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PANEL DISCUSSION:

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SISSON: Well, welcome to the Brookings Institution. I'm Melanie Sisson. I'm a member of the Strobe Talbot Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology. It's a real pleasure to be here today with Mike O'Hanlon, Mackenzie Eaglen, and Stephen Tankel. I presume that you're all here because you know full well who these individuals are, so there's no reason for me to go into their extensive and impressive biographies. Although, if you did happen to come into the Falk Auditorium today on accident, let me reassure you that your day's off to an excellent start and I can direct you to the full details that are available online. Our purpose here today is to think about what kind of military it is that the United States needs and what that military needs to do in order to defend the nation and its ability to exist and to act as an independent and sovereign state. Mike, about one short month ago, you published a paper that takes up precisely these questions. And before we move into discussion of the many events and policies that have occurred in the meantime, would you please get us started by sharing the foundational elements of the paper?

O'HANLON: Thanks Melanie and thanks everybody for being here as well as my co-panelists and good friends on this important topic. What I tried to argue in the policy brief that I wrote was that the United States needs to improve capabilities across four or five areas of defense spending and the force structure. Not in any grandiose way, but in specific ways that I think are necessary based on where we are. at this moment in time, and just to tick them off, I won't go into detail on each one, I'm sure we'll get to most of these in the course of discussion, but I think that we need to worry about the possibility of simultaneous conflicts, because we now have four potential adversaries that actively collaborate with each other, and that's different from 10 years ago.

You might have said 10 years ago when Jim Mattis first put out sort of the modern era version of national defense strategy for the United States and shifted us to great power competition. You might have said that Mattis was, in some sense, being imprudent to assume just one war at a time, but Mattis's clear goal, and I think it was the right one, was to focus on the quality of the force, and he tended to emphasize lethality. Secretary Austin kept much of the same logic and added to lethality the idea of redundancy, resilience, survivability of command and control, other systems, and I think that general logic was correct for where we had to reprioritize in that time period, but at this juncture, I think we're gonna have to think a little bit more about the possibility. not of four full-fledged wars at the

same time, but about deterring opportunistic aggression if we get involved in one fight in one place. I will say one more word about that, but first let me just tick off the other areas where I think we need to consider increasing capability.

And by the way, I wind up advocating an annual defense budget of around $950 billion, national defense budget for the United States. Today it's just under 900, so I'm advocating for a modest real-dollar increase above and beyond the rate of inflation and then staying at that higher level. And this is not quite the same thing as Secretary Hegseth, who I think is actually conducting a useful exercise to ask people, how would you cut 8 percent from your budget if you were required to? Let's just have a blue-sky thought experiment. But I think it's not actually going to be realistic to do that, even if you want to reprioritize. There are just too many needs in the existing force structure and existing mission mix to be able to find 8% reductions. That's my bottom line, and we'll get more into that as well. But the other areas where I think capability needs to increase, we now have a dilemma that we have two peer rivals, both of which want to be nuclear superpowers.

One already is, of course, Russia, and the other is rapidly moving into that domain. So, the idea that we can just do old-fashioned bilateral arms control and force-sizing vis-a-vis Russia is becoming, I think, obsolescent. And there are various options we could consider. I don't really want to see us go for an offensive nuclear buildup, and even if we did, Russia and China might reciprocate. So, I'm more interested in exploring the space of limited air and missile defense, and would give Rob Soofer and some others at the Atlantic Council credit for pushing this debate, as well as friends over at CSIS, Tom Karako and his team. And I'd like to talk a little bit more about that in the course of the conversation the defense industrial base give the Biden Pentagon a lot of credit. They really started to take this problem seriously, but they only began to address it. We were at the very early stages of dealing with supply chain and supply bottlenecks and lack of resilience, lack of surge capacity. We've seen this through COVID, we've seen this through the Ukraine and Gaza conflicts, and I think we're going to have to keep on this job.

Maybe some more additional resources will be required there as well. And the last point that I would make in this opening would be to say that. We need some greater robotics capabilities deployed to

the Western Pacific to better fend off the prospect of a Chinese attempted invasion of Taiwan. I don't think the Chinese can do this today, and I don't really think they're planning to do it in 2027. Xi Jinping giving his military the goal of being able to do that is one thing. It doesn't mean that the military in China will accomplish that goal or that Xi Jinping really wants this war, but I still think we want to over-insure against this conflict because it would be so devastating for the world if it happened. So, in a nutshell, those are my priority areas, most of which would lead me to advocate for roughly 10 to 15 billion dollars in added resources each year, going forward indefinitely at a permanently higher level. But on the question of the four rival simultaneity problem, let me just say one final word and I'll be done, which is that, imagine we're fighting China over Taiwan, heaven forbid. If that war happens, the future of civilization is at risk. But I don't think we can dismiss the possibility.

We also need to make sure that Russia, North Korea, or Iran would not see such a moment as an opportunity to carry out a regional aggression that they had otherwise been deterred by attempting because of American power, but now with the United States explicitly planning its forces around the idea of just one war at a time, they might rightly or wrongly conclude that if we're preoccupied with China. We can no longer deal with them. Now I'm not suggesting we have a four-war capability. The United States has never had that in my understanding of our military history, but I do think we need some ability to deter and also hold and prevent the worst from happening in each of the other three theaters if, indeed, we wind up fighting China over Taiwan.

And just in a nutshell, to give an example of what I think we need to do, I believe we need land-based air and missile defense in the Middle East that would not require aircraft carriers, that could stay there even if we fought China and needed to swing most of our Navy to the Western Pacific, and that could help Israel or another ally fend off the kind of huge Iranian missile and drone attacks that we saw in April and October of last year. So, I would size a capability to roughly that scenario. There are other ways to think about having an anchor in the Middle East even if we fight China over Taiwan. Others will maybe have different takes on what would be an acceptable hold and defend core force.
But the nice thing about this kind of logic is it doesn't require huge increases in force structure. But it also doesn't allow you to cut. And so again, Mr. Hegseth has a good idea looking for efficiencies. I think we're gonna do well to find $10 billion a year worth of efficiencies. And I think we need more like

$60 billion a year of additional spending on these other mission areas. So that's why I wind up advocating a $950 billion a year national defense budget going forward. Which, by the way, puts me to the right of not only most previous Brookings books, but even I think the House Armed Services Committee, the Senate Armed Services Committee, and the Republican Secretary of Defense. So, it's a fairly unusual position for me in my career, but that's where I am. Thanks for the chance to lay that out.

SISSON: That's a really wonderful and concise overview. And I should note that the title of the paper, for those of you who wish to go read it, is Peace Through Strength in the 2020s. So well worth a read. Mackenzie, I want to give you the opportunity to offer any reactions that you might have to what you've heard Mike describe.

