

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

FALK AUDITORIUM

21ST CENTURY SOLDIERS OF THE SEA:
A CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL DAVID BERGER,
28TH COMMANDANT OF THE US MARINE CORPS

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Tuesday, May 23, 2023

UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT – CHECK AGAINST RECORDING

OPENING REMARKS:

SUZANNE MALONEY

Vice President and Director, Foreign Policy, The Brookings Institution

DISCUSSION:

MELANIE W. SISSON (Moderator)

Fellow, Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology, Brookings

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON

Senior Fellow and Director, Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology

Philip H. Knight Chair in Defense and Strategy

The Brookings Institution

DAVID H. BERGER

Commandant, U.S. Marine Corps

* * * * *

SUZANNE MALONEY: Joining us here at Brookings Institution's Falk Auditorium. Good afternoon. Good evening and good morning to those who may be joining from across the country and around the globe who are joining us virtually. I'm Suzanne Maloney. I'm vice president and director of foreign policy here at the Brookings Institution. And on behalf of foreign policy and all of us here at Brookings, I'm truly delighted to welcome you to this afternoon's event, highlighting the United States Marine Corps and its unique role in national security as soldiers of the sea in an era of unprecedented complexity and rapid change in the overall global security environment, particularly the maritime environment, as a separate service within the Department of the Navy, the Marine Corps is our nation's Naval Expeditionary Force in Readiness. Marine's ability to respond rapidly around the globe and to operate on land at sea and in the air make them a unique instrument of national power. Today, around the world and around the clock, Marines stand watch on all U.S. embassies. They are forward, stationed and deployed to strengthen relationships with allies and partners. And they always stand ready to deter and confront and if necessary, prevail against adversaries. Before we begin today's discussion, allow me to offer brief introductions. Our esteemed guest of the hour, General David Berger, assumed the duties as the 38th commandant of the Marine Corps in July 2019. He oversees 172,000 active duty, 32,000 reserve, and 22,000 civilian personnel operating around the world. As a general officer, he has commanded the first Marine Division in Afghanistan, one Marine Expeditionary Force and Fleet Marine Forces Pacific. He served as director of operations in the plans, policies and operations in the headquarters of the Marine Corps and as deputy commandant for Combat Development and Integration. He's a native of Woodbine, Maryland, and holds multiple advanced degrees, including a master's in international public policy from Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. Joining General Berger today are my two wonderful colleagues, Michael O'Hanlon and Melanie Sisson. Melanie Sisson is a fellow in the Strobe Talbott Center and the foreign policy Program here at Brookings. She specializes in the research in research on the use of the armed forces in international politics, U.S. national security and military applications of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and machine learning. Melanie has served in academia and in the private sector, and in 2020, she published a book, along with Barry Blechman and Gene Simmons, titled *Military Coercion and U.S. Foreign Policy The Use of Force Short of War*. My colleague Michael O'Hanlon holds the Philip Knight chair in defense and strategy and also serves as director of the Strobe Talbott Center on Security Strategy and Technology and as director of research for our foreign policy work here at Brookings. He teaches at Columbia, Georgetown, and George Washington Universities, and he's a member of the Secretary of Defense's Defense Policy Board. His most recent of his many books, *Military History for the Modern Strategist*, was just published this past January. Finally, before we begin, we're currently livestreaming this event and on the record, please feel free to send your questions in to events@brookings.edu. For those of us who are joining us via us virtually, please feel free to use the hashtag USMC via social media. Those of us who are joining here in the Folk Auditorium will be passing microphones for a Q&A period following the discussion. Thanks very much. And I'll now hand it over to Mike and to Melanie to moderate the conversation.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: Suzanne, thank you. And I just would like to ask everyone to join me in welcoming and thanking for his service to the nation, this amazing Marine who's near the end of his fourth year as commandant and an amazing run as a marine throughout the last four decades of our nation's turbulent times and provided a steady hand and an amazing kind of visionary leadership these last four years. So, General Berger, welcome and thank you. What I thought we do today and Melanie and I are going to have a little bit of fun tag teaming and then go to you for the last 15 or 20 minutes or so. I'm going to begin with some fairly sort of inside baseball questions about how the Marine Corps is doing in terms of people readiness and the force design. 2030, the big set of innovations that General Berger has championed throughout his time as commandant. Melanie will get at her own questions, including, I think, how all this links to broader U.S. defense policy and strategy. And so, General, if I could just begin, I know you are honored to lead all these great Marines so I could ask you, how does the Marine Corps look to you right now in terms of people And I mean by that everything from recruiting and retention trends, which I think are pretty good, but also how you're doing it, getting the right people, how you feel about sort of the skill set of today's Marines, just what you would say about the state of the force today.

