally, non-kinetically, and what lessons we can draw about how we should employ our military, where we should station it, where we should deploy it, how we should respond in crises with various kinds of surge operations. And it's outstanding. And Melanie has already won all of our hearts, is just one of our favorite colleagues across the institution.

Stan McChrystal, I can't begin to say enough great things about and the best thing I can do, perhaps, I was listening again or rereading Secretary of Defense Robert Gates remarks at Stan's retirement in 2010 when he called General McChrystal one of the finest men at arms our nation has ever produced. And Bob Gates doesn't tend to exaggerate. He tends to say, he exaggerates less than you do, you do a little. But but that was to all of us who had followed General McChrystal's career at Joint Special Operations Command and in Afghanistan and elsewhere, truer words were never spoken. And it's really an honor to have you as a friend as well as a co-panelist today.

So let me talk a little bit about what I try to do with this 400-page book. It's the longest I've ever written, longest I ever intend to write. However, it's sort of short by military history standards. And I wasn't trying to compete with military historians. And if I have one hope about all your embarrassingly kind words, Suzanne and Melanie, it's that some military historians were listening and

will take it easy on me for the mistakes I might have made here and there. I do not claim to be a military historian, and I depended on military historians for the research, the grist, the understanding of the conflicts, the seven conflicts that I tried to write about in this book.

But what I try to do something slightly different than what most military historians attempt and succeed at undertaking, which is to synthesize and also to focus on the strategic and operational levels of war. Less on the tactics, less on the individual battles, and less on the individual people. I hope that doesn't make it dry. And I certainly have a lot of quotes of, you know, Civil War characters in particular, just such fascinating people with so many great quips, lines, witticisms. And Lincoln, of course, is number one, at least in my book, but, but Grant and many others. So I try to bring some color and passion and the human side of war into the book.

But what I'm really trying to do in about 50 pages per war is to understand what were the antecedents of the conflict in political and strategic terms, what technologies and tactics were employed in broad brush, and then to work through the chronologies of the wars and to understand how various kinds of campaign plans were trying to serve the strategy of whatever belligerent or combatant you were looking at, at that moment, and maybe what alternative strategies or campaigns might have been considered. When I say campaign— and military scholars and personnel in the audience will know what I mean—but I'm talking about, generally speaking, a series of engagements or battles over a period, typically of months over a certain geographic sector, but not all in the same one place in service of the broader strategy to which the effort is being applied.

So in other words, just to give one sense of why I tried to write the book, I don't know about a lot of you, but people living around Washington like me, you come across these Civil War battlefields and half the time you just feel guilty not understanding better what that battle was about. And maybe you read the plaque or walk the battlefield. And again, John Allen, Dave Petraeus, Jim Mattis, Stan McChrystal, they can tell you what the individual battles meant and how they contributed to the larger concept. But I usually didn't know. And, and even if I went off and read a, you know, plaque about what had happened at Antietam or what had happened at Chancellorsville or the Wilderness, you name it, there's a lot of them around here, of course, I still didn't find it very satisfying in the absence of trying to focus again on the campaign level of war. And the Civil War is nice. So here, I'll dive in now for a few minutes to then stop and we can have the full conversation.

The Civil War is nice as a way of illustrating this concept because most of what happened in the Civil War, I would argue, can basically be connected into about six or seven major campaigns. So there, you know, depending on how you count, there's 100 battles in the Civil War and smaller engagements and obviously a four-year time period and two or three major geographic theaters and some minor theaters. But to me, the most logical, conceptually helpful way to think about the war is roughly seven campaigns. And so, again, if I'm going to go too fast here, in the interest of just moving the conversation along, please forgive me. Buy the book and read it or buy another Civil War book. But, but what I'll try to do is, is give a flavor of about the 25 pages of chronology that I, you know, describe the whole civil war within. So it's a pretty quick moving account.

But of course, the war began with a lot of skirmishing and limited engagements and then some engagements at Manassas, for example, in July 1861, that turned out to be a little bigger and bloodier than people expected. But the war really settled into its main dynamics and entered into its main dynamics in early 1862. And the first big campaign is basically General McClellan, in a logistically somewhat impressive operation, putting 100,000 soldiers on boats out in the Chesapeake and sailing down to the peninsula between the York and James Rivers to attack Richmond and Lee's army. And President Lincoln, his secretary of defense, the first secretary of war, the first one wasn't very good, Simon Cameron and other thinkers, as they were settling into and adapting to it and accepting the idea this was going to be a long war, which basically nobody except for a couple suspected at first, even Lincoln, thought it would be basically a suppression of a, you know, rebellion by a few noisy minority kind of, you know, individuals within the South who weren't really representative of the Confederacy's desire for a protracted fight. Thank you. Thank you, Dan.

You know, people didn't really think it was going to be tough at first. But as we got into 1862 and people realized it was going to be a real difficult conflict, Lincoln thought that the important goal was to either capture Richmond or to defeat Lee's army or both. He didn't have to have too much of an elaborate debate about this because Lee sort of made it easy because he tried to put his army between the northern forces and Richmond. So you were essentially going after both objectives at the same time.

A third objective was to try to squeeze the south economically, Operation Anaconda, and that, that's through a naval blockade and then ultimately chopping up the Confederacy into different pieces. I'll come back to that in just a second. But again, the first campaign is McClellan trying to approach

Richmond and Lee from the east via an amphibious operation at first, but then a slow trod, sludge through these marshlands and as many dry lands as he could find as we got into the late spring and early summer of 1862. And ultimately, there were battles, you know, seven days battle, Seven Pines battle. The union forces didn't do terribly badly in those fights compared to, they usually sort of got out punched in most of these individual fights. But McClellan's performance at that tactical level wasn't necessarily worse, but he was afraid to pursue his objective. And he always thought the enemy was five times as strong as the enemy really was and that northern forces were less capable. And I had some you know, some of you have studied the civil war, I'd be curious for your thoughts in the discussion.

I had some sympathy for McClellan. He didn't have the kind of reconnaissance assets we have today, and he was fighting from the side and the engagement that sort of like Russia against Ukraine, had four times the industrial, four times the population and ten, 20 times the industrial capacity. And he probably thought time was on his side and patience was a virtue, although he pushed that logic a little too far. But anyway, his campaign is the first. And it partly overlaps with Stonewall Jackson's campaign, which I would sort of define as a second overlapping series of engagements, largely through the Shenandoah Valley and then culminating in the second Battle of Manassas in August of 1862. But Jackson also found his way back to help General Lee defend Richmond. And basically Jackson, this is when he got his reputation for fast marching and for amazing discipline and motivation of his forces. Because with less than 20,000 troops out in the Shenandoah Valley, he kept punching, hitting union forces and then moving so quickly they couldn't quite believe it was the same small unit of people. So they assumed that Jackson must have a much larger overall force. And that convinced Lincoln to keep General McDowell's army up here in this general area rather than to go down and help McClellan.