EAGLEN: Well, as per usual, I agree with everything you said, and I think that's the perfect scene-setter, because we are in the terrible 20s. It's where our conventional and strategic deterrents are both at a nadir at the same time. Typically, historically, we don't take risks like that, and everyone can count around the world, all of our friends and all of our enemies. So, Beijing can count the number of, you know, how quickly could you not sink our fleet. our naval fleet, for example, and how many nuclear weapons do you have on alert? How many bombers are ready to go? And everyone's paying attention, and I worry, except maybe until recently, except Washington, to the negative trends around the world where we see our eroding conventional deterrent, and there's no backstop in our nuclear forces as they, all three legs of the triad, seek to get updated at the same time.

So, I get really nervous about the terrible 20s. and the bills are overwhelming and they're rolling for all the services, but they're all roughly due in this decade. Some are more urgent than others, like for example, the bomber and the submarine legs of the triad, and they're like a Pac-Man and they eat everything else that comes right after it and you have to be able to do all the other stuff to modernize the conventional forces and make them more autonomous and unmanned across the board because what we lack for this potential. You know, for a military that can throw punches but also absorb them as well and then deter another potential conflict, what we lack is mass. And the three things on the

highest levels that win a war are public will and support, of course, the national treasury, tax dollars or debt financed, and the defense industrial base.

And we have sized our industrial base to match our war plans, which are for short. exquisite high-end conflict that's over very quickly. Basically, a missile exchange. I don't see any scenario of the four you talked about with those enemies as being a short missile exchange. And like I said, if everyone else can count but Washington, guess exactly what they're gonna look for, the longest war possible with us. They understand our lack of depth in our magazines and our inventories, particularly as it relates to munitions. So terrible 20s, what we lack is mass. And mass is what we have to get us over the terrible 20s to where we can modernize both conventional and nuclear forces at the same time. And so that's why I'm encouraged actually a little bit by the budget drill is because I think that's the ultimate goal of it, but I'll save that for more questions, Melanie.

TANKEL: I'll begin by agreeing with pretty much everything my two current panelists said and add on to it. I want to go back, I think, to where you started the premise, which is the adversary alignment that we're seeing between the PRC, Russia, DPRK, and Iran. And I think as we look at what the next national defense strategy will need to wrestle with, you know, for quite some time I think. going into this new administration, the thinking was, yes, we will need to be wrestling with this question of are we, are we sized for one war?

Are we sized for two? Is it one plus, one four? I think as we tease out some of those relationships, one thing that is important to note is that right now we are still looking at a series of dyads, which is to say most of the cooperation is between the PRC and Russia, and the PRC and the DPRK, Russia and the DPRK. We're not sort of seeing trilateral or quadrilateral cooperation yet. So, I think that does sort of lend itself to the idea that there might be some assistance coming to the PRC from these different actors, but more to your point, what we would likely see would be some sort of opportunism from them. And so, I think the construct you laid out is a really good jumping off point for how to size against that.

Both of you talked about the Defense Industrial Base, and I would add on there that for quite some time, I think, right, the deterrence question during the Cold War was not whether or not we had the capability, it was whether or not we would use the capability when we were talking about crossing the nuclear threshold. Now, as Mackenzie noted, folks can count, the question is whether we have the capability. Even if there was no ambiguity about whether or not we would intervene. In a Taiwan scenario, there is plenty of ambiguity, I think, for ourselves as well, about whether we could intervene and for what length of time and duration and what things would look like in a protracted conflict. And I think that protraction is going to look several different ways.

One, it's going to be time. The other is, I think we have to be thinking about, and this goes back to your point about the one plus four, the potential not just for vertical escalation, but also for horizontal escalation, that the PRC itself could potentially seek to stretch the battlefield in different areas or that we could as well. And so, as we think about what our force needs to look like, we need to be factoring that into the equation. The other piece of this, we talked a lot about budget is a question of time. And we can spend more, I don't know if we will, I think the 8% budget exercise has potential value if it forces a hard-strategic look at where we're gonna spend our dollars. The other factor here is just the amount of time it is gonna take to build the types of mass that Mackenzie was talking about.

And I think that's where, yes, we need to be looking in the uncrewed space, more robotics, more AI. But I wouldn't just stop there. I'd also note, if we look even at Ukraine, where UAVs have made a huge difference, they've also relied on conventional capabilities. And we're going to need that portfolio mix. So, we're going to need more highly producible munitions. Thanks for watching! not just uncrewed platforms. All of that is going to take upfront time to invest in. That's going to cost money. But we need to be thinking about how far out we can stretch this and what we could do to speed things up. That's not just an acquisitions problem. That's a production problem. The last point I want to make there, and I'll probably reiterate it a few times, is I am all in on the idea that we need to be focusing more. on emerging capabilities, what we could do in the autonomous domain. And I would add to that, we cannot forget about the more baseline sub-tier components, critical minerals, other things that we need in our organic industrial base and our supply base that we're going to need in order to be able to build everything that we need to have a proper deterrent effect.

SISSON: Mike, did you want to respond to any particular element of that?

O'HANLON: Let me just give Steve and his colleagues who worked on the Biden administration effort on this a lot of credit that they begun to help us grapple with the problem of the supply chain and bottlenecks and potentially undependable sourcing and subcomponents and subcontractors. And I think Steve would probably agree. I won't ask him to say unless he wants, but they've made a very good start. There's a long way to go. And so that's going to be where I think a lot of the defense debate is going to have to go. Mackenzie and I, well, she's too young, but, she remembers, because she's a good student of history, that back in the 1990s, a lot of you will recall that we had the famous last supper, and I guess at this time of year it's appropriate to talk in such terms, and basically the Department of Defense and one of my great heroes, Bill Perry, said to defense industry, you know, look to your left and your right, one of you is not going to be here next year, you figure out how to downsize and economize, because the goal was efficiency.

We all took the deficit seriously back then. Mackenzie hates it when I talk too much about the deficit in defense events, but still, in the 1990s we did, and we did take it seriously, and the goal was to take a procurement holiday and save money in the defense budget so we would reduce the federal deficit. It may or may not have been the right goal then, it is badly obsolete now, because efficiency for efficiency's sake can no longer be your only goal. when you need redundancy. and you need a cushion in order to cope with the unpredictability and the, you know, the multiple dependencies that we've now built into our economy. in our industry.

TANKEL: I would just, two-fingered Mike said, you don't wanna put me on the spot to say that we made a good start, but there's a long way to go. I would second that and I would also point to the remarks from a former national security advisor, Jake Sullivan at CSIS on a big defense industrial based speech where he said, we've made a good start and there is a long way to go. So, I think that was something that was very much acknowledged by the Biden administration was that, yeah, there were a lot of efforts that were put into place, some of which were a continuation on from things that started at the end of the first Trump term.

Others that were new, but that, you know, while folks who are, who are been to burden this space for a long time were probably tracking on a lot of these challenges for a long time, at a high policy level, folks were really waking up to this in the last couple of years. And so, yeah, there's been an all-out sprint, but there's a lot running left.