DAVID H. BERGER: Based on my 40 a couple of years. Really strong. And I think it's an exaggeration sometimes when people say I'm not sure, you know, they would take me if I applied today, I'm not sure they would take me if I. I am. This is a challenging time to bring people into the service, no question. Any part of

government service. I think it's a challenge. But for me and the Marine Corps, we started in force design with a concept, but in in the very center from day one, it is about people. Force design is about the marine, the people. I would say on the recruiting side, challenging environment. You have a population that's not all that familiar with its military. It doesn't it's not anti, it just doesn't know a lot about it, doesn't know anybody in it. And what they do read sometimes is largely negative because that's that's makes a story you don't hear about the 99% others that you know everyday are doing great jobs. The Marine Corps is successful in recruiting I think because we have that we send the very best people, our very best people on recruiting duty. And that was a decision 30 years ago to change how we recruited boards, selected handpicked majors, all volunteers. And it's that that taking it seriously and and promoting them matters. We also have a brand that resonates with people in high school and college, especially now. They want to do something that matters. They want to be something part of something bigger than themselves. Do something that's important. And they find it in the Marine Corps because we don't we don't talk about money or college or anything else. It's about you have to become a marine. It's very different than the other services on the retention side, I think not. I think all the services are doing really good on retention Marine Corps especially well. And I my my learning over time is the biggest factor there. You know, why would somebody want to stay in Oregon? Any organization is the tone of the organization, the people they work with, which is set by the leaders. So we focus very much on leadership and then the tone of the organization to make sure it's a place people want to stay. I'm really optimistic, not pessimistic here.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: Some people have been concerned about how the military services in general deal with this difficult time in American society and politics with, you know, concerns on the left and right about are we are we, too woke? Is January 6th affecting people? How do you handle these kinds of concerns and to what extent are they affecting the way the Marine Corps operates, trains and builds its team, builds its culture?

DAVID H. BERGER: I think is absolutely my learning over the last four years. It is this is absolutely the responsibility of senior military leaders to insulate the rest of the force from all that. And you take the temperature by traveling around. You visit with units, you ask questions, what's on your mind, And you listen, listen, listen. I see no evidence that it's even a factor outside of Washington, DC. They know what their focus is. The families have have concerns, but they're not on wokeism. They're on medical care, They're on how do I get my dog flown to, you know, to Germany or to Japan? They're not about the issues that are circulating in here. So I think our role in protecting the force from that and taking that mantle ourselves to make sure we're not being politicized. And if there's a discussion that it happens here and not out in the fleet, that's that's a big role of the service chief. So if I was worried about, I'd tell you I tell you, hey, we're starting to hear it or I'm starting to see it. I don't see it in retention. I don't see it in units at all. I don't hear it from units or families. I think it's a it is a discussion item here, not at Camp Pendleton, California, or Iwakuni, Japan or anywhere. I don't hear it.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: One more question I've got on readiness before. Then we turn to force Design 2030 and a lot of the big changes that you've been making in the Marine Corps. I wanted to ask you sort of about the equipment and training side of readiness. And I'm not going to ask you for a slew of statistics, although I love it when we get those. But but I would just ask you, in terms of, you know, mission capable rates of aircraft and how many of your scheduled exercises you're able to do and how you rate up against your standards for, you know, C ratings and and things like that. How would you describe the overall state of Marine Corps readiness today?

DAVID H. BERGER: We're in good shape. I attribute that to General Miller before me, the commandant before me brought us out of. Afghanistan. Oh, yes, Iraq time timeframe. He spent four years focused on rebuilding readiness that allowed us to do what we've done in the last four. Because if he had not, I'd have been focused on rebuilding readiness. He set the table so well by just relentlessly from all the people, the equipment, the training, focusing on readiness. So when I came in and he handed off to me, he handed me off from Marine Corps that was ready to modernize. And and we had rebuilt the readiness, not that we were in a trough, but we were pretty road hard put, put away wet after 15 years of back to back deployments. He's four years. He rebuilt it. I think in a larger sense though, me and CQ Brown have talked about this and written about this. I think readiness, the whole discussion about readiness needs to change, needs to broaden beyond counting things, because I think we owe the secretary and the president a real clear picture

of a more holistic picture of what readiness is. And it's not just how many of these things do you have in the hangar that can fly, how many ships can sail? It's really, I think, more about relative advantage. Does it does that give you a capability that you need that relatively to the threats is what you're looking for? How do how much do you view near-term readiness versus long term readiness? Because the decisions he makes right now can affect five years from now. I think we're headed in the right direction in re defining what readiness is beyond just is it available this afternoon.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: So I now want to turn to your real historical legacy of Force Design 2030 and all the big things you've done with the Marine Corps. I realize most people here are probably familiar with some of the broad contours of this transformation. I really think you're sort of the chief innovation officer at the Department of Defense these days, because I feel like the Marines, as usual, are punching above their weight and driving change and innovation. And some of the things that have happened under this commandant. Just to summarize very quickly, I think most of you do know, but he has decided that tanks are not a necessary or at least not optimal kind of choice for the Marine Corps in terms of weaponry. Today and tomorrow, he's decided to replace a lot of shorter range unguided artillery with longer range, more precise fires. He's built two Marine Corps regiments that are now called littoral regiments. And they're just they're designed to deal with the possibility of trying to influence naval operations and enemy shipping in various parts of the Western Pacific, being able to threaten those kinds of enemy capabilities in the interest of deterring war against China in particular. And he's rebuilt even at the more company level, at the more hands on level, the way in which Marine Corps weapon specializations are designed. We'll get into that in just a second. But I I'm stunned whenever I look at your track record. And I guess before we get into the specifics, I want to ask you about how sort of each of these different pieces has gone and just rifle through five or six, if I could. But I wanted to ask you, without having to relive the big debates that you've been part of these last four years, and I know it's not always been enjoyable. The debates you've had as you've like anybody who's trying to make big change happen, faced a fair amount of resistance and some of it from inside the family, so to speak, with a lot of retired Marine Corps generals. But for those who just want to sort of an overall summary of where we stand, I guess I wanted to ask you, General, has the Marine Corps gotten out of the business of being the nation's 911 force in the interest of focusing just on China? That's the way people sometimes try to distill the change that you've made. Or do you see the Marine Corps as able to do both, to be able to do a better job helping deter China in particular, but also be responsive for the crisis wherever it may happen around the world?