So in that sense, Jackson was able to distract and divide union forces, prevent them from really marshaling enough power to potentially win the war in 1862, which they would have had a chance to do if they had just kept going for Richmond. And certainly if McDowell had been allowed to come down and reinforce McClellan. So that second campaign is quite important and it's Jackson's. I'm going to speed up now and say, as I define it, the third campaign begins shortly after the second Battle of Manassas, and it's basically General Lee's desire to take the fight to the north. And of course, the signature battles are Antietam in September 1862 and Gettysburg in 1863, both of which

Lee ultimately loses, but both of which still kept the fight away from the Confederate heartland or even from Richmond. And so in that sense, achieved some benefit.

And that third campaign, which again is interrupted by the winner, but it overlaps with the very ill-fated campaigns of Generals Burnside and Hooker who replaced McClellan before each of them being replaced ultimately, and the battles that were most notorious and unsuccessful as the union tried to come back into the South, were at Fredericksburg. And then the following May in 1863, at Chancellorsville, although that's where Stonewall Jackson died, and so it certainly had an important effect. General Lee said, you know, first Jackson was shot in the arm accidentally by his own forces. They amputated, it got infected, and he died. And when, when Lee learned of the amputation, he said, well, Jackson may have lost his left arm, but I've lost my right arm. Meaning Jackson's counsel, I think, Stan, you'll chime in here in a second. But I know you've studied Chancellorsville and, and Stonewall Jackson's famous flanking maneuver and may want to comment on that.

But that was very important because even though the Confederates did win that battle, losing Jackson was huge. And also the Confederates were winning a lot of battles where they suffered two thirds to three fourths as many casualties as the north, which wasn't really something they could afford to do. And that was something that Grant was starting to figure out as he watched the Eastern campaign. But he was busy out in the West. That's the fifth campaign that I want to mention, which is basically culminating in the taking of the Mississippi and Vicksburg. And Admiral Farragut had come up through New Orleans in the spring of 1860 or actually in 1862.

But then Vicksburg was still held by the Confederates and General Grant, at that time, a regional commander out in the West was trying to figure out how he could possibly lay siege to Vicksburg. And so he basically had his army living on this, you know, insect infested, mosquito infested swamp land just north of Vicksburg out near the Mississippi, and finally realized that what he needed to do was to sail all of his troops across the river to the other side, have them marched down on the west side of the Mississippi River, and have then have his empty boats run the gauntlet of the Confederate guns defending Vicksburg and then reunite those boats with his forces that had marched southward, bring them back to the correct side of the river to lay siege to Vicksburg, and then begin the slow, laborious process of doing so. This was sort of counterintuitive, and it took him a long time to figure out this was the right way to go, because he was basically isolating himself from his supply

lines, making it more complicated to supply his forces. But he gave himself this geographically much better position to attack.

And then ultimately, the same week that Gettysburg happened, Vicksburg fell. And that began to then squeeze the South with this Anaconda strategy. So that was the fifth big campaign. I'm just going to mention the sixth and seventh. The sixth is General Sherman ultimately taking Atlanta on September 1st, 1864, then marching to the sea, to Savannah, making Georgia howl as was described. I know that Andy Moffitt and I, both Georgia boys ourselves, don't necessarily enjoy that description of the operation, but it was what Sherman did and then and then wove northward through the Carolinas over the winter time to contribute to the breaking up of the Confederacy. And that was certainly a major campaign that had a lot of importance.

And then finally, of course, General Grant and General Meade setting up camp in Northern Virginia in the early spring of 1864, and then gradually beginning the whole next year leading to Appomattox, the essential strategy or operational concept of just continually pounding away at Lee, losing most of the battles, at least in casualty terms, but knowing full well Grant, Grant knew full well that Lee just couldn't keep winning battles like this. His army was too small, and his ability to draw resources to restore it to beef it up was too limited. And Grant, you know, it's, it's easy to say all the other generals were bombs, but the Civil War fights were so bloody, and I can only imagine what it must have felt like having lost 10% of your, 20% of your fighting force over a two or three day period, with all the carnage, all the suffering, to think that you could then pick up the remaining 80%, take in some reinforcements of quite variable quality by the stage in the war and go do it again, you know, so starting with the wilderness and then Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor and Petersburg, and then just continually pounding away, having fight after fight of the same terrible character, the same bloody difficulty, and losing most of the individual fights.

But Grant and Meade kept at it because they knew that they would win if they just kept going, because Lee could not reinforce, he didn't have the bench strength. And that's the seventh and last campaign. So now I at least feel like I understand the Civil War pretty well. Whether you feel like that or not is an open question. That was more than 7 minutes, but I won't do that again to you, I promise. But that's my one piece of the history. I really wanted to write a history book. First and foremost, yes, there are lessons. Yes, there are observations. Yes, there are analogies to today. But I frankly didn't feel like I knew this stuff well enough, I didn't think there were enough books that tried to handle war

at the strategic and operational level. And so this is my contribution. Thank you for the kind words, Mel, and back over to you.

Melanie Sisson Hey, Mike, it's your book launch. You can have all the minutes that you want. That's how this works. But thank you for that. I have to say, as someone who can barely remember what she ate for breakfast on a given day, your detailed memory, your clarity never fails to impress me. I want to ask Stan actually to come in and similarly just sort of reflect on your experience of reading the book and how it fits with your set of experiences, your knowledge base, and certainly the, the characteristics of your career that Mike mentioned earlier.

Stanley McChrystal Thanks, Melanie. And he mentioned most generals are bombs. And, you know, here I am. I'm here because of Mike. I love the book, but I would have come anywhere to be on a stage with Mike as he's that kind of a friend. I think you all know that. But I want it out on, said in front of everybody. Mike's done something amazing in this book because I get tired of some of these books because they go into so much history. Very few people could break the Civil War down into seven campaigns like you just did. Very few military people could. And I give you a sense why, or why, I think.