SISSON: Well, let's press on. Each of you and your responses or descriptions based on what Mike had described in his paper mentioned, history, precedent, continuity, all of that requires some consistency of worldview, the idea that across administrations they've shared a conception of national security and what threats to US interests actually are and look like. From what we can see so far, how would you describe the Trump administration's worldview when it comes to national security.

O'HANLON: I don't have to start, do I? I've been talking a lot.

SISSON: Fair enough. I'll ask Mackenzie to start.

EAGLEN: I think there is a continuum of on the foreign policy spectrum, and it ranges from, and each of these could have their own interpretations, and when I say the word, you'll think of something different than I'll think it is, but of course, it all matters what's in the mind of a few people. Nationalist, populist, realist, traditionalist, conservative internationalist, isolationist. And that wasn't even actually in the order of the spectrum. And on any given day, and on any given issue, I think that any one of those. factions could compete for to be chosen as the world view of whatever the problem set is and it depends on what the problem set is. So, it's not always consistently one view or the other so far.

Eight weeks, I know, it feels like eight years, I got it. Dog years, I feel like we live in dog days now. So, it's shaking out in real time but I don't, here's what I do see, Melanie is a departure from the first term in cases there will be differentiation in foreign and defense policy. I think that we know, we just don't know how dramatic it is because the first defense strategy that you talked about, you know, it coined the term great power competition, said China and Russia are the competitors, full stop. I think this one will be China first and there are no equals in terms of challenges and it's about prioritization and realism, and so...But I also think, like I said, it shifts, depending on the issue.

But there is the potential where it becomes a world with spheres of influence. There is the potential for that. I don't know, you know, the enemy always gets a vote and you can get mugged by reality as well. So, I don't know if that will ultimately be what happens.

TANKEL: Yeah, I mean, I will, I will second the notion that we are in the early days and I think we're trying to separate signal from noise and to Mackenzie's point, I think there's a number, you know, you spoke about, Mackenzie, about a continuum. I think there's also write different polls within the administration that are going to have different views and you can have, I think, similar actions with very, very different motivations. So, you could look at the primacy of the Indo-Pacific, which is probably more in a traditionalist camp. And you can say, well, there's continuity there. And then you could look at how this administration has engaged with European allies, which is much more revolutionary. And you could view that through the lens of Indo-Pacific first and some, you know, I would not say that it is smart realpolitik, but you could still sort of say that it is motivated by a perception of realpolitik.

Again, not what I would say smart realpolitik. Or you could say that this is driven more by an animosity towards NATO and towards the European Union, I think, ongoing relationships between the president and how he views Vladimir Putin versus Zelensky. I mean, all of these things, that's the noise. And it's hard to separate. And so, it's hard to say how much of treatment of Europe is a function of Indo-Pacific primacy and how much of this is driven by other agendas, really, really hard to shake that out right now. I think the other thing that we are very, very clearly seeing. I think where you get the talk of potential spheres of influence, but again, we don't know if that's really, really going to shake out and we don't know if that's what the actual aim is, is much greater focus on the Western Hemisphere, right, through the homeland lens.

And we're seeing that in terms of, you know, immigration being treated as a national security and a defense issue in ways that it has not been previously. We're seeing that in terms of, you know, focus on cartels and designating them as FTOs. and discussions of use of military there in ways that we haven't seen previously. We're seeing that in the focus on Golden Dome. All of those have much more of a Western homeland focus. How much of that is really driven by domestic politics? How much

of that is driven by a national security world view? How much of that is a function of different power centers that are strong and effective within the administration is hard to determine. The final thing that I will note is I think one thing that is pretty clear across the board is a preference for hard power instruments at the expense of all others. And that has been very, very clear in the way that DOGE has gone about its budget cutting and which entities are being shut down.

Even there, however, you know, it's unclear how much Elon Musk's actions in a budget cutting. departmental shutdown, no more voice of America space, is driven by a national security world view versus what is seen as potentially low-hanging fruit, or this preference for soft versus hard power. And I think that further complicates and muddies some of this. But I will come back to where I started, which is the very clear Indo-Pacific focus. There's a very clear, I think, homeland Western homeland focus. And there is a very clear. preference for hard power instruments.

SISSON: Mike, what do you see?

O'HANLON: I like these comments and they're very brave because it's so hard to tell where this administration is going. So, I would just say two things. One, fundamentally I don't know and I don't yet know if Trump will wind up being seen as a disruptive president or revolutionary in American foreign policy. Disruptive meaning just different style and some different particular issues that he picks and decides to prioritize and revolutionary meaning that he changes America's place in the world. I don't know yet how to predict. But on Ukraine, let me just add one note there specifically, I agree with Steve's overall point, but it's interesting on Ukraine, hard power is the one thing Trump doesn't wanna use. And I agree with him.

And so, I, you know, every day I wake up sort of with one eye half shut and the other one only half open or out of fear that the news of the day is gonna shock me even worse than yesterday. And I don't like the way President Trump's treated President Zelensky. and I think he's too friendly to President Putin, and I can make other critiques as well, but the sum total of what he's trying to do in my mind is not all wrong. It's still a long shot, and I still think that Putin in particular is gonna be very unlikely to agree to terms that we would find acceptable, and that Ukraine would find acceptable, but

some of the worldview that Trump's bringing to this challenge, I agree with, and I'm hopeful that therefore, it will wind up being successful in terms of ending the war and ending the war in a stable and durable way, but also consistent with our longstanding commitments to our NATO allies. That's still possible. I'm not predicting it, but I'm not ruling it out either.

SISSON: Let's keep on with looking at a couple of specifics. Stephen, you mentioned the deployments to the southern border and the designation of cartels and other criminal networks as foreign terrorist organizations. Secretary Hegseth has described this as a strategic pivot. And that may be theatrical of some kind we don't know, or it may be meaningful, if it were meaningful. If this is a strategic pivot and we're going to be engaging in the kind of counter-terrorism operations in our own hemisphere that we have done elsewhere over the years, what would that look like in terms of the composition of our force structure, posture, what changes would we need to affect to implement that? Mike, you get to go first this time.

O'HANLON: On the Asia Pacific, I think that we need to make sure a higher fraction of our Navy can be present in the Pacific than has been the case in the last six or eight years, even as we've tried to de-emphasize the Middle East. I think we need to not just diversify our potential base access, but harden it and fortify it and prepare it for potential combat, again, in the interest of deterrence, not in the expectation of an actual war, but, of course, those two things go together at some level. if you want to prevent the war. in some sense, you've got to prepare for it.

And I think that we need more long-range strike capability coming out of the United States, as well as places like Hawaii, Guam, and Alaska, but also probably long-range unmanned aerial systems coming off of aircraft carriers that we aren't really building, and more robotics deployed in the Western Pacific permanently that stay there and don't depend on long runways or proximate aircraft carriers to project power in and around the Taiwan Strait. So those are some of the pieces. And what I would say is that roughly 10 years into the shift to great power rivalry, which is about how long we've been doing this, going back to Ash Carter, Secretary Carter, President Obama's last secretary of defense with his third offset, and then Secretary Mattis with his national defense strategy, Secretary Austin with his.