DAVID H. BERGER: The answer easy, is both. And it's not an opinion. It's backed up by the, for example, the the muse, the Marine expeditionary units that are out right now, 13th MEU is out in the Pacific right now. Those are our immediate response forces that are sea based. They haven't changed. They're trained to the same exacting standards. It takes six months worth of work up to get ready to go. Now we can we can walk and chew gum, but I think in some ways the interpretation that we were fine tuning or tailoring for a single threat in a single geographic area was misplaced. If you read the planning guidance that I wrote in 2019, it's very clear we're agnostic to the theater. We know who the pacing challenge is. It's threat based, no question about it. That's the level that which where you have to build the capabilities to match. But yeah, we can absolutely do crisis response. However, I think, you know, in a balanced joint perspective, which the other hat that I wear there. There are instances when you want to fly in a response force and there's instances, other scenarios where you want to see base response force. Always, I think we owe the secretary options both, not one.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: When you started as commandant, it was after the Trump administration and Secretary Mattis's National Defense Strategy of 2018, which was very similar, I think, to the Biden strategy. And we had call and call the undersecretary for policy here in the fall for a public discussion. And he acknowledged there were a lot of similarities. But one difference that I wanted to ask you to comment on, the 2018 National Defense strategy prioritized both Russia and China, I think a little bit more equally. The 2022 Biden Austin strategy said Russia is the acute threat and the country that's waging war in the heart of Europe right now. But China is the pacing challenge, the long term bigger problem. When you built your original vision, did you have both Russia and China equally in mind or no?

DAVID H. BERGER: No. China was the pacing threat for us, the pressing challenge for us, no question. Why? Because we're a maritime naval force and we could see anyone could see where China was growing

relative to Russia in terms of a naval force. There was no question in our mind if China maintained the the direction they were on at the pace they were going. No question. That's the pacing.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: Threat. Thank you. So now if I could just go through a few specific changes that you've made and just give us maybe a quick status report, please, if you could, sir, and then I'll hand off to Melanie. So on on tanks and on, shorter range, on guided artillery, these changes have largely been made, right? Correct. So they're out. And now on longer range precision fires, whether it's the lateral regiments and their ability to threaten shipping, whether it's more long range land based capability, how do we stand on that evolution and sort of acquisition.

DAVID H. BERGER: Strategy We already have more or less, which we're expanding in this year. We'll start to field the shore based anti-ship capability, which was envisioned two or three years ago. So this year begins the feeling for that. We have to also boost air defense to go along with it, because the more disperse, the more distributed you are if you're inside their their collection zone, inside their weapons, and you've got to protect the force. So we had to, in some cases, regenerate an air defense capability that we had 30 years ago when there was an air threat and now it's regenerated. So this year and the more or less we already had just expanded.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: Help out in terms of basing in the broader region. I know this has been an ongoing evolution and some of your predecessors were important in this regard to doing more training, for example, in Australia and certainly relocating some of the Okinawa based Marines to Guam. Anything else to report on that front over the last three or four years that's particularly notable?

DAVID H. BERGER: Yeah, I think part of it, just to pull the thread on what you highlighted, I think acceleration in Japan, acceleration in the Philippines and Excel expansion, acceleration in Australia. And you don't need me to to highlight why there is I mean, even in the past 12 months what was moving along at a kind of a steady drumbeat pace has now taken off. Those countries are driven by what they see as a pressing threat. So I think the in other words, the the meetings this winter time in the agreements on edca sites in the Philippines, the fundamental change in the Japanese approach towards the re accused in their southwest islands orcas and not just orcas, but Australia's role in the whole region. All of those are, I think are pretty clear indicators, great evidence of there is a different approach now to a posture, a global posture without it without doubt.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: So just to more and that I'll hand off to my esteemed colleague. How about the rebuilding of this is I know a nitty gritty question, but it's I know it's so important for you and for all Marines, the rebuilding of sort of the weapons specialization profession within the individual Marine Corps company. In other words, I think what you try to do is to is to not just have individuals certified on one weapon, but to be able to operate several. How far along are we with that approach?