As you know, when General McClellan took his army around and landed on the peninsula, he landed at Fort Monroe. And that's an old 1824 fort that's still there. And in 1977, I was inside the motor that fort. And I walked out of one house, and I walked next door to that chapel and I married a young girl. I was a young paratroop lieutenant, and I married a colonel's daughter. And we've been married 46 years. And so you think strategy, my strategy was have a great marriage. Well, you know, think about it. If any of you are married or in a relationship and every once in a while you disagree, in the moment, you think it's very important to win that disagreement. In the long sense, it's more important to understand what it is the strategy you're trying to do is, what are you trying to get out of this?

And I say this because when Mike mentioned things like the focus of on to Richmond, we'll capture Richmond, war starts with strategists saying, okay, we'll do this, but once you get up close to the enemy, you get fixated on tactics. It's like a magnet that even pulls generals down to it and you suddenly start to see individual trees and not the forest. My argument would be that capturing Richmond wouldn't have ended the Civil War. If they didn't destroy Lee's army in that process, if he'd just given them Richmond, because it had been the capital of the South, had been Montgomery,

Alabama until a few months before, it didn't geographically matter. And so the reality is it's very easy to start to focus on tactics and lower-level things because they in the moment seem more important.

And yet the discipline required in an organization to step back and understand in the case of the Civil War, what's the Anaconda strategy about? Why would that defeat the South? And if you look at it, it's just, it's absolutely clear and it's brilliant, you're going to cut it off and then you're going to cut it up and you're going to take advantage of their inherent weaknesses. But what did we do? We ended up sparring in many cases in areas in Northern Virginia, losing unbelievable number of people in battles which ultimately weren't decisive. And so what I, what I think Mike's done so brilliantly here is sort of pull you back to 30,000 feet. Sure to remind you that, you know, and he mentioned, interestingly, that the battle of Chancellorsville, it's important, but it's also irrelevant. Lee won an extraordinary victory in early May 1863, and he did it by dividing his army twice. He's faced with a dominant union force, so he divides his army once and he sends part of his force off to the right, and he's there against General Hooker and this superior force. And they're in a deeply wooded area near Chancellorsville, hence the name. And he meets that night and he's there with top Stonewall Jackson, one of his close subordinates. And they're around this little fire at an intersection.

And I took my wife when I was writing a book on this, I took my wife to that intersection in the winter, and I sat there, and I tried to get her excited about that. You know, August, look, she didn't buy it, but, but in that moment in 1863, what happens is you've got Jackson and Lee there, and suddenly Jeb Stewart shows up. Young cavalryman. But trusted as a cavalry leader and a reconnaissance guy. And he comes up and he says, I found the union flag. And then they say, well, could we get there? Could we find a road to take troops on? And they send people off to try to find guides. And they do. And they find that they, suddenly it's practical to get around and attack the union flag. And so he looks at Jackson, he says, okay, I think we should do it. What do you want to take? How many troops? Jackson says, my whole corps.

So now Lee has divided his army into three parts. Jackson going around the flank, him in the middle, terribly outnumbered. If Hooker had attacked that morning, Lee would not have been able to hold. But instead, Hooker didn't. Jackson goes around and it's a massive victory. In fact, he's put literally in the minds of Southerners, he's, Lee becomes this godlike military genius. But the battle is irrelevant. Two months later at Gettysburg in the invasion of the North, Lee loses, and the balance

doesn't change. But yet we become fixated. I mean, I go to the intersection, take my wife there, and I, I worship at it. The things that matter are those big sweeps that you've caught so well.

Melanie Sisson Well, that's great. I'm actually going to impose on you both with one civil war question. And it's, it's this. Mike, you say in the book that modern strategists and policymakers need to have a working knowledge of the American Civil War. So why, why that war in particular? And Stan, do you share that, that view?

Michael O'Hanlon I just want to say before I answer that, I want to say thank you, Stan, and your clarity, your brilliance, your speaking ability and your range are extraordinary. I think I should have said earlier, the last time you were on the stage, I'm pretty sure you were part of a panel discussion on immunology. And, and of course, you did have a little help from a Yale Ph.D. microbiologist. But nonetheless, I would recommend very highly one of the best memoirs in American military history, since Grant's, is his as well as his books on leadership. And, and you just saw the kind of, you know, personal stories that can come out of his book, his books that he uses to illustrate these concepts of leadership.

So why is the Civil War important? I think part of it is at the human level of inspiration. And, of course, you know, there are just so many amazing lines. I mean, there's the Shiloh Battle of April 1862, where Grant is on his way to Vicksburg. And he, they have a really, really bad day with Confederate forces ambushing them on the first day, horrible weather, you know, pouring rainstorm. And, and, you know, Grant is asked by his colleague, you know, pretty bad day today on General. And Grant's like, yup, but lick him tomorrow. And the union forces did regain momentum. And then there are all sorts of things you know, somebody asked President Lincoln if, if he thought that God was on the union's side. And Lincoln said, well, I hope so, but what I really need is Kentucky. So God would be nice, Kentucky is essential. And, you know, and then, of course, there are all the stories about Grant's drinking and Lincoln saying, well, could you find out what kind of whiskey he drank so I could give it to all my other generals, too.

But, but Grant did have a flaw, which was actually his love of horseback riding. And after Vicksburg was liberated, he actually went out racing and he got knocked off his horse and was unconscious and in a hospital for weeks. At the same time that, you know, President Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton and others are realizing they need this guy, he's off basically getting himself killed in a sports activity. But luckily, he did recover, comes back through Chattanooga, that's a great

story we won't get into. But so some of it's the inspiration of how people under duress have performed before and how that can, I remember our friend General Petraeus during the surge in Iraq would quote that Grant line from Shiloh to give himself inspiration. That's part of it.

Another part is just some of the lessons we'll come to later in the conversation about the nature of war and the unpredictability. And the Civil War is such a mass scale conflict, industrial scale, you know, all of society. And really almost nobody thought it was going to be more than a walk in the park, a couple of battles of Manassas, July 1861, a battle that was scheduled so people could picnic at it, essentially. And, and then, you know, some of the great Civil War historians, Bruce Catton and others, James McPherson, the way they write about the mood of the soldiers as they went off to these early fights and they, they were rushing to get into the ranks of the armies because they didn't want to miss out on all the fun, which they thought would be over pretty soon.

So there's just, not that most of us today think war is fun, but there still is a temptation to think war might be fast and quick based on the latest technology, the new tactics, the inherent martial superiority of one's own culture. Obviously, Putin felt this way towards Ukraine, but we were even guilty of it many times in history. And I don't want to speak too badly of the late Donald Rumsfeld because I actually admire a lot of his thinking, but his war plan for Iraq in 2003 assumed a rapid win and then no particular difficulty in stabilizing the country after. And so we are potentially vulnerable to this as well. And so that's one other reason to study history is to remember so often people have convinced themselves for one reason or another, this war was going to be easy. And we got to always pause, two and three and four and five times before we ever think that our war plan is likely to produce a rapid, conclusive victory. There are other reasons too, but I would start with those two.