Going through that period, we now had about 10 years to get after this problem, and we're probably about a third of the way towards what I would like to see us be able to do. I still think getting a third of the way puts us in a pretty strong position, because I'm a little more hopeful here than Mackenzie, so she'll probably want to go next and disagree with some of my points. I think that the Chinese know we still have the best military on Earth, and that they recognize we also use it a lot, and that we're pretty good at combat. It's sort of in our DNA, and it's certainly in our recent history.

And I don't know if it's in their DNA, but it's not in their recent history to have done a lot of fighting. I think they're wary, and Xi Jinping has replaced a lot of his top military leadership. He doesn't seem to trust it. He doesn't really seem to have quite the bravado that sometimes China, with its wolf warrior diplomacy of recent years, projects in other ways. So, I'm not suggesting that deterrence is about to fail. But I still converge in policy with those who do think it's about to fail. because even if I think the chances of it failing are only 5%, that's still 5% too high for my taste. And so, there are all these other things I'd like to see us get after more quickly.

SISSON: And Mackenzie, what would you see if we were gonna start campaigning against FTOs in Mexico and in our own hemisphere? What would that look like?

EAGLEN: I think you see it clearly reflected in the 17 protected areas of the Hegseth budget exercise, which is a reorientation to the two primary things. Warfighting readiness, particularly against China and homeland defense is co-equal mission sets, separate but equal. And so, you see that what are the protected, so the budget review that people are talking about, the 8% scrub, it's an attempt to cut in order to reinvest all of that money into the protected areas that he's outlined in. There are 17 of them, and these reflect, I think, those two already priorities. And so, it's things that Stephen mentioned, including, for example, Golden Dome, aka an Iron Dome version, something for America. It's kind of like a 10-7 and subsequent incursions into Israel. happened from here in the US, can we defend against that, as well as, of course, Iran's capabilities, which can hit our shores, North Korea, as well, and others.

But it's also space-based, and remember the Chinese spy balloon. Can we deal with that better now? It's been five, four years, or three, however long, it's been years. Those kinds of threats as well. Then you have the new threats. China has a new, or skimming missile that can come up through the southern hemisphere down over the south and then through Mexico. And we have no way to track, detect or prevent that. So, there are brand new shiny threats. And then there is what you were talking about, organized crime, which includes, but is not limited to cartels, stopping the flow of fentanyl.

I'm struck by how strongly this administration, this president feels emotionally and viscerally about fentanyl, which really peaked in the first year of his last term, his first term, and this is a huge priority for him. And so, you know, you see, for example, a ship assigned to NORTHCOM this week, which really, I don't think has happened forever. I mean, there's been a couple of counter drug missions under the first Trump administration where there was a couple flotillas here and there, but typically they don't have naval assets assigned to the theater or to the commander. And you could also see some other realigning among the combatant commands and other things, which we can get into those details, expect, broadly speaking, you're just going to see more people and attention and spending on the capabilities for the hemisphere along the lines that I've talked about.

SISSON: Stephen, I actually want to push into Europe a little bit now, if we can. And there have been reports that the administration is considering handing over the role of NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe. Can you help us to understand what that means, both strategically and operationally?

TANKEL: So right, the Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, head of NATO, has historically been a U.S. general officer, always has been, and that, I think, provides the United States a significant degree of influence within NATO, the alliance. It is also an acknowledgement of the disproportionate role that the United States plays for Europe's own security, right, and as a member of the NATO alliance.

So, I think there's a couple of different ways to view the decision to potentially hand this over, and I think this goes back to some of the points that I was hinting at earlier with Europe, is that this could be

a function of the President's stated antipathy towards NATO as an alliance, which he has referred to not as an alliance but as a protection racket, which is something I would vigorously disagree with. And that is what is driving this, that he wants to and has tried to, you know, he talked in his first term about leaving NATO and that this is a function of ways in which to weaken NATO or divest the United States of involvement in NATO. This could be part and parcel of an attempt to get Europe to take more responsibility for its own security, right, and not to rely as much on the United States to do more to be able to fight on its own and not rely as much on U.S. enablers, on U.S. equipment and other things in order to be able to focus on those other priorities, right, the Indo-Pacific and the homeland.

Going back to previous comments that there are multiple polls within the administration and multiple views of the administration, you know, something that I tell my children all the time, right? Like, two things can be true. It can be both of those things. It could be very potentially that Trump has antipathy towards NATO as do others and towards the Europeans. And simultaneously, there's a desire to get the Europeans to do more on their own. I think the danger is several fold. One is, I'm heartened to see that the EU is going to spend so much more on its own defense industrial base in the last weeks. It had a European defense industrial strategy, it was putting some money towards that, it is now prepared to put a lot more, it is trying to fast track its own development of munitions and do more on its own. That's all well to the good.

It comes at a potential cost though, in terms of our ability to rely on our European allies, which we would do in a PRC war fight, and which we would do in many other instances as well. We rely on our European allies to be able to operate in Africa, in the Middle East. And unless we truly do want to see a return to spheres of influence where we cede Europe, right, to Russia, we want a stronger Europe and the United States needs to be part of a NATO alliance. So, as I unpack all of this, I think it's difficult to say with certainty what the driving motivation is. I think what will be clear from this will be a weakened NATO and a weakened US role in NATO going forward.

SISSON: I'm going to have you comment on it, but I want to throw an additional question, so please respond there. But I also want to point out that for all of the reasons that Stephen has mentioned Europe is decidedly unsettled these days, enough that they're talking about potential nuclear options,

and so if you could add on to your own remarks some conversation about what you see in the nuclear space and whether or not European proliferation is or is not in US short-term and long-term interests.

O'HANLON: Yeah, thank you. And thanks for the great comments, Steve, as well. I think it's a very bad idea to give up the Supreme Allied Commander position to Europe for the following reasons. First of all, let me give a great shout-out to General Chris Cavoli, the current SACEUR, an outstanding American officer. We typically had outstanding officers. Once we had an admiral, maybe more than once, but Jim Stavridis would want to be remembered. But generally speaking, Air Force or Army, and I think once, have we ever had a Marine SACEUR? Yes. Jim Jones. Anyway, you see the point. It's an American. The Secretary General is always a European. And also, it's an interesting little thing that some of you will know, the SACEUR is not considered the top military officer in NATO.

