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PANEL DISCUSSION:

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O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Brookings. I'm Mike O'Hanlon here with Melanie Sisson of the Strobe Talbott Center on Security, Science and Technology. We are honored to have the chief of staff of the United States Army, General James McConville, with us today. General, I've been lucky to know you for a number of years and we've hosted you before at Brookings, and as you prepare to complete your tour as chief of staff, it's really a privilege to be able to host you yet again, and I don't think of it as a farewell visit, but I think of it as really an opportunity to honor and thank you for your service and maybe I could ask everybody else to join me in a round of applause, please. Thank you.

So today we're going to talk with the general up here a bit. First me, then Melanie with some questions and then you, to round out the hour. And first I'd like to say a couple more words about this distinguished soldier's amazing career. He's been in uniform for 42 years, actually, 46, if you count all four years at West Point. Grew up in Quincy, Massachusetts, near another young man and promising, promising future American named Joe Dunford. Some of you may have heard of, pretty amazing group of individuals following in the footsteps of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, all from that same small town in the Boston region. As I say, he went to West Point. He studied science there and also earned a master of science degree from the Georgia Institute of Technology. He was commanding general of the 101st Air Assault Division, he served in both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, he's been vice chief of the Army, in addition to being chief, he's just had a remarkable career and he's seen a lot.

And so, general, you know, we're all talking these days about the national security strategy, the national defense strategy, China, etc., but I don't want to begin there, I want to talk really about you as a soldier and your fellow soldiers and the state of the U.S. Army today, which, of course, is a big part of your day-to-day responsibility and ask you about the all-volunteer force. How are we doing? And I'm just going to pack it all into one question. How are recruiting and retention doing? How is your ability to draw on an adequate pool of young Americans who might want to serve? How are you handling all the political pressures of, you know, the fallout of January 6th? On the one hand, the criticisms of woke culture, on the other, a lot of, you got a lot of incoming to deal with in terms of what people think of the, you know, way in which our all-volunteer military is navigating this treacherous time in American politics. So could I just ask to begin, about how is our all-volunteer force today?

MCCONVILLE: Yeah, well, thank, thanks, and it's great to be here with you all, and, you know, in the Army, it's really about people first. And, you know, people are the greatest weapon system, the greatest asset in the United States Army. When I talk about people, I'm talking about soldiers from all three components. I'm talking about civilians, I'm talking about our families, and I'm talking about our soldiers for life. So what I take a look at, you know, the people in the Army, I think we have the best leadership, you know, coming up into the Army and these are combat-proven veterans, and as far as leadership goes up and down the Army over 20 years of combat, I think we're in great shape. Retention is at a historical high. So people that come in, the Army are staying in the Army, and that's good. Recruiting right now is a challenge, you know, we did not have a good year last year and we are in a full-court press to inspire young men and women aside.

And you mentioned, you know, different people saying different things. Quite frankly, I'm staying out of that, the military needs to stay out, we are nonpartisan, we are apolitical, and quite frankly, we need to do that. And when we talk to our young men and women, one of the things that we found, we talked to recruiters was, there was a lot of challenges after COVID with young men and women that want to serve meeting the standards. So what we did is we stood up a future soldier prep course. It's kind of like a boot camp for boot camp, if you will. And so far, we are finding pretty good results. About 95% of the young men and women that come to our future soldier prep course, make it through, go on to initial military training, and not only are they passing initial military training, they're actually exceeding the standards, they're taking the leadership positions, they're doing very well physically. So I think there's, there's something there which is brought back, be all you can be, you know, for some of the older soldiers that resonates. We've had different campaigns that, quite frankly, I personally did not think hit the mark. I think this hits the mark because, if you're a parent, and I'm a parent of three soldiers, and you ask them, why should your kid go in the military, you know, a good answer is you want your kid to be all he can be. And that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to

invest in American youth. And just for everyone here, I think we need to inspire young men and women to serve not necessarily in the military, but across all the institutions that we have, and that's really important for America.

O'HANLON: So if I could follow up on that, I think you were the one who taught me, general, five or six years ago, before COVID, and maybe when you were vice chief, if I remember the numbers correctly, about half of all of your recruits came from just 10% of the nation's high schools, is I remember you stating that statistic and is it is what you just said a way to think about broadening the concept of service to make sure that the other 90% of the high schools, perhaps don't catch up fully with military service, but that we really change the culture in the United States about national service writ large. And if so, how do we do that? I mean, your message is very helpful, but how do we broaden that message?

MCCONVILLE: Yeah I think we have to expose more people to military service, you know, the the statistic you quoted was, is 44% of American youth that have a JROTC program go into the military. So you think about it, you know, JROTC program is in 10% of the high schools, but 44% go into the military, and they're not necessarily in JROTC, but they've been exposed to it. 83 percent-ish of the young men and women that come into the military come from a military family. So we have become, in some ways a military family business, and quite frankly, we need to be an American family business. And we're spending a lot more time doing that, getting out, you know, you know, even the commercials, they're a chance to expose young men and women to what the military's all about, but going back into the high schools, we're, not in the high schools during COVID. And then we're getting our divisions, you know, like the 101st, 82nd Airborne Division. They are actually in support of recruiting brigades, which is a really unusual relationship, but we want Americans to see what their military does. You could be anything you want to be in the United States Army, in fact, you can be all you could be.