DAVID H. BERGER: Pretty far along. We've almost doubled the length of infantry training in order to get to what you're alluding to. So the graduates, if you're if you come out of high school and you go to the Marine Corps Infantry training, now it's almost twice as long as it was two years ago. So when you graduate there, you're going to be competent on all weapons systems, all communications systems, a basic understanding of emergency medical care forward. In other words, you're you're joining your first unit up here where I would have joined three or four years ago down here. How do you know? And probably the best indication is if you went to one of the two infantry schools where, you know, up until. Couple of years ago, very much led by instructors, demonstrated by instructors, and the ratio was pretty high in terms of instructors to student, now 1 to 10. And the students are running, you know, the privates, the PFC draw their own weapons, get to the range that we're asking them to, and then they're capable of a step and they're stepping up in a pretty rapid manner. I'm very happy with where the rifle company is, which is sort of the infantry is the centerpiece.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: By the way. I guess I should this is an asterisk. And then I come to my last question, which is going to be on amphibious shipping. But I wanted to ask, when you talk about training and you talk about all the different capabilities. I think you're the second commandant whose tenure has has included women having access to any and all combat specializations without training or how is that overall trend line going with gender integration?

DAVID H. BERGER: Good. But it will take time because those fields were excluded. You know, we talk with the secretary all the time about, you know, why aren't there more senior, for example, senior officers? You know, there is this is a conversation with all the services. Right. And we're you know, me in the Army, especially Jim McConville said, well, they couldn't enter the fields until, you know, six, seven years ago. It's going they have they have to grow to become a general. You can't just snap your finger and make them more of them. I think it's going good. I think the probably the best indicator of the role models that are moving up because you can I think if you're in any organization, military or not, it's hard to envision yourself at a higher place if you can't see anybody like you in that organization. The more they see. In other words, if I'm a second lieutenant or a first lieutenant and I see colonels and lieutenant colonels, okay, now I can see a path for me to get there. I think we we need to go faster. But I also understand it's going to take ten years to make that general.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: And then finally, on shipping, which, of course, I maybe I should have saved it for last, because it's inherently going to be an area that requires patience. Right? Because it takes a long time to build patience. And so how we do it, I mean, you had you had a vision for smaller and more numerous amphibious ships and for more, I think, supple and flexible and resilient logistics in general. How are we doing on that agenda that, of course, you have to work with the Navy very closely to pursue?

DAVID H. BERGER: Not not satisfactory. The challenge and it's not to place blame on anybody, but it's a great question. We'll take the ships first, the smaller ships, which we know we need. They enter a process in the Pentagon of, okay, what is it you need? What capability do you need? And by the time it comes out, the other side is everybody's piled on all kinds of extra things on there that you don't need. And it comes out to be super expensive and beyond what you want. And then you wargame it and you have discussions and six months later you end up doggone pretty close to where you started from. You lost a year. So my frustration is I could not find a way to navigate through that process any faster. And now we're back where we kind of started from. But again, if I don't if we don't put a check on it, people will put more weapons systems and more defensive systems, and then we'll come out the other end. Too expensive again, more than we need. The frustration there. The second part, though, you had.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: Logistics.

DAVID H. BERGER: And logistics. Yeah. Here I think I'm maybe not alone, but it's very clear to me that logistics among the warfighting functions is the one that we need to make the most progress on right now. It's not fire, it's not intelligence, it's not command and control. Actually, it's actually logistics. And it's not that we're bad at logistics, it's just that we've had secure, reliable logistics since World War Two. Maybe, I don't know. I mean, everybody is or most of them are historians. We haven't needed to protect our or our lives. Now we assume they will be contested. So my number one focus. Logistics, logistics, logistics.

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON: Thank you. Melanie, over to you.

MELANIE W. SISSON: Thank you, Mike. And thank you, sir, again for joining us here to engage with the Brookings audience. It's really wonderful to have you. Now that we've talked a little bit about what changes are being made in the Marine Corps. Let's talk a bit about why what habits of thinking or assumptions does 2030 challenge.

DAVID H. BERGER: Born out of a series of war games that I attended when I was in Hawaii as the commander of Marine Forces Pacific at that time, I was out there with Harry Harris, was the combatant commander and not so swift was Pack Fleet Pacific Fleet. And so off we go to, you know, a series of two years worth of war games where everyone doesn't turn out very well. For us time after time after time. So it's pretty clear that these are these are Indo-Pacific kind of scenarios that if we don't change something, the same result is going to happen every other, every time. So beginning with do you understand the threat, then from there? What's the concept? What's the operational concept? For us it was we need to be more naval. More light, more distributed. In order to pose this and that. In order to deter better and be able to respond faster. So the concept then drove everything else. So starting with the understanding of the threat, and if we don't change anything, it's going to be the same outcome. That was the driver in the beginning. How do we

fight? How do we operate more distributed? Incorporating allies and partners? Because we are not going to be able to do it all by ourselves. And then from there came organization and training and all, all the rest. That was the sequence.