There is another position that I think Admiral Bauer of the Netherlands. held recently, and they still, that is, the military advisor between the North Atlantic Council, that's the political side, the decision-making side of the alliance, and then the operational military forces. So, we've already got a pretty nice balance of labor between Europe and the United States in terms of leadership of NATO, and I think that's been a very good thing. Why would we want to unilaterally disarm as Americans, so to speak, unilaterally give up the one key position that has historically been ours, going back to Dwight Eisenhower the first sack here. So, I have a pretty clear opinion on that and I'm willing to try to be flexible on some of the Trump tactics where I think that disruption is a good idea. This would be a bad idea.

The United States still accounts for two-thirds of all of NATO's military spending and unless you decide once and for all to cut the tie to Europe, which I don't advocate, we're still going to be the preeminent power and we should want to have major influence therefore in all decisions. We will anyway, but why would we want to give up the military command? of the operational forces, which then leads to the nuclear question very naturally, because I think when you start to think about this, could Europe do more in its own defense?

Well, Paul Stairs of CFR and I just wrote a paper this week trying to lay out some conventional capabilities we think Europe should improve on, for example, being able to have 10 to 12 brigades, brigade combat teams, and associated air power to defend the Baltics and the Eastern flank in general, which NATO does not have, NATO, Europe, and Canada do not collectively have right now. So that's a doable proposition. It would take work. It would take new resources and a reorientation of existing resources. But it's doable at, I think, less than 2.5% of GDP across NATO Europe. What's not doable, in my judgment, is NATO actually going toe-to-toe with the Russians in nukes. Who's going to do that? This is where you get into the dilemma, that after the United States is taken out of the equation, NATO is a wonderful alliance of a lot of mid-sized and small powers.

They are powers, they're capable, but there is no natural leader within Europe for the Western defense, the European defense of its own territory or its own collective space. So, is France with 200 warheads, as feisty and proud as the French can be, is France really gonna be counted on in a crisis over Poland or Lithuania or Latvia with Russia sitting with 6,000 nuclear weapons, France with 200 and trying to checkmate the Russian nuclear deterrent with its own force to frappe? I don't think so. Is France gonna embark on a buildup to have 2,000 warheads instead of 200? They could if they really wanted to, but politically, the French polity is not gonna do that.

They're not gonna devote the resources to do that. Do we really want Germany to go down that road and build up a 2,000-warhead force? I think asking the question answers the question. So, when you, and I trust Germany, it's not the same as it used to be, but you see my point. that we don't really want. to ask Germans to become the world's number four nuclear superpower. So, there's just no good answer to the question of how do you replace the American nuclear deterrent with a European nuclear deterrent. We should stay engaged in NATO, and one of the big reasons is, even though we don't intend ever to use it, we have the nuclear backstop that at least checkmates Russia from thinking it can make nuclear threats and get away with it.

SISSON: Mackenzie, there also have been reports that the Trump administration is thinking about reducing and reorganizing the combatant commands and headquarters, recognizing that we of course

don't have the details even on what sort of notional plans they might or might not be considering. What do you think about the general idea of that kind of restructuring?

EAGLEN: I like the disruption across the board, meaning insofar as even if you just disrupt and settle back on a similar answer, at least you've opened the, lifted the hood, you've shook everything up, you've asked everyone to re-justify their existence, and like I said, if you settle back on what it was, great. And if you don't, and there's a better idea that emerges to better reflect reality, great. A lot of structures and processes and organizations that have stood up since the Department of Defense became such in 1947, and then was updated with gold water nickels, just stay in place and get added onto the new barnacles of bureaucracy and very little ever gets taken away, very little.

You can think of the occasional high-profile casualty organizationally like Joint Forces Command, but otherwise, not much changes, we just add, space force, undersecretary for intelligence, undersecretary for research and engineering, everything just is additive. It's very rare that this town scrubs and deletes. Can you sunset outdated work requirements now that we live in an information age in the digital world? Yes, the answer is clearly yes. Do you want everybody to go through boot camp even if the, you know? Maybe you need that for mass, but maybe you don't need the accountants. You know, maybe you do, maybe you don't. I don't know. Ask the questions. So, I'm fine with a relook at the combat command structure. It's also not a new idea. It's been out there for a long time being pushed by no surprise.

Special operations forces and so come. Basically, they started saying in the height of the wars, I'm sure you got the briefing too, you know, basically the world is the battlefield for what we're doing. You know, in 120 countries on any given day, killing bad guys. But with cyber and space and satellite and jamming and critical infrastructure, there are no national boundaries when it comes to this stuff. I mean, there are and there aren't. Everybody is in everybody else's infrastructure. Everyone can turn, you know, the big guys, we can all, everyone can mess with each other's populations very quickly and make them very vulnerable.

And so, the thinking was, you know, there's no. geographical boundaries don't matter in terms of how combatant commands are carved up, particularly the geographic ones. I'm not talking so much about the functional commands, which do things like transportation or nuclear weapons, et cetera. And so, they've been pushing that argument for a long time and it's worthy of that consideration, particularly in the light of what Michael talked about, which all coined the League of Darkness, Axis of Resistance, Upheaval, whatever your term is. But we all know the four actors we're talking about, which is Russia, China, North Korea, Iran. While it may be bilateral to some extent, Steven, the cooperation is increasingly overlapping, extensive and broadening, right? North Koreans dying for Russia and Ukraine is astounding.

And before they died there, they sent every 155 shell they had on the shelf in the warehouse. But it's text sharing, it's drone know-how, it's facilities, it's infrastructure, it's energy, it's sanctions, evasion, it's trade and cooperation to prop up each other's economies to keep the wars going. I mean, this is extensive working together. And that to me makes the case of... these artificial lines drawn on the map, they're relevant for some questions and for others they're not. I'll wrap up with those, what relevant some questions might there be? Well, different threat profiles in these regions as they're artificially constructed now tend to have a service favorite or a preference, which capability and expertise and certain branch or branches of the armed forces are dealing with that problem foremost. and its over different temporal dimensions, risk profiles, and capability sets that you need. So in that case, you could say, all right, so we're gonna stick with the unified command plan, but we're gonna scrub Goldwater Nichols, we're gonna update it, sunset what's not relevant, and we really need a global force management reign in, which this team would rather, you could leave the combatant commands alone and just reign in the demand set from the COCOMS and work it from the bottom up, I guess you could say.

SISSON: Steven, I'm going to give you the last word on these topics, and then we're going to pull in some audience questions that we received prior that lend themselves to an actual lightning round, and I'm going to enforce it as a lightning round. And then we'll turn to some questions for the audience. So, I'd ask those here in the room at Falk to start thinking through what it is in terms of questions that you might like to pose to our panelists. So, Steven.

TANKEL: Great. I'll make a few points not necessarily all related. I mean, the first is, yeah, so Mackenzie, I fully concur with you that the cooperation that we are seeing between the four different adversaries is becoming increasingly extensive. The Biden administration developed a national security memorandum to counter adversary alignment. That alignment still is, for the most part, bilateral, but it's all of the different bilateral relationships. The risk is it becomes more and more right trilateral or quadrilateral. But even absent that, it is becoming more and more extensive. I think one of the concerns that I have about the disruption, and I take the point that disruption can be good because we're not a town that normally sort of like ever does the big scale rethink is that if you disrupt everywhere across the board rather than in a very intentional manner, we're gonna disrupt in these spaces.