O'HANLON: You know, the Army has continued to downsize, partly because the surges of Iraq and Afghanistan are obviously over. But also, I know because of challenges with recruiting. And just one last question on this topic, because it is so central. Would you describe the current challenges with recruiting as nearing a crisis proportion, or do you feel that while there's some strain, there's some trouble, there's some inadequacy and shortfall, that this can be largely explained by the COVID period and largely addressed through things like your pre-boot camp boot camp. In other words, we got some problems, but it's not a crisis. Or is this one of the worst periods in the history of the all-volunteer force in terms of its ability to maintain the kind of numbers we need?

MCCONVILLE: Well, you know, like I said, we didn't have a good year last year. And what that means is in three to five years, if we don't retain or improve, we're going to have some challenges with the noncommissioned officers who are the backbone of our army. So where I sit right now, we are not in an absolute crisis, but we don't want to get to that crisis. And so we are pulling out the stops in the army, it's our number one priority when it comes to recruiting, and it's not just a recruiting command challenge, it's everyone's challenge. In the Army, everyone's a recruiter and, you know, and we're sending out, you know, one of the best examples we've seen is just getting our soldiers out to the high school, taking our Soldier of the Year and going back to their high school. We had we had a young man who just finished basic training, go back to his wrestling, he went to a wrestling tournament, and he came back and he signed up 19 kids, you know. So, I mean, what we have to do is people have to be able to see themselves in in the Army, see themselves in the military, especially places where they're not used to seeing what the military is all about, right?

O'HANLON: If I could, I'd like to turn to the war in Ukraine, not to talk about the specific next phases that you may be anticipating. That's, I realize, more General Cavoli and national military and strategic leadership, but from an Army perspective and a soldier perspective, what have you learned? What have you been surprised by and how, you know, then we'll get to how that maybe affects your own priorities for how the U.S. Army should be modernizing and adapting. But what have you learned by watching Ukraine?

MCCONVILLE: You know, I think we're learning a whole bunch by watching Ukraine, and I kind of when I take a look at history and I try to put it in context, when the senior leaders last time we did a major transformation in the Army was was in 1980s, late seventies, 1980s. Time before that was 1940 before

World War II. Every 40 years, you know, most would argue, the Army needs to transform. In 1973, the leaders at that time were coming out of Vietnam, and they looked at the Arab-Israeli war, and they got a sense of what future combat may look like that, and they took that and they came out with new doctrine, and they came out new organizations, training, the Big Five, as we like to talk about, and the all-volunteer force, and that's what drove them, and quite frankly, that's what we've used for the last 40 years, incrementally improving all those systems.

We're in a different place right now. And as we take a look at Ukraine, what we're seeing and confirming some of the things we've been talking about is going to be a multi-domain fight. So if you think about it, it's not just contested on the land, and that's a vicious land fight that's going on. It's contested in the air, you know, everything's getting shot down, a lot of things that, you know, you gonna fly airplanes, you're going to fly them, or drones, in a contested environment. We've seen ships sunk, when the last time we saw ships actually sunk, so it contested on the sea. We're certainly contested in cyber, and was certainly contested in space. So we're going to have to be able to operate in that environment. And that is driving our doctrine. It's driving new organizations. It's driving our modernization priorities and quite frankly, all our personnel-type systems.

So as we take a look at, you know, what's what's going on, long-range precision fires, you know, people talk about HIMARS being a game changer. Well, the Army's developing, you know, the present strike missile, [inaudible] midrange capability, is going to sink ships. We're developing hypersonics, all these capabilities are going to be in the hands of our soldiers by the end of next year and into the next year. And we're seeing that's really important. If you're gonna do long range precision fires, you have to do long range precision targeting or deep sensing. You've got to have the ability to find targets and you have to be able to do it at the speed of relevance. So it's great that we have systems that go very fast, it's great we have systems that go very far, but the secret sauce is what we call convergence. How quickly can you take that information from the sensors, get it into an integrated battle command system, and quickly get it to lethal means that are going to apply those effects. And so we're seeing things like noncommissioned officer corps. You know, we're very blessed if you're going to have a complex plan, and quite frankly, if you look at what the Russians had, it was a very complex plan, when the initial attack was five accesses, they were doing airborne operations, air assault operations, amphibious operations. And you have to have a highly trained force be able to do that, and you have to have noncommissioned officers who been around to lead those small units to make it happen. Logistics, logistics, logistics. You know, I'm very proud of what our logisticians have done as far as supporting, but also, put us in a place that we can reinforce allies and partners.

Another, you know, when people ask me at the beginning of the conflict to go, hey, you know, the javelins and the stingers worked very, very well in defense of Kiev, so you don't need tanks anymore. The tanks are stuck by the side of the road. And, you know, my kind of, you know, response to that is, you don't need tanks unless you want to win. And, and what I mean by that is what you really need is combined arms and you need combined services and you need combined allies and partners and you have to all work together and take advantage of the strengths that each system has, each service has, each branch has, and bring them together to present, you know, the right course of action for our commanders, but more importantly, provide dilemmas for our adversaries. You want to, you know, you want throw a whole bunch of balls and they don't know which one is coming at them. That's how you win.