MELANIE W. SISSON: So given the amount of change that you've introduced with this and as Mike mentioned, the fact that change is hard and sometimes contested itself, how well institutionalized are these changes, do you think? Are you optimistic that the campaign of learning will continue after this July and you'll continue to see after 2030 develop over time?

DAVID H. BERGER: I'm confident for a couple of reasons. One, from the beginning, these are not my ideas, but the big idea was if you're going to move faster, you're going to make some assumptions, Right? And the way to buy down your risk then, is make sure you close the loop. You have a way of testing those assumptions. You have a way of iterating and bringing the information back and making adjustments as you learn. So the process mattered. From the beginning, though, our warfighting lab in Quantico would be this sort of centerpiece of experimentation that would then be decentralized around the world. We would not have an experimentation or unit. We chose to use the world as the laboratory, the fleet. Our is our test forces. It's kind of hectic when you're doing that. But I think much more realistic and you can learn a lot faster. So I'm confident because the process of bringing back this works. This is not is baked in now. So even if we got it not completely right, we'll learn it quickly and we'll make adjustments in stride. And the last part, why, you know, why am I confident? Because Marines, I think for the first time in my career sense that they have control part of control over the future of the Marine Corps. They're determining what will work and what won't. And when they own that, okay, you're in a pretty good place.

MELANIE W. SISSON: That integrated deterrence is the centerpiece of the Biden administration's national defense strategy. And it is in part, I think, a response to the recognition that the PRC is a peer competitor, not just in one domain, not just in as concerns military activity, but broadly. And integrated deterrence operates internal to the Department of Defense across services, but it also operates across the interagency. Have you seen a change as growth, development, progress in the extent to which the strategy for competing safely and effectively with the PRC is integrated across the interagency in the connectivity between the Department of Defense and the other involved apparatus of the U.S. government?

DAVID H. BERGER: Great question. I would say yes, not maybe I'm not I'm an eternal optimist first, but I don't give myself or anybody else an A-plus. So I think. Yes. And the evidence for me are things like whom I mentioned before orcus the agreement with the Philippines, the agreement by Japan to host to to to actually make adjustments in a previous plan and host one of the littoral regiments you talked about forward in the first island chain. Today the agreement in pag. These are I think I don't think any of these are pure military or pure State Department. To me they're a reflection of the gears, the mechanisms and our government are starting to mesh and produce. I don't think anybody else in the world could have held Naito together and driven it. I think there's still a role for world leadership on our on our part. Later this week, on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, we're going to go to Europe, few of us, and I'm going to go to Finland and Sweden. They I think these are places where our government is actually definitely meshing together because we are not doing it purely that, you know, it's not we're not carrying the load on our shoulders anymore.

MELANIE W. SISSON: You mentioned Europe. And so a question about a question or two, I suppose, about the war in Ukraine. Do you see anything happening in that war that strikes you as being fundamentally new?

DAVID H. BERGER: Boy, that's a great question. Yes. At least one, it's not technology, but our willingness to share very sensitive information. No, we're not talking about a five partner here. But I think a very you know, Colin Kyle probably talked about it, but this is a very thoughtful approach to. To what degree are we willing to share information that previously, you know, to protect certain things we wouldn't we would not have shared with anyone outside a very tight circle. But we did. And if there's a risk that came along with it, but it's paid off. So I think in that regard, how we operate with allies and partners has changed. Now, I don't know what that means for the next one and the next one, the next one. But for me, that's a fundamental change. I think the use of unmanned systems is not new, but exponential in terms of the impact, the capacity, the just the numbers of them. I mean, every single day in large numbers, that's not new. But the scale of it certainly is. Lastly, not a new one, but new for me to watch the power of information at the local level and the

ability to move that information, almost all of it unclassified. Amazing. There's almost like an informal intelligence network between the people in Ukraine and their military that's doggone near seamless. And they're moving the information on encrypted system at speed to make decisions to get inside a cycle of decision. It's phenomenal to watch. We should learn from that. We're going to have to operate at speed. You got to look at some unconventional ways to move information they have. They've done it.

MELANIE W. SISSON: And has the war caused you to reflect on what you thought you knew or understood before about the causes of conflict or of what can possibly prefer, prevent, deter or avoid them?

DAVID H. BERGER: It's a good reminder. I think the bets were pretty. Even if you weren't read into the sensitive information, the bets were pretty even that this is just an exercise or Russia's actually going to attack. So our historic ability or inability to forecast where and when a conflict is going to happen, we should be reminded with some humility we're not always going to get it right. So if that's true and you can't forecast the when and the where, then you need to be ready, especially where it matters most, or you need to be responsive to get there as quickly as you can, because the longer nowadays, the longer it takes you to respond, the bigger the problem gets. I think just largely just be humble as a nation about our, you know, precision in forecasting where a conflict might happen.

MELANIE W. SISSON: You may have previewed this earlier when you mentioned logistics. Yeah. What would you like to see the Joint Force focus on in the coming four years?