One, you run the risk of sort of throwing out good work that has already been done. I don't know if that NSM is among the many that has been rescinded already. I know that others have been rescinded that have had casualties, for example. On Friday, the executive order rescinding a bunch of the Biden era orders resulted in a stoppage of, I think, 65 different projects that were funded under, right, Defense Production Act, for example. It's not gonna be the end of the world. but you do get these sorts of casualties along the way. And so, I think one of the risks with the disruption is also the way in which it is messaged to your workforce and to your allies and partners about what it is that you're trying to get at, because in the absence of that, I think it makes everybody very, very nervous and very, very skittish in ways that are counterproductive. And that's the first part I would note. The second is, back to your earlier question about what's happening at the southern border. We've talked about Golden Dome.

Mike was talking about our postural realignments in the Indo-Pacific. I think one of the concerns I have broadly is that whereas I agree with the need to focus very squarely on lethality, resilience, and readiness, my concern is that some of these steps are going to eat readiness. We're going to send military to the southern border - unclear exactly what it is we necessarily need them to do there given that we've already seen the numbers of illegal immigrant crossings have dropped dramatically. I think we could see other activities in the western ham that potentially eat readiness as well. Depending on

what Golden Dome looks like, if this is like a counter UAS and putting air defense around key sectors in the United States, right, Mike talks about this in his paper, right THAAD. That sounds feasible and manageable. If this is essentially all hands-on deck and we've got to throw tons and tons of resources and manpower and brainpower at trying to replicate what Israel has, which we cannot do for geographic purposes because of the types of munitions that would be incoming, and let's also not forget that Israel Iron Dome worked on specific occasions. If we're facing ongoing barrages, it might look different.

That's going to eat readiness. Thanks for watching! This goes to my final point, which is we didn't talk a ton about the defense industrial base. We talk about readiness, we talk about service members, we talk about whether what we have in inventory is fit for purpose, but we also talk about our ability to produce what we need and to scale up quickly and to sustain what we are producing. And I think there are a number of risks there. I think one is the risk that we are by the way, this is a bipartisan problem, going back for years, eating readiness in terms of our inventory on things that we don't necessarily need to be doing. We are not scaling up quickly enough, and we are not finding the creative ways that we need to sustain production over time. And we have not talked a lot about workforce today. We have to be thinking more about how we are going to be building a workforce that we can sustain going forward, that is well trained, that is not going to be let go the day after the contract expires, how we are going to build up infrastructure that is maintained, that isn't going to be turned off after the contract expires. To me, those are going to be key elements of deterrence that we need to be thinking and focusing more about. as we are doing this disruption.

SISSON: Well, because we have such a prescient audience, some of these lightning round questions hit on a couple of the topics that you've just raised. So, I'll start, I think, with one, which is just a simple yes, no. Truly, yes or no, right? Are American weapons too complex and hard to manufacture? Starting with you, Mike.

O'HANLON: No.

EAGLEN: Yes.

TANKEL: Sometimes.

SISSON: Cheater, you have to pick one.

TANKEL: Um, yes.

SISSON: The second, are you worried that the DOD workforce will have a difficult time regenerating with fresh talent after a purge of probationary employees?

TANKEL: Yes.

SISSON: Clear yes. Mackenzie?

EAGLEN: TBD.

SISSON: Disallowed.

EAGLEN: No.

O'HANLON: Yes, but it's much deeper than the recent events.

SISSON: Nope, nope, nope. That's a yes. OK, the final question is really a high, medium, low. So, you have three options this time. What are the prospects for military base closures abroad, Europe, Africa, Middle East, Latin America, Asia, Pacific, and via BRAC base realignment and closure policies here at home? High, medium, or low, please? Mackenzie, you go first. Aye.

O'HANLON: Prospects? Prospects. So, will it happen, nor should it happen?

SISSON: Correct.

O'HANLON: Mostly no, except in Europe.

SISSON: No, high, medium, or low.

O'HANLON: Medium.

SISSON: Okay, and Stephen.

TANKEL: Medium.

SISSON: Thank you all. We'll turn now to our audience questions. We will have many. In fairness, by forcing our panelists to be concise and adhere to rules, I'm going to ask the same of you in the audience. When you have the microphone, please introduce yourself where you're from, and you'll have 45 seconds to formulate a question.

O'HANLON: As you just saw, she's tough.

SISSON: If you don't meet the time requirements, I will be interrupting you as well, not out of an intention to be rude, but just to keep good order. So, hands up, please. Let's see what we've got in our microphones already. Okay, we've got a person over here in a blue necktie wearing glasses, please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hehehehe

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you. Thank you. Thanks, moderator. Jeff Feltman from Brookings. Thanks very much for the comments from all three panelists and the discussions about supply chains, inventories, the types of weapons we need, types of budgets, et cetera. Could you talk about recruitment of the fighting force we would need for long-term wars to deter or to prepare, since there's

already a recruitment problem and does the removal of officers have any impact on the recruitment process? You wanna start?

EAGLEN: Uh, it does, it could, um, you know, the recruiting challenges that were accelerated by COVID, but weren't caused by COVID, it was, it was not the causal foundation that these trend lines were sadly already underway, but they got worse, uh, even after, uh, back to work and that sort of thing. What I worry about is it's like an air bubble in the garden hose or when the snake swallows a rabbit or pick your favorite metaphor. Also, eventually that trickles, there's a gap in the force. So now you would have like a E2 gap. There's like a bunch of people at E3 and E1 doing the work of the missing E2. So, you also have that and then the impact on retention. People are saying, well, now I'm doing two jobs for one.

And so, the recruiting challenge is one that is never just fixed. It's something every year it's a senior leader problem. I think the solutions so far that were started under the last team will be continued by this one and they're a good patchwork. But I think overall, if you're talking about the long war, we have nothing in place right now to, every commission report that I've ever seen or read in the last 20 years has talked about the need to talk about mobilization and plan for it, large scale, meaning out into the real world of pure civilians and we've not done that.

TANKEL: Yeah, so I'll note a couple of areas that I think are ripe for disruption. And when I say this as a Navy reservist, is I think the reserve force is probably ripe for some rethink about how reservists are trained and prepared, especially for some sort of a protracted fight. I'm a Navy reservist who's been in for a number of years. I've never served on active duty orders on a ship, right? And so, right, there's questions about sort of how well. we are training and preparing our reserve forces, which are really supposed to be that bridging function, right, they're not, right, they're supposed to give us time and space if we need it in the event of a protracted conflict to be able to mobilize. And so, I think we need to think about that, and I think that is one area of right for disruption.