O'HANLON: Just one follow-up on that, and then I'd like to talk about Army modernization today. But your point about tanks is intriguing and we could have a whole conversation just on that. But I guess what's, what's got my curiosity is watching that Russian attempt a year ago from the north, where they send in a lot of vehicles on a predictable path of approach along major roads. I guess there was some you know, it was winter, there were, there were, there was snow on the side of the roads, maybe hard to drive off road, some of it was perhaps light snow. Anyway, not the easiest environment, at least for support vehicles. Maybe some of the tanks could have gotten across. But the Russians came straight down those highways. And what struck me is they didn't have proper unpredictability of their approach, but nor did they have dismounted infantry along the side to try to snuff out those javelin wielding teams. Am I partly correct in that analysis? And if so, does that mean that the tanks really are just as useful as ever if you operate them correctly, or are they marginally less useful?

MCCONVILLE: Now I think if, if the Russians had done combined arms and, you know, had had infantry with, we never employ tanks without infantry, but but also attack aviation, also artillery, also intelligence gathering platforms, and it's very hard to fire a javelin if you're taking artillery, you don't want to be hanging around, you know, as artillery is kind of raining in on you and and what you want, what you don't want to do is present, you know, your adversary with one dilemma. You know, if they only have to focus on the tanks coming down the road, that's if that's all they have to focus at and they're paralyzed, oh, by the way, you throw in the logistics, you didn't have gas for your tanks, you didn't have parts for your tanks, you didn't have ammunition for your tanks. You probably didn't set yourself up for success. I think, and again, I don't know for a fact, but I think they thought they could just drive in in armored vehicles and people would surrender. But that's not, you know, kind of what happens, and as commanders, should always plan for the worst case, you know, there was going to be a big fight, then how do you set the conditions for moving very, very quickly, you know, an armored type force? You know, if you go back to history, you see forces, you know, like, you know, 101st Airborne Division, they would jump in and seize the bridges. It was all about getting the bridges because that was critical terrain. And then you could quickly move tanks and other things very, very quickly through, so, you have got to do combined arms.

O'HANLON: So now to segway to what you're trying to do with the Army and to build on what you just said about the history lesson of previous transformation. Of course, the Army did try to transform itself again in the early 2000s with the future combat system. And I know there were some benefits from that effort. But overall, the big idea didn't quite pan out the way people had hoped. And there were other setbacks in the nineties with various kinds of weapons systems as well. And so I guess now you've got you, and before you, General Milley and Secretary Mark Esper, when he was secretary of the Army, you were talking about six major areas of modernization. And I wanted to invite you to maybe update us on one or two of them. I mean, you already talked about long range fires. There's vertical lift, there's the network, there's the soldier, Air and Missile Defense, I think I'm forgetting one, maybe it is mechanized vehicles and and tanks. And out of that group of six are there are one or two that are showing the most promise that you're happiest about? And one or two that are lagging?

MCCONVILLE Yeah, well, I think, you know, we talk to you know, I talk about 24 signature systems, so there's six modernization priorities within that. There's 34 kind of major systems coming to bear. 24 of those systems are going to either be fielded in testing or in the hands of soldiers in 23. And so that is pretty quick because these things were, you know, five. When you look at acquisition programs, a lot of time, it takes a long time to get things in place. And I think it's because we're doing things differently. You know, we're moving away from spending years trying to define the requirements and then turning it over to our project managers and industry and saying, come back in seven, 10 years with a product. And meanwhile, technology has really changed and the requirements are really no longer relevant. So kind of, you know, in a thumbnail sketch of how we're doing business, we're saying, hey, we want something that kind of does this, it goes this fast, it goes this far, come back to us with a white paper and what you think you can do, and this opens up to a whole bunch of partners, and so we may get 100 white papers to say, okay, we've got a hundred white papers on what this going to be, we're going to pick 10, and you're going to \$800,000 each or something to go to the next step.

Now, come back with initial design, and we take a look at what industry says they can do, and, you know, what's really critical is what I've always found is you can do a lot on PowerPoint. It's a lot easier do things on PowerPoint and paper than actually build this stuff, so you always want to be kind of thinking about that as you go forward. But, and then we go to initial design and meanwhile we're updating our characteristics, we're not to requirements yet, we're saying, hey, we, you know, we want to see this thing. And then we go into detailed design, then we go to prototyping. And so with the prototyping, we're able to drive a fly before we buy, which is very, very different than we used to do it. So if you look at future vertical lift, the future long range assault aircraft, the two competitors are actually flying those things. So we can, we know and they are transformational and how they're changing the way aircraft, they're not helicopters anymore, because one's a two-rotor configuration and one is advancing blade concept and it's allowing them to get the speed and range. But we know they can do that because they've been able to do it. We just picked a new vehicle for our Mobile Protected Fire, and that is, went through the same thing, we put in the hands of soldiers at the 82nd Airborne Division. We let them use those vehicles for 6 to 9 months. We've got a good

idea of what they wanted and didn't want, and we're bringing them forward. So we're driving before we're buying, we're flying before we buy them.