DAVID H. BERGER: A re completely relook of our global positioning network both afloat and ashore. A much I would say as fast as we can go on autonomy and unmanned systems that will help us from predictive maintenance to distribution to forecasting all the way back in our supply chains, all the way back to the United States, linking, stitching all of that together. But our even just our first our pre-positioning framework was built for a different time, right, where you had secure ports and and guaranteed access. And we didn't have we didn't have a pacing, you know, challenge, a pacing threat. So I think we have to make adjustments in how, how and where we have things pre-positioned around the world. And then as much focus as we can put on the artificial intelligence aspects of making logistics decisions. Stitching all that together. And the last part of that, clearly, if there's anything that's a you know, a no kidding wake up call is the industrial base matters. If it's protracted, your industrial base, huge factor.

MELANIE W. SISSON: I'm going to ask two more questions of my own and then I'm going to not be greedy about my privilege of being here and share some time with the great Brookings audience that we have. So somewhat related or at least similar questions, I suppose. The first is, is four years the right term for a service chief?

DAVID H. BERGER: Yes, it is.

MELANIE W. SISSON: And why is that?

DAVID H. BERGER: First, I guess you could you know, if it was longer, you might pace yourself at a different kind of rhythm at different RPM. Then for four years, four years, you can push pretty hard. Six, eight, ten years if you knew it going in. Okay. You might have to calibrate, you know, the energy level to the speed at which you can go any shorter. Absolutely. No. Our cycles are budget and personnel and to have a strategic view to three years, not enough. Too much turbulence, too much change. So to do with a Title ten role, both as a service chief and a joint chief, I think four years is about right.

MELANIE W. SISSON: And what about the combatant command structure? Is that the right structure for the present or for the future?

DAVID H. BERGER: My own opinion is time for a look at that. For all the right reasons, we've added where we need it. But there comes a point where there are so many combatant commanders and so many service chiefs that I wonder at what point does the secretary of defense have a span of control where there's getting to a decision, getting the right perspectives on the table becomes really difficult. And it was also, you know, as you all most of your really know well, due to partly because of Goldwater-Nichols, we refrained

geographically, which made absolute sense when most of the conflicts were regional, not any more. So we have a framework that has lines on maps that don't really correspond to where the seat they create seems. I guess whether that's vertical to space, cyber, no, you can't even see it. Or even, you know, you come to CENTCOM, these are these are now become really, I think, a challenge when you're viewing global global threats, global problems. How do you integrate that from a global perspective?

MELANIE W. SISSON: All right. As promised, this is the time where we'll turn to our audience here. So if you've been thinking of your questions, now is the moment we have microphones available. Here are the rules of asking the questions today. The first is when you receive the microphone, please introduce yourself and confine yourself to 45 seconds of asking a question. At 45 seconds, your time is up. Okay. So questions, Hands, please. There's a woman in the back. There you go. Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. Meredith Roten with James. I wanted to go back to some comments that you made at the beginning of the talk about regenerating integrated air defense and if you could talk about, you know, if this is truly an old system, you know, how did you regenerate it this year and what lessons can you learn from that regeneration to new air defense systems going forward?

DAVID H. BERGER: Yeah, when I first came into the Marine Corps, we had Big Hawk missile systems all the way down to shoulder launched, and then we ditched all the big missile systems and ended up some years ago with just what we could carry on our shoulder shuttle launch. Not enough anymore. Not enough. So before we went back to big missiles, we thought what we have to be like, we have to be expeditionary. So what is it we can put on what we have. So now the magic of it is integrating. I've learned not actually looking for a new weapon system, but how do you integrate some that already exist that'll fit into your formation? So now it's integrating, like, for example, a TPS 80 gate or radar with an existing to surface to air missile system that's on a JL TV or a U U TV chassis. It's not big, it's not heavy, it's not logistically unsupportable, and it's a common missile system. So we can we can move missiles between us and other units. Okay, this makes sense to me. Then you have to make it modular enough that beyond the kinetic kill is are you going to be able to evolve this into where if it becomes an energy directed weapon, can you can you evolve it to that if that that makes sense two or five years from now, instead of going back to the all the way back to scratch, create a new requirement. So that's where we are with I'm going to use the acronym because we don't have a ton of time, but Emerick, which is our vehicle mounted system and integrating that, as you pointed out, the key here is the air picture, the common air picture. This is where the Marine Corps has a huge advantage because we have a common air control system within the Marine Corps. So we have to be able to, if you can see the threat long away, you know, a distance away, you're in much better shape. Of course you know that.

MELANIE W. SISSON: All right. We've got a person here with a plaid shirt and a Navy blazer.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you. General, I'm Harlon (inaudible). And, you know, I'm a great supporter of the Marine Corps. I've got two questions first. I have been shocked by the degree of animosity towards you personally of the critique of a future of force design 2030. You have a former commandant who says it's a clear and present danger. Have you learned anything positive from that criticism that changed your thinking? And second, if the war in Ukraine escalates and there's a slight chance it could and NATO's engaged. How would the Marines fit in without armor, artillery and engineers? Because I don't think you're going to get any from the Army.