The other one that I want to mention is, you know, and there was some nascent discussion around this, you know, that I and others were having in the previous administration, and I think it needs to go

further, Is this question about. what is going to happen with National Guard, which is I think, you know, on average, you probably have a higher proportion of first responders in the Guard. If you mobilize the Guard in a war fight, what does that mean here at home as well in terms of first responder, you know, so we've got, I think across the board, mobilization challenges for society. That is really, really, really hard. to engage with and talk about because of the sacrifices you're potentially asking people to make for something that is quite abstract at the time, but certainly I think there needs to be more planning done on that.

SISSON: Hands, please. OK, we've got a person here in a green shirt with a pen in the button spot.

TANKEL: He's rewarded for dressing informally. Makes him distinctive.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi, I'm Dan Gagliano, I'm from Connecticut. I'm curious, since we're going with defense spending being a theme of today, where you put the national deficit in planning for resourcing and strategy development for the DOD? Is it becoming an existential threat that may limit what can really be done?

TANKEL: I'll start by saying the problem of the national deficit and debt is so big and so serious that you can't put it on any one part of the government to solve, and you know the math, I'm sure. We're in the ballpark of more than $7 trillion in annual spending, $5 trillion in annual revenue, and the defense budget's less than $1 trillion. So those are very round numbers, but they underscore that you're going to need a whole of government effort. I'm advocating a slight increase in the defense budget. And so that would not be in the spirit of belt tightening across the board because I don't think we're at a moment in history where DOD could be expected to contribute. But I am still informed by the debate in the sense that I'm trying to limit my proposals to the cheapest possible.

In fact, the other nickname I sometimes have used for my recent papers or my ideas is cheap hawk, which is an idea that Newt, or a phrase Newt Gingrich coined in the 1990s and I still think it helps describe the world view of some of us. Back then we had a much less serious deficit problem, but we took it much more seriously. And I'd like to see us get back on track. But fundamentally, revenues and

entitlements are going to be the more important contributors to solving this problem than any discretionary account, whether domestic or defense.

SISSON: Does either of you want to weigh in on this one or we can get the next one?

EAGLEN: Yes, it's a universal sacrifice, right? If veterans gotta take the hit, grandma takes the hit. That's just, it's just simple math, unfortunately, to get at the whole total spending pie. And it's also, of course, reining in what government does to its core functions. The reason I will defend your defense spending fence is because using violence in the name of the state is uniquely the feds. We don't want the state and locals doing that. We don't need our militias people taking up the guns we all have and deciding for themselves what to do with them, right? That is a unique government function. Does government have to do all the other things it does? No, I'll just conclude by saying but this president is very comfortable with debt financing. It's a real estate way of life. I have a husband who does commercial real estate So I think he may ultimately think about it differently, but at the same time he's letting DOGE forge ahead, which is to ultimately, I think, reduce some of that spending.

SISSON: More questions, please. We have a person here in a blue blazer and a blue and white checkered shirt with glasses.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good friends. Okay, thanks. Stuart Macdonald, British Ministry of Defense, thinking about complementing the Us force, where should European allies focus in force structure and posture, especially UK and France as two of the bigger allies?

O'HANLON: And we don't have our colleague Fiona Hill up here, because she's on your commission to address those very questions. It seems to me that Britain has obviously a long history of expeditionary warfare, and it's still got that capability in its DNA, but not so much in its military. And at the moment, my understanding of British power projection capability is roughly one brigade of sustainable force that could be transported to a different region or continent and engage in combat over a period of weeks or months. By contrast, we can sort of do, I mean, not as well as we should and with a lot of, you know, gaps, but we can sort of do 30 plus brigades.

But we're only six times bigger and we have 30 times more deployable force. So, with Britain as, Britain and France as the best European countries for projecting force, they've got to up their game to at least three brigades each. And I just don't see why that should be undoable. Frankly, I don't quite understand the British defense budget, because the numbers look okay for being able to support that kind of capability, but the capability's not there. And so, I'll conclude by saying, one thing that Paul Stairs and I tried to argue and articulate in our paper this week at the CFR or the foreignaffairs.com website is that this whole debate about what percent of GDP Europe should be devoting to its military collectively is somewhat helpful, but it could be a distraction from the real question, which is how to spend that money better. I do think European budgets need to go up, but an even more fundamental problem is Europe is not getting nearly enough for the 300 plus billion it's already spending per year. And so, bottom line, I think Britain and France each got to aspire to be able to project and deploy and sustain at least three brigades each indefinitely, starting with the Baltic scenario but extending beyond that as well. That would be my aspiration for our allies.

TANKEL: Add a couple things on one is I think there's right. There's the size question There's also the capability question and the ability to operate without relying on the United States for enablers and so Focusing on that, you know as well as just size and capacity And the other is you write you didn't ask about what the what the arsenal looks like But I you know, I will, I will come back to that again There There's a long way to go for UK and European industry to be able to get to where they need to be, to be able to produce sufficient platforms and particularly munitions. And in the near to medium term, there's going to be whether Europeans and UK want to or not continue reliance on the United States for foreign military sales.

The ideal outcome is over the medium to term. that we have greater defense industrial integration with one another, and that we are a rising tide lifts all boats, and that we are all producing more together with one another and leveraging one another's comparative advantages. There's a lot that would have to change, including here in the United States, to make that a reality. But as we think about what a truly not just interoperable but interchangeable alliance looks like if we still have one. Five or ten years from now, that to me is also where we need to be.

SISSON: More questions please. We have a person with a blue sweater and like a floral print top.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi, thank you. My name is Sarah. I'm an active duty military spouse. We're currently stationed in England, coincidentally, on NATO orders. So, a lot personally at stake with your high, medium, and low question earlier. I'm grateful that the conversation at the tail-end finally started talking about personnel, right? As we talk about future strategy and ramping up hard tools, you need the personnel in order to obviously use them effectively. And there's the joke that you recruit the service member, but you retain the military family. And so, I was curious to hear in either your policy brief or other materials you've produced recently, the nature of recommendations that you've formed regarding military family support, quality of life, perhaps even reform, and what constituent engagement you may or may not have done in formulating those recommendations.

TANKEL: Well, constituent engagement, please don't give her the microphone yet. I want to hear your opinion after I give mine. But my basic, simple point to start, and Jeff Feldman's question was excellent before too, this is not a place you can cut. We have, generally speaking, good compensation packages for America's men and women in uniform today and their families. You may disagree, but if you look at quadrennial compensation reviews, you compare to cohorts in similar kinds of jobs with experience and education in the private sector. We're doing pretty well by the force, and we should, and we must. And so, I would rule out any large reductions in anything. You can debate commissaries. You can debate exchanges. And you can also, of course, always look for efficiencies in healthcare. So not everything has to say exactly where it is. But generally speaking, Secretary Hegseth is not going to get any of his 8 percent out of personnel. That would be my starting point. But I wonder if anybody else wants comment and then also if you want to comment.