Melanie Sisson And Stan.

Stanley McChrystal I'd like to build on that because I take the point that wars aren't going to be easy. You start with a calculus of who's got more military power, economic power and whatnot. And then you've also factor in who's right and who's wrong. And you say, well, if we've got more stuff and we're right, they're going to at some point see the light. In 2017, after 40 years of hanging a picture of Robert E. Lee in my home— a picture my wife had given me when I was a second lieutenant— after the Charlottesville incident, I took it down and I threw it away to the trash. And I had gone to Washington Lee High School in Arlington, Virginia. I lived in Lee Barracks at West Point. I had venerated generally through my life, but I had separated him as a military leader from the fact that as

a commander, he is the single commander in all of history that's killed the most American soldiers. Not under his command, but against him, United States soldiers. So no other general has killed as many American soldiers as Robert E Lee. And so we're in an era right now, and I'm part of that, where we know that Lee and his connection with slavery and that cause was wrong.

But let's step back and be really honest. My family's from Chattanooga, and if we were back in that era and I lived in Chattanooga, I'd have probably fought for the South. Statistically, I certainly would have. And so my point is, Robert E Lee led forces. If you were an infantryman in Robert E. Lee's army in Northern Virginia, you had a 71% probability of being killed or wounded. That's astronomical. And yet not only did his popularity with his troops continue through the war, it continued after the war and southern commitment of the force to the fight really didn't waver. There was a lot of desertions near the end when they just thought there was no way to get it done.

I bring this around to say because what Mike talks about is wars, the side that one side thinks is wrong doesn't think they're wrong. And it doesn't make them irrational. It doesn't make them evil people. It means that their life's journey took them to a point where they have a different perspective. We had suicide bombers in Iraq and Afghanistan that would come and out the most difficult Al Qaida that we fought. And people used to ask me, boy, your commandos are great, and those people are evil. I said, no, it's not like that. It's not a spectrum with good on one end and bad on the other. It's a curve. And up near the top of that, the best people in my command were very similar to the best people in the terrorist force. They were committed, they were loyal. They just had a different perspective based upon their life journey.

And so when we talk about a war and you say that we will win because we are morally right or we are materially advantaged, you've got to assume that the other side may not see it that way, and they may be willing to give it all, the ultimate sacrifice. And that's what makes wars in my mind, first, they start for these logical policy reasons, and then they continue to burn for very personal, visceral emotions that that carry the conflict on.

Melanie Sisson Stan, I'm really glad that you brought up so much of the human element that goes into war and in particular, how all of these features of our humanity, our upbringing, our experiences, our family, the way we read history can form into conscious or unconscious biases about how we approach problems and how we approach strategies. And Mike has written this book of history, I think, in part to help us to be good thinkers at the strategic level.

And so I'm going to again, sort of take a quick line from your book, Mike, and then and then ask a question after, which is that leading up to World War One, you described the strategic community, the leadership, the thinkers then as generally mediocre in intellect. And so I want to ask and I'm asking for a friend, of course, but how do strategists today not become mediocre in intellect? How do we use these histories to avoid the, the impulses, the emotions, the bias, or not avoid, but to be able to manage them meaningfully, to still be able to design effective strategy?

Michael O'Hanlon What I thought the World War One leaders got most wrong was tunnel vision about especially the German Schlieffen plan, but also the French Plan 17 and the Russian mobilization schedules that were just going to be, you know, a lot of the planning was about how do you get your force ready for a big fight, not what you do after the fight or during the fight and not what you do in stage two or three or four of a conflict. You better assume it's going to be long. I see my, my new French colleague in the audience. I'm a big admirer of what the French did in September of 1914. They actually recovered as the Schlieffen plan started to work. And that's one more thing. These, these plans usually the problem is that there's usually some kind of innovativeness, brilliance, cleverness to most of these kind of war plans.

But people put on their blinders, they get tunnel vision, and they don't see what could go wrong. They don't remember Clausewitz's dictum, you know that about fogs of war, about plans not surviving, contact with the enemy, about war just being a difficult slog, you know, not just Clausewitz, but others have said these sorts of things. They, they forget that chances are, whatever their game plan is, it's not going to work that well because the enemy is going to interfere with it. It's sort of like, you know, Bill Walsh, the 49ers coach in football 40 years ago, he was pretty good at scripting out the first 15 plays of the game. And he could usually get away with it because he had Joe Montana and Jerry Rice and so on. But he didn't try to script out the whole game. He knew he was going to have to adjust to the adversary. And in war, that's what people often forget. They fall in love with their plans.

So what the French did, they thought on their feet, they were on their heels, and they repositioned and rebuilt their army for what was called the miracle on the Marne and basically saved Paris, unfortunately, condemning the Western Front to four years of additional fighting, but saving their country in the process. So that was good leadership. But both Germany and France and Russia and certainly Austria-Hungary had, you know, this belief that if you just got the train schedules well-organized and figured out which soldiers you were going to put on which trains to get them to the

battlefield, that would sort of solve your problem of war planning. So they got way too myopic. That was, that plus they didn't pay attention to recent history, starting with our Civil War and just how deadly it had become, modern warfare with the weapons that were available.

And of course, in the intervening 50 years, artillery became longer range and more powerful. So and you didn't yet have very good tanks or other armored vehicles. So it should have been, it should have occurred to them just how horribly sanguinary this kind of conflict could be. And they seemed to be so nationalistic, so bent on, you know, defending their pride sort of Putin-esque, in a way that that they understated or ignored these verities about modern combat, just didn't care enough.

Melanie Sisson Mm hmm. So, Stan, so there are these intellectual level sort of readings of history, being aware, processing them properly. What about team composition? So I will confess I'm 50% of the population and 20% of people in the strategic community usually, and reading histories, that percentages is low to none. And so when you think about how to not have intellectual mediocrity in strategic leadership teams, what kind of characteristics and features of the people that you work with do you look for?

Stanley McChrystal Yeah, and we struggle with this in the United States. We struggle with it in the military because most military are raised to be technicians. You know, blame it on Samuel Huntington soldier in the state. But the reality is there is a view that the military does the technical part of the war fighting and that the civilians do the, the overall policy and strategy. If we truncate those, to me, it's dangerous. And I think we do a bit of that. We, we have a system where senior civilian leaders will come up with general ideas and then they will pass it to the military. And then there's this attitude on the part of the military that they really don't have a seat at the table in this first part.

