



# Conversations on National Security and U.S. Naval Power: A Discussion with U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton

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## TRANSCRIPT

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**BRYAN MCGRATH:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome. On behalf of the leadership of the Hudson Institute and my boss, Dr. Seth Cropsey, in the Hudson Center for American Seapower, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you today to our conversation with Congressman Seth Moulton, who represents the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' 6th District of the United States House of Representatives. Congressman Moulton was born in Salem, Mass., graduated from Harvard with a bachelor's degree and a couple of master's degrees and lives in Salem with his wife and daughter. A Marine Corps infantry officer and combat veteran, Representative Moulton served four tours - combat tours before transitioning to the private sector. In 2014, he unseated an incumbent in the 6th District's Democratic primary and then went on to win the general election in the fall. Now in his third term, Representative Moulton is a member of the House Budget Committee and the House Armed Services Committee, where he has gained a well-earned reputation for national security insight and expertise. And that is why we invited him here today. Congressman Moulton will have a few opening remarks, and then he'll join me in conversation for the bulk of our time together. I'll set aside a little time at the end of our session for some tightly constructed questions. And then upon conclusion of our time together at 11:15, the congressman has a hard stop. I ask that you remain seated, and we'll exit stage left. Please join me in welcoming Congressman Seth Moulton.

(APPLAUSE)

**SETH MOULTON:** Thank you very much. It's an honor to be here. And I'll be brief with my remarks so that we can get right to questions and enjoy the conversation. But thank you so much for having me, and thank you to many of you for your service to the country in different ways but especially overseas. I want to tell you a little bit about just who I am and why I'm here. And fundamentally, the fact that I am here today as a United States congressman really comes back to my time in Iraq. Iraq is where I learned how much I love serving this country, but it's also where I really saw firsthand that America needs to do better. From the day that we were issued woodland green camo chemical weapons suits - and we joked that they were saving the desert ones for Korea - right up until the terrible scandals with Abu Ghraib and the drill abrogation of leadership at the top, I knew that this was not America at its best, that we could do better and we had to. Oftentimes, I found that we were fighting on entirely the wrong battlefield, where we were on the frontlines fighting al-Qaida in Iraq, and yet al-Qaida was beating us on the internet. That should be the other way around. Iraq is also the first place that I really saw what it means to - the tremendous difference between the hardworking men and women fighting our wars on the ground out there at the pointy tip of the spear and the folks back here in Washington who start them. And I think that that is true today more than ever before.

In fact, all of the problems that really came of age during the last 15 years of war have gotten us to a point where we now face great power competition like we truly haven't seen in America since the lead-up to World War II. And I think we run the serious risk of being entirely leapfrogged by China and Russia. And for a while, I thought that the best way forward was simply to double down, to go back to the strong tradition of foreign policy that we've already - always had. But I think that now has changed. And simply doubling down on the past will not be good enough. You know, if you have an old house, and it gets completely damaged in a storm or something like that, you don't just rebuild it to look exactly like 1950, when it was constructed; you renovate it. And I think that analogy is apropos to our foreign policy today. We don't need to just rebuild the old. We need to build something new - something more relevant, something better. In with the new is an important part of that phrase. But just as importantly and often more difficult is out with the old. This means recognizing the new arms and new alliances that we need and the old weapons and the old wars that we don't. To me, that boils down to three core issues. We need newer, smarter, stronger arms, alliances and arms control. So first with arms - we need to invest in the next

generation of defense. I asked a member of Navy leadership a couple of years ago, coming before the seapower subcommittee, how many times China has attacked a US aircraft carrier. Of course, he said, none, sir. And I said - how many times has China attacked us through the internet? In the last 24 hours, sir? The punchline is this. Right now we're investing 16 times more in aircraft carriers than in cyber. And we at least need to ask the question - is that the right balance? Arms control is just as important, and here's why. Most people think of arms control as purely a way of reducing the overall number of weapons that everybody has. But done well, arms control also makes us stronger by giving us a strategic advantage. And I'll give you a good example with the INF Treaty which, of course, is quite a bit in the news today. The INF Treaty only limited land-based intermediate-range missiles, not sea- or air-based systems. Thus, it dismantled the Soviet Union's ability to use short-range - intermediate-range targeting against our allies in Western Europe. But it gave us an advantage in air- and sea-based missiles where we had technically more capable weapons. And so therefore, the treaty not only made everybody safer but it actually gave us a strategic advantage over the Soviet Union.

That's the kind of thinking that we need today. And it's not just with traditional weapons systems, like perhaps developing a new INF Treaty that might encompass China. It's also thinking about what sort of arms control we need for things like cyber, like artificial intelligence. We should be getting ahead of these issues, and we should be making sure that our arms control deals favor us, not our adversaries. Finally, alliances - we need to reimagine our alliances for a new world. Many will call for strengthening or re-strengthening NATO after Trump leaves office, and I am among them. But NATO was put together under 1949 rationale. We need a NATO for the 21st century. And we should be asking whether a form of NATO for the Pacific, to help contain China, is something that we should have as well. Likewise, we should be re-examining our troop commitments in places like Germany. We need to continually ask the question - are we putting our resources where they are needed most today, not 20 or 50 years ago? In summary, it's time to completely reimagine our arms, our arms control and our alliances for a new and rapidly changing world. That's a long way of saying that we need to make hard choices and new investments. And whether we rise to the challenge will ultimately be determined by the courage of our leaders. Just a little south of here at Quantico, Va., was where the Marine Corps taught me, in 2002, about the two types of courage - moral courage and physical courage. In warfare, we usually talk about physical courage. But I found that in Iraq, the most difficult challenges I faced require both. We expect courage in all respects from our troops every single day. The only courage required in Washington is moral courage. In the four years I've spent here, I've found that moral courage is often in short supply. But we need it to make these decisions. Our troops deserve it, and our national security demands it. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