I'd say one of the, you know, systems that is not moving as fast, but I think is one of the most transformational is, I guess, the integrated visual augmentation system. And to understand that, you know, you have to kind of look into the future. And what I mean by that is, we have night vision goggles and we've incrementally improved those, and we have a set called Enhanced Night Vision Goggles Bravo, which is really a good set of goggles, and it fuzes ambient light and flare, the troops love it, it's got, you know, it's really very helpful as a very good set of night vision capability. I've asked for something completely different, and I use I've used the the analogy of like the phone. Yeah, we went for a phone in the wall, worked our way through iterations, cordless phone to a cell phone, and we had a very, very good cell phone. Then all a sudden, you know, the computer folks came up with a different idea, they got the smartphone, which transformed how we use phones, you know, for, you know, the younger people here, we didn't have things. We used to have these things called cameras, you know, we didn't take pictures with our phone, we didn't navigate with our phones, we didn't watch movies with our phones. I have Eisenhower's phone in the Eisenhower bedroom in my house, you know, it's an old dial type phone. That is what I-BEST is going to be, and people just got to be persistent and they got to be consistent and stay with it. And it's clunky right now, but what that is going to do is transform the way our leaders and soldiers can operate in the battlefield. And, you know, we have to be patient, but we have to be we have to get it done. Because, you know, when you start to see what you can do, you can bring video in, you're going to have manned-unmanned teaming, you're going to have unmanned-unmanned teaming, of all these type of things going on in the battlefield, and you want to have the ability to pass data to leaders so they can see it in a heads up display.

O'HANLON: Just one last question for me, and then I'll hand off to Melanie. I wanted to talk a little bit about how the Army is going to respond to the new security demands in Europe, not by getting into General Cavoli's portfolio so much as yours about how is an army of now 450,000 active duty soldiers, smaller than you've been in a long time, how is that army going to handle maintaining modest but still significant footprints in a lot of parts of the world, where the European footprint is now likely to grow? I think probably steady state, although I realize decisions haven't yet been made, and in particular, I guess to bring it to a specific question, would it be better if the army's going to be in eastern NATO territory, Romania or the Baltics, at least with a couple of battalions, maybe a brigade? Would it be better to base that unit there permanently rather than try to maintain it with the with the rotational system that then winds up requiring three or four units to sustain one, because of the recovery and preparation time? Are we better off thinking about whatever footprint we're going to have in the eastern member states, that it perhaps should be a permanent stationing as opposed to a rotational one?

MCCONVILLE: Well, I think it's it's not either or. It's it's it's a bunch of all. And when I take a look at as, you know, in Europe, we have permanent stationed troops. You know, we have troops in Italy, we have troops in Germany and we have some throughout Europe. And and that makes sense in some places. We also have rotational troops, which again, it has value in the fact it gives us flexibility on how they move in, how how they how they move out. But it also gives us value in that you don't have to bring family, so some places you may not have the capacity to bring families and schools and hospitals and and, you know, that's a fairly significant number to do that. So you want to balance that. The other thing is, which we showed, is the benefit of having prepositioned stocks. You know, I mean, if you want, you know, the First Brigade or the Third Infantry Division, we were able to deploy an armored brigade combat team in a little over a week, which if you, you know, understand what goes on behind that, and the reason we were able to do it was because their equipment, it was a modernized brigade combat team of armor sitting over there that was maintained with logisticians, and so, in fact, the logisticians are the ones that actually moved it to the range. So when they showed up, you know, we basically could move, we just had to move the people and airplane, they got the airplane, they were ready to take over these tanks and conduct operations. So I think it's a little of both. And what we're going to do is, you know, take what we have and provide options. And then as far as where we're permanent, not permanent, those are, as you know, those are decisions made well above us.

O'HANLON: Thank you. Melanie.

SISSON: Great. Well, first, thanks, Mike, for starting off the conversation with such an important set of topics. And sir, thanks very much for joining us here today. Let's stick with what Mike just brought up, but make it a little bit more general and put it in some broader context. And when you look around the world today at the changed strategic environment that informs all of this work that you're doing with and on behalf of the U.S. Army. So in that broader geopolitical context, how do you think about how big the Army needs to be and about where it needs to be now?

MCCONVILLE: Well, when I take a look at, you know, first of all, we want presence and support of National Defense Strategy. And I think, when I use Europe as an example, it shows how quickly we can respond to reassure allies and partners and deter any further aggression. And that's because the theater is set. You know, we have strong allies and partners that are there, we work very close together, there's been rehearsals with Defender Series, where you can quickly move, you know, systems across Europe to respond and then you're there, and then we take a look at, you know, the Indo-Pacific. You know, we have some places where we're very present, other places we are not. And those relationships are really important as we talk to decision makers, want to make sure, hey, if we want to do something like this, we need to have this capability in this region or we're going to have to do it differently. And what I see from a chief of staff, the Army standpoint, is I want to make sure we can provide the capabilities that the National Command Authority needs to do to assist and the combatant commanders and National Defense Strategy. A lot of people say like, hey, you know, you know, like in Europe, you don't need long range precision fires because no one will ever let you bring them in. Well, that may change. You know, I mean, there's people that are very eager to have long range precision fires now, and maybe if, you know, three or four years passed, they wouldn't. So someone is providing the capabilities that are trained and ready to go. And if we're asked to do that, we can do that. But having some type of access and presence and the reasons we're going to operate, I think is extremely important.