But also there's a hesitance on the part of civilians to think that they should have a seat at the table in the execution of the strategy. And I think it needs to be like this. And this is where people like Michael O'Hanlon and others become important. When I first took over in Afghanistan in 2009, I invited over a number of really brilliant civilian thinkers, strategists and whatnot. We did this review, and we produced a good document I'm still proud of it. But most important, what it did was it breathed air into our thinking, and we really need that all the time. You need a Michael O'Hanlon, you need a Melanie, you need them in the room in the process as you are executing. Because as things change, the original part still needs to be breathed into it, the consideration of that. And so this idea that we,

we have phases, it's a civilian phase, then a military phase, and then go back to civilian phase in peace. Those have to be much more integrated. And so I think we need to think differently.

And then education wise, I would say that military leaders, you know, we talk about it, that we're going to train military leaders to be strategists. But that's not how you succeed in most careers. You work your way up as a very competent tactical leader. And, and I'm absolutely guilty of that. I, you know, my, where I progressed is because I got very good at the company level and the battalion level. But that doesn't win wars. I mean, that that's important. And I didn't get the kind of education that although the military spent a lot of time on it, me and my peers did not become as good as strategists as I think we needed to be.

Michael O'Hanlon You're still pretty good. So I think, I think some things are a lot better. I know that I'm an admirer of a lot of the military education system. We're grateful at Brookings and elsewhere, I know you spent a year at the Council on Foreign Relations. Anyway, that's just a quick advertisement for the way military education, I think has gotten better. And I've learned a lot at the strategic level from talking with you, Dave Petraeus, Joe Dunford, Jim Mattis, John Allen, others over the years. So I just wanted to put in that quick plug. But, but your broader admonition can probably never be said enough, you know.

Melanie Sisson Well, Mike, let's move into your big three lessons from this work, because I think they each deserve some individual attention. So if you would sort of run the audience here through what your big takeaways from this were and then we can talk about them a little bit.

Michael O'Hanlon Thanks. And this won't be 7 minutes, I promise. But it is the final chapter in the book. This book was deliberately not a book of political science. And what I mean by that is I didn't try to create three propositions that I could statistically defend with a regression or come up with three that hadn't been thought of by anyone else before. I just to some extent, it's like what struck me, having worked through these seven wars, the American Civil War, both World Wars, Korea and Vietnam, which I treat together in a single chapter, but sequentially and then of Iraq and Afghanistan. And what I was struck by is something we've already been discussing a little bit so I can go quickly, is that these wars almost always were initiated by at least the aggressor or the first, first to move, first mover with an expectation of rapid success. And almost always the war took a lot longer and was a lot harder, bloodier than expected.

Now, you could say, you know, I don't want to get too sweeping in the statement, there can be exceptions. Operation Desert Storm in 1991 went faster than we had expected, for example. However, if you put Desert Storm as part of a 30-year experience of the United States in Iraq, that and just sort of the opening engagement, then it doesn't look so fast, does it? And, and so actually, all seven wars wound up longer, bloodier, harder, and in many cases less successful than we initially assumed or whoever might have initiated the conflict. So that's point number one. War is hell, and war is usually more hellish than you even expect when you start it.

Point number two is that the outcomes in wars are not preordained. Bob Kagan was on the stage two weeks ago, and Suzanne and I had the privilege of being up here with him and Bob, who's fantastic, and I recommend his book Ghost at the Feast, about 1900s to 1941, the United States history through that period, which he spent 12 years researching. The reason he said he did spend 12 years is because we learn history looking back, but we make it moving forward and to begin to have the kind of empathy and understanding of history that you need to learn from it, you've got to try to put yourself in the mindset and the shoes of people who were living it moving forward, not just those of us who have now learned it looking back.

The North could have lost the Civil War, I would say as late as August of 1864. If Atlanta had not fallen to Sherman, McClellan was probably going to win the presidential election in November, and he would have let the South go, for example, and probably revoked the Emancipation Proclamation. I'm not a McClellan expert in terms of his political campaigns, so somebody here may want to correct me on details. But McClellan, the former general, was running against Lincoln and in opposition to Lincoln's intention of winning the war, reunifying the country. Our French friends didn't have to succeed at the miracle on the Marne, the Schlieffen plan almost worked, and it might have as another example, if I go to World War Two just sort of dancing around through history quickly to illustrate this argument that outcomes are not preordained, I don't know what happens if Hitler doesn't attack the Soviet Union and the Japanese don't attack us at Pearl Harbor. I don't know that we ever enter the war, or even if we do, we might not enter it soon enough to make sure that we're the ones that get the atomic bomb first.

Maybe we enter the war after Hitler's got the atomic bomb and then rolling back his successes looks a lot more daunting, but especially if the Soviet Union is on his side. And you could say, well, Hitler always wanted all of Eurasia with his Lebensraum, crazy concept to depopulate these

lands of all the non, you know, Aryan inhabitants so that Germans could then create this thousand-year Reich. Yeah, I know all that about Hitler, but he really didn't need all of Eurasia to carry out some version of that concept.

And if he had stuck with the Molotov-Ribbentrop concept and divided up Eastern Europe with the Soviets, Stalin would have been happy with that. And, and we would have been in a far worse position because never forget the Soviets, the Russians did a lot to win World War Two, and the U.S. role was no more important than theirs. And at a time of very serious disagreement between the United States and Russia today, I at least want to honor that Russian sacrifice in the past, even though I have no, no sympathy at all for Vladimir Putin or most of the Russian political leadership right now. Anyway, those are some illustrations.

And the last lesson, in addition to war being harder, usually much harder than expected, outcomes not being preordained or even determined halfway through most of these wars, the last lesson is what an irony that the United States since 1945 has been, I think, the most successful great power in history, defined by preserving the peace, building coalitions, helping the world become more democratic and more prosperous. Yes, we're at a fraught moment, but if you look at the 78-year sweep, there's really never quite been something like this. The British in the 19th century doesn't compare, don't compare because they were doing it through colonialism and suppression of others— all due respect to British friends— doesn't compare to the last 78 years. However, our military record over that 78-year period is quite poor. And it's not the fault of the Stan McChrystal's. It's the fault of the broader political decision-making process, and maybe the military's had a role in that. And I would be fairly critical of the military in Vietnam in particular.