TANKEL: I want to give a shout out to a colleague of mine from NSC under the Biden administration who was the driving force behind the policy that allowed military spouses to be able to telework so that they could travel with their spouse to a new location without losing their job. To me, that encapsulates a good creative policy solution in a way that works at individual level and provides the care and respect that we should all have, right, for uniformed military and their partners. I tell my wife all the time, people should be thanking her for her service, not me, right. And also has, right, the net

benefit of helping boost retention. So, I just wanted to mention that because I think that was a really good policy came out of the last term.

O'HANLON: Anything you'd add?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, yeah, very, very familiar with the gains in employment access under the last administration, which we supported and commend. I would say, yeah, from the kitchen table conversations that both folks like my family and folks in our network are having, there's kind of two parallel concerns that I think are contributing to some of the retention efforts. efforts. I mean, number one, serving in a force where direction feels volatile and uncertain, and we're ramping up for ops tempo that can feel unprecedentedly scary to include new missions in the Western hemisphere that feel to be expanding beyond legal authorities.

That's like one big kind of existential factor that I think a lot of families are having serious conversations regarding. But then on kind of the base level quality of life existence, while improvements have been made in the employment sector, there's a lot of gaps when it comes to just rights and safeties and protections. I would say that is exacerbated when you are a family that does not look like a white straight family unit. So, plugging a lot of those gaps, which some of which wouldn't even have to cost you towards your new budget increase would be certainly where we would recommend starting and analyzing.

SISSON: Thanks for the question and for engaging in the conversation. We have a person in the back with, I think, a sweater and some glasses there, please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi, my name's Mark, I'm from United Daily News base in Taiwan. We touch up on the U.S. military industrial base where it stands right now. My question being, how can we truly mobilize and speed up the production? Another question related to that is that President Trump's policies still remain ambiguous. One hand, he's saying that he wants to build the greatest military in the world, but on the other hand, he's saying that he wants to sit down with China and Russia to cut

down the defense budget. So, I'm just wondering how serious is Trump, do you think that President Trump is about up the production of military industrial base? Thank you.

SISSON: Either or both for you to answer.

TANKEL: So, I'll start with, how do we ramp up? So, I mentioned earlier that I think one of the challenges with our, with the Defense Industrial Base is a function of time, not just money. You can say I want more air defense interceptors, right, or another Patriot battery, and the answer will be great. You'll have one in three and a half to four years. And so, there's, I'm not going to be able to solve this in one answer. but I'll take off a couple of things. One, there's a lot of good thinking and work being done, both at the department and on the Hill, about acquisition reform, in ways in which we will speed acquisition, do a better job of buying things that the U.S. military needs, and hopefully shedding some of the legacy systems, speeding up those processes, bringing new competitors into the marketplace.

All of that is gonna be to the good. I will also note. I'm thinking more from a requirements perspective about a portfolio approach. I have an air defense problem against UAS, go find me a solution, industry, rather than I'm gonna spend two years and come back to you with, I want you to build this end state item that is probably already overtaken by events by the time you get there. So, I think there's a lot of good thinking that we wanted to continue on that. I think we also need to start thinking more creatively about how to incentivize through means other than just trying to do multi-year procurements or boosting demand in the short term, building more production infrastructure capacity. Some of that is about the government investing in machining tools and other sub-tier components, critical minerals, things that I've mentioned, work that's being done on supply chains. Some of it is also thinking about public-private partnerships with industry.

What is industry going to commit to in terms of maintaining excess capacity, even in leaner times? Same goes for workforce. How do we start thinking more strategically about a workforce within the defense industrial base that really, to my mind, should be considered at least part of the national security workforce? What can government do to incentivize not just recruitment, but also retention so

those folks aren't sort of let go the minute the contract ends I'm in ways that also make business sense for industry because we're not in a command economy right now and I don't think we're, I don't think we want to be, right? And so ultimately at the end of the day we need to find ways where for the defense sector there's a business case for them to move forward but it also meets our national security needs in a way that quite frankly right now we are not. So those are just a handful.

SISSON: Does either of you want to weigh in, or should we take one more question? One more question, please. Let's go over on this side. There's a person, the only person with a hand up over there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi, thank you. I am Mikhail Udominsky. I am Ukrainian priest, military chaplain. My question is what do you think, what situation will be much dangerous for U.S. if the Russian wins the Russian war against Ukraine or if it will lose? Thank you.

EAGLEN: I want you to start.

O'HANLON: I'll start, she'll clean up what I say. If Russia were to win this war, and by winning, of course, we could have a conversation what that means, but the initial fear was that Russia wanted all of Ukraine, or at least the overthrow of the Zelensky government and replacement with a Belarus-style puppet, if you will. I think that Putin would have felt that his worldview was vindicated, and he seems relatively indifferent to the lives lost, even on the Russian side. And so, I think he sees himself in grand historic terms with Catherine the Great, Peter the Great, Vladimir the Great. And he thinks that the course of history justifies the sacrifice.

So, if he gets what you're talking about, it's very, very bad because I think he starts to wonder, can I do the same thing in Latvia and Estonia with the Russian speaking populations, Moldova? I don't know if he would really want to attack Poland, But, he might take on Lithuania just because it's the way over to the Kaliningrad enclave. And so, the temptation is going to be there if he wins. And if he wins, it will also be our collective failure, let's face it. And by the way, let me salute you and your countrymen and your president and I think I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but I think a lot of

people in this room agree with me and in our country that your courage and your performance on the had been amazing. But having said that, you are outgunned, outnumbered, and we don't know where this war is headed. So, I think it's crucial the United States understand that it's one thing to try to freeze the conflict where it is. That's a partial Russian win, but it's also not a complete Russian win. It's something else entirely if Putin can feel vindicated in his fundamental objectives being satisfied. Because then I think there's a very high chance it makes him greedy and ambitious. to cause more mayhem in Europe, including on NATO territory. So, I think the stakes are still quite high.

SISSON: We have time for one other brief intervention from either or both of you, and then with apologies, we are going to have to end our time.

EAGLEN: If strong men respect strength and power, then that needs to be the ultimate thing in Putin's head when this is over, however it ends, on all sides. So, we need it, you need it, he needs to understand it.

TANKEL: Yeah, I would just, I would, I would, I just want to endorse having worked on this for three and a half years in one form or another at State DOD and then the National Security Council, you know, the, the, the, the thinking was always try to put Ukraine in the strongest possible position going into 2025, noting that this was going to have to end one way or another at the negotiating table, but to, to then say, okay, we're going to I'll see you next time. Bye. Russia, everything that they are asking for, that they could not get on the battlefield, to me would be an incredible diplomatic disservice and put us at risk going forward for the reasons that Mackenzie and Mike both mentioned.

SISSON: For those of you who were not able to forage your questions today, I hope you'll come back next time and try again. Thank you for joining us, and if you would please join me in thanking our panelists for their time today.