SISSON: You mentioned the National Defense Strategy in the past, you've also spoken very clearly about the difference between competing and being in conflict, so you can compete below the threshold of conflict. And the National Defense Strategy in 2022 incorporated the idea of campaigning. And so do you think about those two as similar constructs, competing below the threshold and campaigning? Are they different? And in either case, what's the role of the army?

MCCONVILLE: Well, I see, you know, the campaigning as, you know, how do we work in a region and build the capabilities, the capacity and the competence and, quite frankly, the will to fight of our allies and partners, we are never going to fight alone. And, you know, I think as you take a look at Ukraine, it's a great example of a country that we were able to help with their capabilities, we're able to help with their capacity. We're able to help with their confidence by the training we're doing. But they provided the will to fight. They provide the commitment to defend their country. And I think that needs to be the framework for how we look at, you know, campaigning. And I would argue that, you know, a country has a lot more will to fight if they have the capabilities and capacity and the competence and they know people are going to be supporting them. So I think that's how I see campaigning. We've set up new organizations, the security force, the system brigades, to help build that partner capacity. We certainly have special forces that do a great job of doing that around the world, and we have National Guard state partnerships, again, working with our allies and partners to build their capabilities. And we do lots of exercises in our critical theaters to make sure that that we're ready, and we've kind of worked through some problem sets, and, you know, one of the you know, least, you know, when I was at West Point, President Reagan gave a very famous speech at our graduation of peace through strength speech, that's kind of stuck with me. How do we get peace through strength? And, you know, the best way to win without fighting is to demonstrate you can win by fighting. And we're going to do that as a joint force. We do that as a combined force. And that's what I think the campaigning is all about.

SISSON: You mentioned peace through strength and the idea of deterring conflict. And deterrence, of course, is on everybody's minds these days, not just because of the efforts prior to Putin's egregious actions in Ukraine, but also, of course, because of concern over Taiwan and potential PRC interest in using force against that island. When you look at the joint force today, how would you assess our ability to deter, whether it's that specific scenario in Taiwan or if there are other areas that you see that we ought to be paying attention to that you think about in a deterrence framework?

MCCONVILLE: Well, when I think about deterrence, first of all, I think we have the world's greatest military. We have the world's greatest Navy and the world's greatest Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force and Army. And I think people should not take that that lightly. I've fought as a joint force over many, many years. And I, you know, a lot of confidence in our ability to do things. That doesn't mean the fact that we're ready today, that we should rest on our laurels, and as we look around the world, people are certainly increasing their capabilities. And that's something we're certainly concerned about, and we need to be ready to do that and we need to do the same thing. But when I take a look at, you know, how we're shifting and I won't give into specific scenarios, but, you know, if someone's considering, you know, trying to say hypothetically seize an island type structure, hypothetically, you know, I mean, the way you know, first of all, you'd want to make sure that that country that is defending that island has the capabilities, the capacity and the confidence and the will to fight, you know, as a starting point. But there's also other things can be done, as is, you know, if they are going to fight and they are going to resist, then that's going to require, you know, the adversary to do some type of amphibious or airborne operation, whether that's a airborne parachute operation or an air assault operation, then you have to think, well, how do you prevent that from happening? What type of capabilities and capacity you have to do that? And I think that's why you in developing, you know, certainly anti-ship capabilities and that can be done from the sea, it can be done from the air, it can be done from the ground, anti-airborne air assault, that's, you know, shooting their airplanes down or helicopters down. And so you build those capabilities, and if you build them with the amount of strength, that that may deter someone from trying to do that.

You know, amphibious operations of that ilk are very challenging, you've got to go back to D-Day to really take a look at how that was done. And then you've got to take a look at, you know, things like, you know, D-Day, we didn't have the intelligence apparatus we have today. You know, you had pattern of running around trying to convince people to come from a different direction. I'm not so sure you could do that today. And then logistics, it's about logistics, logistics, logistics. You could see with a landlocked battle we're seeing in Ukraine right now, it's very challenging for one side to get logistics and make all these type things happen, and then you put in, you know, the idea that you have to supply an amphibious force coming across. So there's a lot of potential there that that could be deterred with the right capabilities, capacity and competence, and certainly the will to fight.

SISSON: Those are three Cs and one W if I'm counting--

MCCONVILLE: C3W, That's my new acronym I'm throwing around and trying to, you know, you got to in the Army always have an acronym, right? C3W, Yeah.

SISSON: That's right, it helps us all out with those of us with failing memories. But you know, all of that begins with the people who serve. And, you know, you and Mike touched on this. I wanted to go a little bit more in depth on one area in particular. I know you've been invested in talent management in the Army for a while now, and in particular, there has been some changes to the personnel management system and command assessment. And there's also something called the software factory now, so if you could share a little bit about one or more of those things with us, then tell us why and where they're at.