But it's really a product of the way we've decided which wars to fight and how to fight them and how to define our goals and how long to pursue those goals. And one way to put it is if you look at, if you categorize these wars the way I have and look at the big ones, it's Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan. Our record is zero wins, two defeats and two stalemates or ties, as I, as I argue in the book anyway. No wins. We lost in Vietnam and Afghanistan. I don't think we had to lose Afghanistan, by the way. I think it was a decision to concede defeat in 2021, and I'm quite critical of that, although this book is not primarily about that argument. And then two stalemates or indecisive outcomes, Korea, where we basically restored the status quo ante after three years of hard fighting, and Iraq, where I would just say it's too soon to know where this is headed and whether we could ever think

that Iraq is going to be a better place for our intervention. The intervention was not well done, not well conceived initially, and certainly we paid an enormous price. But there still is some hope that in military terms at least, Iraq can be seen as a partial, you know, success. But it's way too soon to say that. And I'm not really using those words at this juncture in history to describe the Iraq experience, but it's still, to me, inconclusive.

So we're oh two and two, and yet we remain the most successful, great, great power in history. And that should tell us something about which wars we're choosing to fight, how we're fighting them, or maybe that some of the wars aren't quite as important, didn't turn out to be quite as important as we thought at the time. So those are my three lessons.

Melanie Sisson So I think each of those is a really important lesson. And Stan, I hope you'll take up a couple of the themes of it in answering this question given to both of you. But we'll start, start with Stan. We've talked about outcomes not being preordained and some of the proclivities to think that victory can be had quickly and relatively easily. Or another thematic element of that sort of notion is that the other side will break first, that we can simply reach their tipping point and turn the conflict that way. Are we getting better at learning these lessons over time? And as we think about where the United States sits right now in a particularly heightened geopolitical moment, you know, are we more vulnerable to feeling threatened or are we more vulnerable to overconfidence?

Stanley McChrystal Wow. That's a, that's a great question. I think that we, we may be getting better, but there's no data to support that yet. I think that you're exactly right. And the one thing I disagree with Mike, I think the military absolutely owns part of the failures in every war to include me and to include my era, because it's a team that has to do these things. And we made as many mistakes as anybody else. But to the idea of are we figuring it out? The answer is hopefully we are. But there's no, there's no clear reason to think that we've gotten it better. My father and brother fought in Vietnam. I studied it when I was young. When I was in high school, I went to St John's my senior year up in Northwest D.C. I wrote a 174-page paper on part of French-Indochina. I was fascinated by it. So I was a student of that. And yet in Afghanistan particularly, but partially in Iraq, we made almost every mistake we made in Afghanistan, almost every one. And Dave Petraeus had written his thesis on Vietnam. So many of us in the military knew it.

And yet, as you're doing it, you're like part of a slowly unfolding car wreck of which you are partly responsible. And so the answer is, I think we, we really struggle to, to learn the bigger lessons.

And maybe one of the things that I loved about Mike's three conclusions is that there were only three. And the beauty is, hey, if you get those three right, if you understand those three, you're going to avoid a lot of other problems. Because if you really get back to those and you just say, wow, they are a lot harder than you think. They last longer. They don't come out well, but we might be okay. And then you start to decide whether we should or shouldn't or do, do need to fight or not. You have a different framework.

And so I would argue that if we used that framework to think, we would probably avoid many of the other challenges that we end up making. And then there are a thousand other reasons why the way the government operates to include the military and interacts that makes it more difficult. But the big ideas are right in the last chapter, you have to read the whole book, though, you just can't skip ahead.

Michael O'Hanlon So let me say three things, Melanie. That's a great question and a great answer by Stan. First, ever, so gentle, friendly disagreement with Stan on a couple of things. You and Dave Petraeus and John Allen and others, I think did a much better job commanding counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan than we had done in Vietnam. Yes, Vietnam had some good people, too. General Abrams and a few others. The Marine concept of the combined action platoon, which was sort of in a way a precursor to some of what you all tried to do by protecting populations. But the care, one of the great things about your legacy and why I think you're such an outstanding military leader and a moral inspiration, is the care you try to take to protect Afghan lives. And that was a distinction from the way we fought Vietnam. And so that's one area at least where we got a lot better, I think.

Second point, an area where we haven't gotten better. The U.S. intelligence community deserves great praise for what they did in 2021 to foresee the Russian attack on Ukraine and to help Ukraine be ready for it and to help, therefore, the President Zelensky Government survive. However, the U.S. intelligence community thought it was going to be a walk over once it happened. They got it wrong again. The same proclivity to think war is going to be quick. And they gave Russia too much credit, Ukraine too little. They bought into the idea that the Russian war plan would have sort of this blitzkrieg-like quality in the north and some nice airborne operations and maybe some assassination teams to take out Zelensky. And by the way, if we hadn't gotten involved, maybe those plans would have worked.

But those plans were always a possibility. They should never have been a prediction. It was, in other words, that was the left parameter, the left boundary of what was possible in terms of duration and difficulty and the right parameter was always equally plausible. And that's a long war that settles into a war of attrition. And the U.S. intelligence community needs to go back and figure out how they could buy into this idea that the war is going to be quick. We got to stop thinking that way. Do we have to prepare for that possibility? Yes. So everything we did to help Zelensky survive was great. But there were some consequences in terms of how we handled other aspects of the early weeks of that war that were misinformed by this, not just possibility that was foreseen of a quick Russian win, but this confident prediction. So that doesn't make me feel too much better because I know, I know a lot of people in the U.S. intelligence community and they're smart and they're really well-educated.

And I had the honor of being on Dave Petraeus' CIA External Advisory Board, getting briefed by a lot of those folks. And they're great. But somehow the system led by Bill Burns, who's one of the most inspirational and brilliant public figures I've ever met in my life, somehow the system, at least at CIA and maybe other parts of the community, seems to have made a mistake. So we got to keep going back to basics and remembering not to do that.

Third point— and I know you and I talk about this a lot, Melanie, and it really worries both of us— we've got to make sure that neither China nor the United States ever develops confidence that it can quickly and easily defeat the other in a war, because both sides are going to be prone, at least at, at risk of coming to that conclusion if they're the first ones to get AI, the first ones to build a hypersonic missile force, to have a clever war plan for how to go after the command and control nodes of the adversary and fall in love with this elaborate, technologically up to date modern concept that really is going to be sort of like a modern day version of the Schlieffen plan, with some chance of success, like Hitler proved with Blitzkrieg against France, but also some decided chance of failure like von, well, like von Schlieffen's successors found out when they tried to implement his plan in 1914 against France.