DAVID H. BERGER: First, I would say yes, am. I was taught by some great people to keep your ears open all the time. So out of the criticism, absolutely. I draw things that have affected the way that I think and also how I communicate. For example, in the first year, year and a half, I probably did not talk enough about what wasn't going to change. So that those items very helpful to me in terms of framing the changes that the Marine Corps need to do, need to make. And the rest, I just like shedded off the back. I don't lose any sleep at night. They had access to a lot of classified information every morning like I do right now. And all that's going to go away in about two months for me. And I'll be supportive of the commandant because he'll have better information than I do. I'm just ask him to trust that the whole institution is headed in the right direction and they have information. You know, we have information that they had 20 years ago when they were in uniform. What about Ukraine? If it it spills out beyond you, the Russian invasion spills out beyond Ukraine? What's our role? Depends what the European commander is. We provide forces. Of course you know that.

So it's up to the combatant commander how he would respond within a NATO's construct. I would imagine that's what you're headed towards. Could be anything. Immediately after the invasion, we had a we had a squadron of hornets in Norway, which the European commander quickly moved to the Polish border because we have tech gear that he needs. We also moved some radar systems that we also had in Norway, training alongside of Norway as part of an exercise. He wanted that relocated very quickly down to Poland and Lithuania. So it depends. He knows the my job is to make sure he knows what tools, what we have. His job to mesh it all together. So it could be tac air, it could be command and control, it could be infantry, could be any part of that. It's up to him how to employ it.

MELANIE W. SISSON: Go back to this section. There's a person in a double blue shirt and jacket.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you. Sean Carberry, National Defense Magazine, Another major initiative that's been going on along with force design at the higher level is Jad C2. Yeah, we're now C Jed C2. I guess it's being rebranded again. But Marine Corps obviously doesn't have its own specific program like Overmatch or Convergence. So can you talk about what Jad Seta. Sort of means. For the Marines and how it factored in the force design and how the Marines factor into Jancee to.

DAVID H. BERGER: No question or a great question. Probably a couple of ways to address that one. In things like Project Convergence, which is an ongoing series of experiments and trials and tests, we are part of that, as are the other services. We just don't make a loud, big deal out of it on purpose. We're part of Project Overmatch with the Navy because we have to be able to communicate with among the naval force. We've got to be able to talk. So it's organic to us. Project convergence is part of us. But again, we're not running out there and painting billboards that says, Hey, we're part of Project Convergence. We have to integrate. We have to tie together the whole command and control system. But I think the difference is we're early on two or three years ago, there was a notion that we needed to come together in a common set of hardware. Now the notion is keep the hardware that you've got. You just got to we have to find ways where we can move information between existing programs. This is more software than it is hardware in many cases. Not completely. How does all that look? Probably best illustration of that is we have three air wings. We have three pretty large footprint aviation command and control systems that the governance that you know, that that are built to command and control, that all that's being shrunk down into the. Back of one or two. KC one thirties. All domain. Aviation, space. Cyber. All in a very small form footprint. Tested twice. We went to it last year, once in California, once in Hawaii. And we're driving ourselves down into a much more expeditionary, small version that can plug into and have access to any anything from national technical means all the way down to the tactical. So it's driving that all into a smaller, more portable, more supportable form factor with a lower signature. That's where we're headed.

MELANIE W. SISSON: We've got a person here in the middle section and a great jacket with glasses.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi, my name is. I'm associated with the Burn Back podcast and my question focuses on logistics. So in maintaining supply chains in the event of conflict, it appears that we seem very dependent on forward distribution sites such as ports, material processing centers like Guam and so on. What happens if we lose access to those ports? Because it seems like, you know, we'll be doing a lot of container unpacking, a lot of cargo packing transfer and so on. The adversary may target those ports. What are the alternatives to those land based ports? Can we do anything aside from using other land based ports? Thank you.

DAVID H. BERGER: Great point. In fact, if if you we could shave that beard off, you could come to a marine and work on logistics like Sacramento. But I think here's what I'd say about that. In the same way that like Christian Brose started talking about Kill Chains years ago and then it expanded into kill webs. My our approach in the Marine Corps same approach to logistics. It can't be a chain. It has to be a web because we assume, as you just stated, that nodes will be contested if you wanted to. If you wanted to disrupt the U.S., you wouldn't go symmetrically head on, head with us. You'd go after the soft spots or what you perceive and you might perceive the logistically, that's that's where I can pinch them. That's where I can hurt them. So first we have to take that mentally. We have to take the approach of a web, not a chain. We have to have a balance of both offshore nodes, as you pointed out, and afloat and air all of it. And this is where U.S. TRANSCOM commander is headed. She she clearly recognizes single points of failure. Not good. Need a lot

of resiliency, a lot of redundancy that will not be cheap to build in that resiliency. And the redundancy will not be cheap. But we can't go for efficiency and hope that we're going to be resilient enough to survive the first few weeks when they can it. And I'm not talking necessarily about missiles raining down on a port, but through other means. Right. Interdicting that supply chain you're talking about can happen non kinetically. We have to build in from the networks to the nodes a web that is has the both the resiliency and the redundancy that will come at a cost. I think your observation I would agree with 100%. We cannot be fragile. Can't.