MCCONVILLE: Well, first of all, I think talent management is one of the most important things we do, you know, like I talked about people is our greatest weapon systems, so we are moving the army from what I would call an industrial age personnel management system to a 21st century talent management system and really trying to manage the individual talents where they're not interchangeable parts in this big industrial age system, which is fundamental change, you mentioned the software factory. So we know in the future we're going to have to code. You know, there can be a lot of algorithms out there, artificial intelligence. We're going to have coding going on the battlefield and we take a look at convergence, which is our, I can say, super-sized moving data very, very quickly, taking advantage artificial intelligence, countering algorithms, all these things are going on. We'll need young men and women who can code, and so we've set up a software factory. And what's really interesting, it kind of highlights some of the challenges that we have in our talent management system. We tend to manage people by two variables in the army. You're captain of infantry, you're a sergeant of engineers, but we don't see the entire picture of the knowledge, skills, and behavior that they bring to the Army. So we actually have a specialist in E4 at the software factory that has no formal

training but codes at the Ph.D. level. He just grew up coding, he loves it, and we just happen to find him by a lark.

But the future is we want to be able to know the talents that people have, and we see it happen all over the place, when I was a one star in Afghanistan, we were building out most of Afghanistan, and I had a lot of great guard and reservists that were working for us. And so I asked them to fill in an Excel spreadsheet. I said, What do you do in real life? You know, I mean, I got it, you know, you're a captain, major colonels, sergeant, what do you do in real life? Well, there was a supply sergeant there who owned an engineering design firm in his civilian life. He is the person, that sergeant, who designed all the airfields and all of the forward operating bases. And it struck me, you know, I said, wow, we are kind of missing something here. And then as many knew, agriculture was it was a focus area. So if you don't know this, if I'm from Boston, you know, in Boston, we have pictures of farms, we don't do a lot of farming up there, you know, you know, and those type things. But we had folks from Nebraska and Iowa, the professional farmers, and so they were able to snap these agro-business development teams. So what we're really trying to do with talent management is get the right people in the right jobs and be able to manage your talents. And so we're putting in place, we put in this integrated personnel and pay system, it's only taken nine years and it's almost there. But, you know, you have to stay consistent, persistent to get these systems into place. But I think the future is talent management, where you are managing not two variables, maybe 25 variables. You take advantage of artificial intelligence and you quickly can get the right person in the right job at the right place.

SISSON: Well, I'm going to ask one more question before turning it over to this nice crowd here. You know, Mike touched on what has been a very long and accomplished career that you've had that I'm sure has been full of hard work and some heartache and a lot of challenge. What has been, for you in this position or over the course of your career, the most rewarding part of your service in the Army?

MCCONVILLE: I think it's the people. I'd like to say it's this person, but, you know, it's just, you know, every day is a great day at the United States Army because I believe we serve with the world's greatest soldiers. And, you know, having been in some very challenging situations and see young men and women rise to the occasion, we're in multiple combat tours, multiple places around the world. It's just really special. And I just wish everyone would have that opportunity to see what that's like, because sometimes, you know, you don't realize, you know, the system can be hard. The system can be cold, but the people are what it's all about at the end of the day.

SISSON: All right, we have some microphones coming around for questions from the audience. You will be allotted 45 seconds to generate and ask your question, at the 45 second mark I will interrupt very rudely and pass it over for the answer. So hands up for questions, please. Where shall we begin? Let's start with the gentleman here in the glasses. There's a microphone coming for you, sir. Okay. Announce your name and where you're from.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah. Sam Skove, Defense One. So you talked about retention, sir, and it being at an all time high. I'm just wondering what you thought the reasons for those high numbers are and if that will apply to this new generation of recruits that you're seeking to attract.

MCCONVILLE: Well, I hope so. I think. I think it's because of leadership. I think it's the same thing that, you know, many people come to the Army, they're not sure what it's all about, but once they get in the Army and they meet the people they're serving with and they find the purpose and the difference they're making, and they want to stay and we want them to stay. But we are, I tell, you know, our commanders, we're in a war for talent. We are competing for our soldiers' talents and we should never take them for granted, and that's why it's about people first.

SISSON: Great. Next set of questions. Great. Here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you. John Harper with DefenseScoop. General, you mentioned IVUS earlier. How confident are you that the Army and Microsoft have a plan in place to overcome some of the challenges that the program has run into? And just more broadly, how concerned are you that some of the

publicity surrounding some of the challenges with IVUS will erode political support for that program, either on the Hill or in other corridors of power?

MCCONVILLE: Well, I'm confident in the team that's that's developing the product. I've seen major progress. And I guess when I look out there and I see how far they've come, if you can envision what it will do in the future, you know, it is really going to make a difference if you, you know, stay, it's kind of like when we first got, you know, the cell phone, we thought that was great. You know, I like Blackberries. You know, I kind of was very comfortable with that. But as new technology came in, if we want to be in a leading edge of technology, we've got to go with technology, and it's going to take some time, and what I've learned is you have to be persistent and consistent, getting things done. The first time you run into a little roadblock, if you stop and turn around, you'll never get anything done. And so we just need to stay with it. We need to keep our solace on that when need to, you know, make sure that we reinforce what is happening, and it's like every single major system that we have, if you go back and study the history of even the big five and go back and say, what was this, you know, tank like? What was this helicopter like? What was this like? And you find out it's not all perfect. And what you really want to do is get, you know, what I call the A model or the alpha model in the hands of soldiers, we've done that right now. We realize it's bigger than we want it and it's got some system in place. But if you take a look at where we're going with the the 1.2 model, we just need to, it's going to happen. And when we visualize what it's going to end up being five to 10 years from now people go, wow, how do we ever operate without this system?