And so heaven forbid that we allow ourselves to think we could ever defeat China quickly. And let's work very hard to make sure China can't come up with that same theory of rapid victory against us, which has a lot of implications for how we do defense planning and other things. But those would be three points. So I'm not sure. I'm not sure how well we've learned.

Melanie Sisson Well, I think we've run out of time despite having only scratched the surface of the amount of rich content in the book and what it's generated for both of you in terms of your thinking about the past and the present and the future. I am going to open up for some audience questions, and we've got a really wonderful crowd here. There are microphones going around. We'll call on you. I'm going to warn you in advance you have 45 seconds to issue your question. And at the 45 second mark, I will rudely interrupt you and force the issue. So let's see, where are some hands? There's, let's start, there's a gentleman over here on this side with glasses there. Oh, okay.

Audience Member My name is Mark Brodsky. I'm a retired physicist and engineer and CEO. We're now in a proxy war in Ukraine. What lesson should we have, we seem to be fighting it with material and advice? Are, are we sending the right material? Are we learning anything from past wars, from even this war about whether tanks are useful or not, etc?

Michael O'Hanlon I support the tank decision, but not because I think it's a silver bullet. I think that— and I will try to use a little bit of the book to shoehorn that into my answer— but too much of this war to me, looks like World War One, pounding away with artillery and then hoping that once you weaken the enemy over a period of days, weeks, your infantry forces or light skinned vehicle mounted forces can then take a kilometer or two. Yes, there have been exceptions to that. For example, when the Ukrainians duped Russia into thinking they were only going to attack in the south last summer and wound up going after Kharkiv in the north and the Russians were unprepared, and then there were big advances. But they were not enormous advances. They were big, but not enormous.

And so if you're going to give Ukraine a realistic chance to win back a fraction of the 17% of its country that Russia still sits on, I think you have to do it through more than artillery and infantry. Having said that, I don't really think that a couple of hundred tanks is going to allow Ukraine to win back all 17%. And so I see this as a multistep process where Ukraine deserves a chance to try and we might even have to have a debate about attack helicopters, in my judgment as well. But after they've tried for a while in the course of the coming spring and summer and probably only partially liberated fractions of their country that are currently held by Russia, I think we're going to have to encourage them to think creatively about some ways to finesse the territory issue.

I don't mean giving it to Russia permanently, but we may have to look for some versions of local autonomy, may have to schedule referenda on the future of one piece of Donbas or another for

the year 2040 once Putin's gone, we may have to tolerate Russian control even, even where we refuse to recognize it just to get ourselves to a peace. I don't think we should pressure President Zelensky to do that yet. But I think he deserves the tanks first and then a chance to give it a try.

But at some stage later this year, I expect that we might be facing that kind of a conundrum where there is a new stalemate, a little different than the one today, but essentially a stalemate. Even with the Ukrainian tanks being provided because the Russians have tanks too, tanks are not a silver bullet, but they do certainly help a lot with combined arms maneuver warfare. And so it was the correct decision. It also signals to President Putin that we're not losing heart and we're not weakening in our resolve to fundamentally support Ukraine and keep it sovereign and keep its government intact. So for that reason, I supported it as well. But I'd love your thoughts.

Stanley McChrystal You know, I do. But I'm not sure we're right. I'm not sure what outcome we think we can get in Ukraine. And so we're doing sort of the gradual escalation approach right now, which rhymes with Vietnam. You use the rheostat; you raise the pressure on the enemy till they quit. The North Vietnamese wouldn't quit. There was no point they would quit. Arguably, at least in the case of Vladimir Putin, I think there's no case when he will quit. Now, there may be a point when he's overthrown or whatever. So the danger of this approach of sort of poker, where we're each raising the bets in this, in this effort, is that the other side just keeps realizing I can actually play at this higher level. It just gets up and it doesn't take us anywhere. But I'm not confident in that answer. I don't, if somebody called me in and said, what's the right answer right now? I don't have a better one. I would continue to support the Ukrainians like this because I don't have a, a more clever approach.

Melanie Sisson All right. We'll take some more questions here. There's a gentleman all the way in the back in the middle, and let's actually do two at a time here. So hands back up. Let's see. How about here on the edge? Blue shirt in the third row. So does someone have a microphone in the back yet? Yes. Yes. Okay. Go right ahead.

Audience Member Hi. My name is Mike. And one of the really crucial figures in World War Two was Vannevar Bush in terms of scientific revolution, in terms of the research and development that went into the military, the Manhattan Project, things along those lines. Who do you think would be a modern analogue of that, if any?

Melanie Sisson Okay, great. And then we'll take the second one here, please. This gentleman. Thank you.

Audience Member You've mentioned Vietnam quite a bit, which is part of one of your chapters. What kind of lessons about Korea, other than the fact we got totally caught by surprise?

Michael O'Hanlon You want to take one of those and I'll take the other?

Stanley McChrystal Sure. I'll take the easier one, the Korea one, although it's not easy. My father fought there, so I was interested in that as well. I think the big lesson on Korea is probably in the run up to the war. We didn't anticipate war in Korea. We, in fact, made a policy pronouncement that some people would argue encouraged Kim Il-Sung to make the, the attack of South Korea, because we basically said they were not inside the perimeter of essential things for the United States. I think the probably the biggest failure was understanding what the Cold War was going to be like. And so we we sought this chessboard that if we can make this move here and we check them, that that that would work.

And of course, Korea was two things. It was part of that chessboard, but it was also Korea. I mean, it was the North Koreans trying to unify their country. I didn't obviously support them doing it, but it wasn't just the communist expansion in my view. And so we caught in that extraordinary profusion of resources, and you could argue a great distraction. Of course, the counter argument is it woke us up, the counter argument, it got the United States to rejuvenate the military because it had been really run down and the budgets had been denuded right before that. So in some ways, the extraordinary cost in Korea ended up being worth the investment that we had to make. Although 50, more than 50,000 Americans is an awful lot.

Michael O'Hanlon I'll just add one point on Korea, then come back to the science question. And in military terms, Ridgway, General Ridgway deserves a lot of credit and he's sort of an underappreciated, quiet hero of Korea, as you probably know better than I. But he, you know, he helped rescue our position when we had had multiple debacles through the first ten months of the war, once he took command. And he was just an old-fashioned sort of, you know, get the basics right infantry soldier.