MELANIE W. SISSON: All right. We've got a question here in the front row with the blue and red polka dotted tie.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Michael Gordon, Wall Street Journal. Hi, I'm looking at China scenario. Obviously, force design 2030 is not just a vision for the future, but it's a work in progress. What capabilities are you actually going to have in place, let's say in 2027, the so-called Davidson window, and how much of force design 2030 is actually going to be in place in 2030, given the difficulties you're having with landing ship medium in the Navy and getting the amphibious lift? And how are you going to how are the Marines going to deal with that if not everything's in place?

DAVID H. BERGER: We'll take a if I could, Mr. Gordon, take off the amphibious ships for just a moment, because they're not part of force design that would be essential for no matter what plan. We had the rest. In fact, last week, on our way back from Japan, I brought to Admiral Aquilino. This is the delivery schedule for all the capabilities and the reorganization of our units over the next three years so that he knows it. And the same for the other combatant commanders. There is no 2030 is not. Wait until 2030, of course, and deliver like, you know, Amazon or Wal-Mart. It's all going to show up on January the first. It's there now. It will be we will expand it. We will grow it. And we're sending it to the priority areas first. So it's now the areas where I wish we could speed up. You highlighted it the the landing ship medium. We need to move quickly on that. I saw I saw a Brookings study I was reading this morning from 1976, and I'm just scanning through it and on one part on ships, it said we had 64 at that time. 64. Today we have 31 and we need the light. We need the medium shift to move stuff around. So in some areas like that can't go fast enough. The other areas like road nemeses and command and control systems, the gator radar, the amphibious combat vehicle, those are those are fielded now. You have 35. Now, the mobility part, which you highlighted the ships. We really frustrated. We can't move faster. We have got to move quickly if we're going to have the mobility that we need and we do need it.

MELANIE W. SISSON: We have someone here in a white shirt and khaki blazer.

DAVID H. BERGER: This is like a fashion show. Fascinated.

MELANIE W. SISSON: Hi, sir. My name is Madison. In my work that I've done, where I've come across Marines, I've always been really astounded by how great they are doing more with less. But as someone who's worked in Congress, what can Congress do? What are the low hanging fruits that they can actually deliver to your people so that they can stop just saying we'll do more with less?

DAVID H. BERGER: They're already doing it. The evidence I have for that, for the first three years, we submitted a flat budget intentionally and we modernized from within. We did not ask for one more penny, and yet Congress gave us more. So I don't think they would have given us more if they didn't have confidence in the direction we're going. This is the first year for us. This next budget cycle is the first year we're asking for more. But what we're saying is, hey, we did we within our own piggy bank, we did everything humanly possible to stretch this out. And Michael highlighted some of the things that we've divested of intentionally. Nobody told us to do those things. But I think you have to prove that you're frugal before you go ask for more allowance. Congress, what can they do? Help us with acquisition, which they know and want to help with. But that's the speed of acquisition is one of the drags that we have. Oh, simplify that. Clean it up. And in fact, I think help us take some risks. For example, the speed of innovation and in the private sector to some degree, is driven by concepts like like venture capitalism. But that doesn't exist in the Department of Defense. In fact, it's whatever the opposite of that is. That's what we have. We have a venture. I don't know what you would call it, but it's just the opposite. Okay. But if we're going to move at speed and not not even

to match the private sector, I think Congress can help by finding ways to provide free up funds. There's going to be risk. Got to have some oversight. But we're not Don't penalize this for the, you know, toilet seats and golden hammers of 30 years ago, because then we didn't have a pacing challenge. Now we have to move. So I think give us ways to I'll offer you even not the services, give the combatant commanders a way to invest in funds using funds to move quickly, because that's where the laboratory is, in my personal view. So I think adjust some regulations to enable innovation to happen at speed, understand the risks. But if we don't if we keep the same framework in place that was put probably for all the right reasons when their oversight didn't wasn't to the degree it should have been. If we don't if we don't change that, we will fall behind. But it comes with risk. Comes with risk.

MELANIE W. SISSON: All right. Well, our time here in the auditorium has drawn to a close. I would ask our audience here to do as the courtesy of staying in your seats as the general departs. But before we do that, on behalf of the entirety of the Brookings Institution, many thanks to you for coming out to speak with us all today. And if you can join me in extending our appreciation to the general, please.

DAVID H. BERGER: More than I gave. Because the tone of your question, the content and focus of your questions, tells me what's on your mind. And it proves it forces us to think. So I'm grateful for the questions. And I don't look at this as defensive like it's a hearing. This is very, very helpful because we'll go back based on the notes we took and figure out, okay, are we thinking about things in the right way? So I'm grateful for not just sitting there as passive listeners, but actually poking at the institution. It will help us adjust and get better. So thanks for. Thanks for asking us the hard questions. Thanks.

MELANIE W. SISSON: Thank you again.