SISSON: Okay, I have an audience question here, and I'm going to just read it directly. So you recently stated you could see a third multi-domain task force in the Indo-Pacific alongside the one already in Europe and a potential fifth one focused on global contingencies. The Army had earlier indicated that the fourth MDTF would be focused on the Arctic. So do you see a third MDTF in the Indo-Pacific as a more pressing need? And would you still consider sending up an additional MDTF in the Arctic?

MCCONVILLE: Yeah, I think we would take a look at, you know, the five we're going to have. You know, we're pretty focused on having three, and right now we're doing the analysis. So any type of any time we do basing options, we take a look at where that will be. The other thing about the multi-domain task forces is multiple components of that. So some pieces could be in our units, could be other places comes with long range precision fires, it comes with air and missile defense. And some of that may be positioned based on the scenarios. So we want to be agile, we want to be able to move the system as needed, you know, right now we have one in Hawaii, we have one at Joint Base Lewis-McChord and we have one in Germany, but we're able to move that around as we build out the capabilities. They are a task force. And when we think about, you know, the long range fires battalions that come that could be composed of hypersonics, it could be mid range capability which will sink ships, it can be PrSM. And then we're going to see, as we you know, as the situation changes, it could be any of all of those in a system and then air missile defense that comes with it. So it's hard to say exactly that, you know, and it could go in the Arctic, it could go where it's going to be required based on, you know, what we see and whether it's a campaigning threat or a reassuring deterrence thing. So we are keeping our options open as we move forward.

SISSON: I'm at risk of abusing the privilege of having a microphone attached to me instead of having to wait for someone to come and bring it, but I am going to do it nonetheless and ask you, you know, you've you've talked a bit about the the value of jointness and being able to converge data and operate together. Do you have an eye on joint professional military education? Do you see what is being taught in those classrooms? Do you think that the frame on that is right? Are we teaching the right things in terms of how we think about competition, in terms of the requirements of working jointly, in terms of what a future war fight might look like?

MCCONVILLE: Yeah, I think I'm sure we could do improvement. I'm sure as people take a look at it, we can always improve. You know, first of all, Army, you know, kind of a professional military vocation, then a joint profession, military education, I think would put a lot of that into, you know, our war colleges, and so we're sharing the same vision, the National Defense Strategy has been integrated into the curriculum, so we're, you know, spend a lot more time studying about, you know, future pacing challenges probably than we were in the past. And I think the young, younger officers, noncommissioned officers realized certainly the

importance of doing joint operations and many doing combined operations and so I see that that growing as we move forward.

SISSON: Okay. Audience questions. Here please in the middle.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Sir. I'm Harold Hague and I'm Norwegian defense attache. I think every question should start with a very big thank you to the US leadership in Ukraine. Without the US leadership, I'm afraid not much would happen. So thank you very much. As we look in the rearview mirror, one year ago, a war started in Europe. It's you know, it's mind-boggling that we're not, that we're not better. And I'm curious now that you are developing the U.S. armed forces, the U.S. Army, for the future with a focus on the Indo-Pacific. What's happening in the high north, what's happening in Europe now. How has this war in Ukraine changed your perceptions on the future development of the U.S. Army? I would be curious to hear you elaborate. And of course, with Sweden and Finland joining NATO as well, which was, as a Norwegian, it's extremely good to see, even though the circumstances that it happened under is terrible. But well, we're getting them into NATO so. Thank you.

MCCONVILLE: Well well, thank you for that question and thank you for your partnership, and I've had a chance to visit your country and very strong partners. You know, it wasn't maybe three or four years ago when many thought that any type of conflict in Europe was unimaginable, even even as, you know, we saw the situation develop. There were many, many people that even once, having seen the intelligence, could not believe that the Russians would conduct an unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. I mean, just you know, and I think we've all you know, luckily we've stayed strong together. You know, we certainly could probably be stronger. And I think a lot of the countries in Europe are realizing that NATO does matter. And, you know, having strong allies and partners matter, and that, you know, getting back to my C3W we need to do that, you know, I mean, I think each of the countries is taking a hard look at their capabilities, their capacity and the confidence of their soldiers and, quite frankly, that drives their will to fight because they're going to have to defend themselves. And, you know, as I take a look around the world, you know, what we're trying to do with our army is certainly support the national defense strategy, which is, you know, sees China as a patient challenge, not an adversary, but as a patient challenge. But, you know, Russia's also acute threat and we're seeing that it's a real threat with what's happening. And what we want is an army that could do a lot of different things and work very closely with you all. You know, we've stood up an Arctic Airborne division, the 11th Airborne Division, that is focused on the Arctic. And, you know, you all and our friends in Sweden and Finland who are experts in arctic warfare and do extremely well, we're working together, we're learning a lot by coming together. And I think as we take a look at the future, if you're going to do integrated deterrence, which is more than just military, but it's economic, it's diplomatic and information type operations, is there's there really is strength through strong allies and partners all sharing the same vision of what should happen in coming together, and we are much stronger together. So, you know, we're arctic capability, we're developing long range precision fires. And a lot of our systems are, you know, long ranges. You know, when you take a look at some of the aircraft for developing, you know, if you get 300 to 350 miles an hour on an aircraft and the ranges, then you're in a much better place, you know, in the Indo-Pacific, where you may have to go further and farther and you're creating options for the combatant commander over there, you to get long range precision fires that you can target. You know, all those things come together as we work together as a team. And that's where I see the future is. I see strong allies and partners. I see us working together. We're doing a lot of work right now on convergence, which means that we've got to be able to pass data to all our allies and partners because that's where, quite frankly, I think you get the edge or advantage that you need in any type of potential conflict.