And I bet I've heard you guys, you know, you had Dave Petraeus and others rave about Ridgway before. I don't know if you or Petraeus in particular has raved a lot about Ridgway. And and and I've admired him as I've learned more. I'm not as big a fan of General MacArthur. And MacArthur, of course, is controversial for a lot of reasons. But he's the one that essentially took our forces north of the 38th parallel after the brilliant Inchon landing, which he deserves credit for. But he left our forces

sort of straggled through North Korea. And I feel that even more than the decision to cross the 38th, because a lot of people share responsibility for that. You know, Secretary of Defense Marshall, President Truman, they didn't stop MacArthur when he decided to go north or even when he aspired to get to the Yalu River with the border with China. But MacArthur left his forces in unprepared and indefensible positions. And he was so overconfident that we had turned the tide of war that he really underestimated the enemy. So that to me is an interesting lesson of Korea.

And then on whether we have a Bush like figure today, I think I'll use your question just to give a shout out to the amazing research and development technology innovation facilities we have throughout this country in general, but certainly within the Department of Energy and Department of Defense. And I've been fortunate enough to go to Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Los Alamos, Livermore, Sandia. They're just such jewels of technology, and they benefit us in ways even beyond the military. So we've institutionalized the kind of genius that we might have looked to individuals for in somewhat earlier periods. And it doesn't mean that, you know, there still is an importance for like, who's the next genius with the really big idea? But we are constantly inventing really amazing stuff.

The danger is we'll believe that gives us a silver bullet in a future war, if the wrong military or civilian leader who doesn't appreciate, you know, the histories, the lessons of history and the vulnerabilities of technology gets too excited. Then, because we're spending well over 100 billion a year on research, development, test and evaluation, always coming up with new nifty stuff, we have to remember— and the Chinese, for their part, have to remember— that new technologies usually help you do one or two really clever things early in a conflict, but the enemy often adapts. And so don't overestimate your advantage just because you've invented something cool.

Melanie Sisson Yeah, and I'm actually going to take the liberty of responding to the Vannevar Bush question, too. I don't think there is one today. I know there's a lot of people that aren't a Bush like figure today, but, but I don't know that there is one that is. But I think the good news about that is that there are indicators of a general interest in an understanding and pushing energies in a direction for funding of science and technology generally, nationally, as, as Mike notes that I think are really heartening. It's, it's not just DOE and DOD, though. We have, for example, that, you know, we usually think of as the CHIPS and science act, right? It should be the CHIPS and Science Act where we're funding real education. We're putting money to incentivize people to think about the kinds of

technologies that will serve the national interest broadly. And ultimately, perhaps will do so in ways related to the national defense. So that's more than, than you wanted out of me. We have time for one more question. The gentleman over here, please.

Audience Member Yeah, it's a quick, quick question. One of the main theme of the historiography of American military history since like the sixties is that whether we have an American way of war and what is the American way of war? Yeah, I'm wondering, what's your take on this, having read the history on American military?

Stanley McChrystal Well, I will give one observation. I think there's a perception of an American way of war that's often wrong. Back in 1993, you remember there was the, the fight in Mogadishu. Rangers and Delta Force people lost, 18 Americans killed, a number of Somalis killed as well. And the takeaway for much of the world was that— and American pulled out of there pretty quickly after that— was that Americans would not take casualties. And so then we went to Bosnia, where the guidance to the force was no casualty. So force protection became everything. And so our, our opponents went to school on that, and they said Americans will not bleed.

Well, they were wrong about that. We got into Iraq and Afghanistan. That was not the critical point. What Americans don't want to do is fail. They don't want to be involved in something a long time that doesn't have demonstrable progress. Americans aren't happy with a war like Ukraine if it becomes a long-term stalemate. That's part of our national psyche. So the American way of war sort of personified by that first Gulf War, the 100 hours and we thought we'd solved all of our problems is something that is a potential vulnerability for the United States. Both in our own, to the point that or to the extent that's real, but also to the extent that other people can make that kind of assumption about us, which may cause them to make incorrect assumptions and lead us into a fight that, like the Japanese at the beginning of the Second World War, thought that they might get America if they punched hard enough to get us to step back. And it's those miscalculations that raise risks.

Michael O'Hanlon That's an amazing answer. I'm not going to try to compete with that. That's a beautiful way to summarize and sum up the whole discussion. But I'll make one additional point, because, of course, I'm sure you were inspired by the late great Russell Weigley whose book, "The American Way of War," tries to answer the question, and that's in some ways a book that inspired me with this one. Because he did try to take a broad sweep through history. And for a while I thought maybe I didn't need to try to write my book because he had already written his. And there are a

couple other books that are sort of surveys of warfare over the years. But this is an advertisement, by the way, so I'm going to finish with an advertisement.

What I tried to do that I wasn't sure that that they had done. Well, first of all, I tried to bring it up to 2022. So there is the Iraq Afghanistan chapter, and I try to write it for the modern strategist, because I did, I didn't know that Russia would invade Ukraine when I began the book, but I knew it by the time I finished, so I could weave that into my discussion. But also, I wanted to give a tight and fairly complete chronology of each of the wars at the campaign level. To the extent that paradigm or framework would allow me to describe much of what had happened. Because a lot of the other surveys like by B.H. Liddell Hart, the British historian and, and, and Weigley himself, they, they use a lot of history. They probably knew history, frankly, better than I do, but they didn't really have these sort of tight chronologies that tried to, in a sense, be a primer. I hope I didn't write it like a boring, encyclopedic primer, but I did try to presuppose that I've got a really smart audience that may not remember too much about the histories that I'm describing. And of course, the Civil War is something that Americans tend to remember a little bit about.

But I was talking again about World War One, most Americans don't know much about World War One. I didn't know much about war, I read a bit of the literature with the centennial, you know, of 1914, 2014, and Margaret Macmillan and a lot of other excellent authors who told the stories of that period. But what I really wanted to do was write a history that was fairly complete so that if you didn't know basically what had happened in that four year, four-and-a-half-year sweep, that at least the major pieces, movements, decisions, campaigns would become apparent. And so Weigley inspired me, but I tried to do that in a little bit more of a comprehensive way about the chronologies of these wars than perhaps he had done in his outstanding volume. So with that, I'll end the advertisement. Thank you all for coming today.

Melanie Sisson Well, I'm. Well on behalf of the whole institution and foreign policy, Stan, thank you so much for joining today, it was really wonderful to have you. Mike, all congratulations on a really excellent book. For the audience, great job asking the questions in timeline, I'm both pleased and a little disappointed that I didn't get to interrupt anybody. Don't forget that the books are out on the front so that you can continue your learning adventure. And please join us back here at the Brookings Institution again sometime soon. Thanks very much.