SISSON: Another audience question that was submitted ahead of time, which we all really appreciate the engagement of the Brookings audience. How does, and you touched on this a little bit, but perhaps an opportunity to elaborate on the role of the Army Reserve in the Army National Guard?

MCCONVILLE: Yeah, I think the role of the Reserve and National Guard is just something that we cannot live without. You know, take a look at in our force, 52% of the Army is in the Guard or the Reserves. And we have asked the National Guard and Reserves to do all types of things inside the United States, whether it's support of COVID, national disasters, it's on the border, social unrest and then deploying overseas for their state partnership programs and to combat and, you know, even driving busses, you name

it, our National Guard and Reserves have been like a Swiss Army knife, if you will, that we asked them to do just about anything and they do it, but they still need to be ready for their combat mission. That's what they exist to do and they have to be ready, and I'm just really proud of our National Guard and Reserves for what they do every single day for the country. And, you know, they have a very challenging time because most of our civilian jobs, too. So they've got to balance that with their military careers.

SISSON: Questions from the audience. We've got a gentleman in the far back here, please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, thank you, General. Having visited Ukraine as a United Nations delegate on civil human rights, you're right on time to say logistics. And I understand from NGA, the Nitrogen Space Agency, that real-time visualization mapping can help give good on-time and real-time situational awareness as to the conflict in Ukraine. Is the army also engaged in using visualization surveillance and mapping in real time to give, I guess, up-to-date situational awareness of the conflict in Ukraine?

MCCONVILLE: Well, we certainly have capabilities that run the whole gamut of what you're talking about, you know, from deep sensing to update mapping and all those type things. And then when it comes to the Ukrainians, there is some information that if shared, but, you know, right now they're doing an incredible job getting after that, making sure, they are very talented in the ability to locate and engage targets.

SISSON: And we had another from one of our federal executive fellows here at the Brookings Institution.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: General, Brad McNally now with Brookings coming from the Coast Guard. Thanks for your time. Sorry, I just wanted to ask, as an Army aviator and you're getting prepared to step away from a very distinguished career here in the next few months, what are your thoughts on Army aviation currently and how excited are you about some of the things coming down the pipe in the next few years?

MCCONVILLE: Yeah I think I'm, you know, I talk about Army aviation, but I think Army, really military aviation and Coast Guard and across the front, we have the world's greatest pilots and at scale, too. And I take a look at Army aviation, you go to some countries, there's a few people can fly night vision goggles or maybe shoot at night or do some of those type things. We have a force of aviation professionals across all the services that is extremely highly trained and can operate in the worst weather, can operate at night, they can do the most difficult missions. And you know what I've seen? You know, I see it more as a commander, Command 101st Airborne Division, we had 250 aircraft and seeing what they would do in combat and then even the idea that you can maintain, you know, you know, part of that, you get to the, you know, fueling and rearming and all those type things that I see in aviators across the entire force. I, you know, just think the world of our aviators and what they do for this country, along with the maintainers and all the professionals who go along with that.

SISSON: Think we have time for one more question. And as I said, Mike took advantage of my opportunities, so I should, I feel, to be evenhanded and fair, should make that available to you as well if you have one more you'd like to ask the General.

O'HANLON: Well, I'll follow up on the aviation question, thanks. And to ask about the status of the air fleets themselves, the helicopters, the planes. And, you know, I always regret that going back to Secretary Rumsfeld and thereafter, we haven't really published as much data on readiness. I know we decided it's classified, but I'm not expecting numbers so much as your overall sense of airframe availability. You talked about how hard people work on the maintenance end, but how are we doing in terms of the readiness of these fleets?

MCCONVILLE: Yeah, well, I can speak for the Army. First of all, our fleets are very ready. Our pilots are trained, our aircraft are up. You know, our three main aircraft, the Apache helicopters, the greatest attack helicopter in the world. The Blackhawk is the greatest medium lift, and then the Chinook is the heavy lift, and, you know, I see them every single day supporting our troops and, quite frankly, I think they do a great job of keeping those aircraft. The other thing is the safety record is, at least in the United States Army for

aviation is a historical high, which is pretty good given the type of missions that they're actually doing out there.

SISSON: Well, two last notes before we express our appreciation for your time today, sir. The first is that Mike O'Hanlon has a new book out, *Military History for the Modern Strategist*. It's an important read for all of us who are interested in national security and the history of war and the future of war. So please do check that out. The other thing I'd encourage everybody to take a look at the Brookings Events webpage. Our federal executive fellows are hosting an event this coming Monday entitled *The Future of Recruitment, Retention and Education*. Very important topics as we've discussed today, so please take a look for both of those things. And otherwise, please join me in thanking General McConville very much for spending some time with us today to share the status of the U.S. Army, things that they've accomplished and are looking toward in the future. Thanks very much, sir, we appreciate it. Thank you for your service.

O'HANLON: Thank you.