**MCGRATH:** Thank you, sir. Have a seat.

**MOULTON:** All right.

**MCGRATH:** You just mentioned Iraq and the Marine Corps.

**MOULTON:** Right.

**MCGRATH:** Take us back to 2001.

**MOULTON:** What was going through my head?

**MCGRATH:** What caused you to join the Marine Corps?

**MOULTON:** You know, to be honest it was actually - I was in college then. I graduated in June of 2001. And it was the school minister back at Harvard, who talked a lot about the importance of service. He was not only the minister in the college church, but he was the professor of one of the most popular courses on campus. He was a real moral guidepost for the university. And he talked about how it wasn't enough just to believe in service or support others who serve. You got to find a way to give back yourself. So I looked at different options. I looked at Peace Corps. I looked at teaching overseas. The Office of Career Services at Harvard did not have a big section on the military, believe it or not. But that college church was built to memorialize the Harvard men who died in World War I. And then, shortly after it was completed, they added this massive marble wall for all the men and women who died in World War II. And you couldn't go to church every Sunday and not be struck by the amazing commitment to our country made by these, you know, in many cases, 18-year-old kids. And so that's where I decided to do my part. Now, I had no idea that September 11th would happen three months after graduation, that I'd end up in the first company of Marines into Baghdad or that I'd go back there, you know, three more times after that first tour. But there's no question that I wouldn't be here today without that experience. I did not study politics in school at all.

**MCGRATH:** Excellent. Great reason to join the Marines. One of the things Marine Corps leadership has said in the last few years is that they need to return to their naval roots. A whole generation of captains had come up through the - come up - had developed who had not had an actual float experience. Did you get a chance to be a float before you went into Iraq, or were you one of that generation?

**MOULTON:** I actually sailed to Iraq for the invasion. So I crossed the Pacific twice for both my first and my second deployment. The second deployment, in the spring of 2004, we were just ready for a regular WestPac view, you know, just the regular float, and that's what we were training for. And then at one point they started - you know, we would go down to the ship on occasion in San Diego, and they started pulling all the helicopters off and replacing them with trucks. And they said, we can't tell you where we're going. OK, well, it was pretty obvious.

**MCGRATH:** (Laughter).

**MOULTON:** So we ended up back in Iraq. But I think that there's some truth to that, but I also think we have to be careful. I mean, in a sense, yes, there's an amazing history of power projection by sea that the Marine Corps embodies. And with the increasing - you know, one of the things that the Pentagon has pointed out is that with climate change, most conflicts will be happening in the littorals. This is something the commandant talks about a lot, is that the pressure from climate change will be most felt in the - you know, the areas of countries right around the coast. And there's a clear connection between that - those rising pressures and increased conflict, so it's another reason why the Marine Corps needs to have that naval presence. But at the same time, an - you know, a naval presence that gets you to Iraq in 40 days, or whatever it took us, does not really address the cyber threats that we face, does not really address the, you know, unmanned undersea aerial vehicles that Russia and China are developing, the hypersonic weapons that they're developing, right? So I think that we have to be careful about, you know, even within the Marine Corps, making sure we maintain those core competencies, but also updating them for a new world.

**MCGRATH:** So you mentioned a series of tough threats. Hypersonic weapons...

**MOULTON:** Cyber, AI.

**MCGRATH:** Cyber, AI. Clearly, these threats are most publicly manifested by China and Russia. The administration has made great power - the return to great power competition the centerpiece of the national security strategy. Do you agree with that move, and do you think we might be ignoring some other things?

**MOULTON:** Well, I agree with the move, and I think we might be ignoring some other things. You have to understand what your greatest threats are, but that doesn't mean that there isn't a continued threat from terrorism. And so those who see this as purely a tradeoff, I think, are seeing it wrong. We live in an incredibly complex world where there are threats from a lot of different places, different actors. I think that the threat from - the more immediate threat from Russia and the long-term threat from China is paramount. And we have to be able to confront those threats in an aggressive way or else they will leapfrog right over us. But at the same time, it doesn't mean that we can take our eye off the ball with transnational terrorism and other things like that. We just have to figure out what the right balance is. And I think for the last 20 years, we've had a supreme focus on the Middle East. And I'm - I am proud of what my Marines and I were able to do in Iraq. But let's be honest, I mean, we have, I think, two or three - four times, I think, more Sunni extremists in the world today than we did on 9/11. We have - although we talk a lot about taking back all the territory from ISIS, and that ground fight has been successful in Iraq and Syria over the past four or five years, I think if you look globally worldwide, ISIS or other extremist - related extremist groups control literally more land now than they did then. So we have to ask some big-picture questions about our overall strategy with the war on terror, with the fight against terrorism. But it doesn't mean that it's not a continued threat. And without question, I think that if you just look to when I went into the Marine Corps in 2002 - which, I mean, for the young people here seems like a long time ago, it doesn't seem like that long ago to me - and we weren't talking about China at all back then.

**MCGRATH:** You are one of the young people (laughter).

**MOULTON:** (Laughter) I just turned 40. It makes me feel old.

**MCGRATH:** (Laughter) We talk about fleet architectures as a way of describing how you arrange naval forces, Marines. You've cited a few of the threats that you see in this environment. Which of these threats should have the most impact on how we build the fleet architecture of Marines and Navy?

**MOULTON:** Well, I think this is an open question, and I'm chairing a subcommittee, a task force on the future of defense to ask these questions. So I don't want to just presuppose the answers. But look, I'm here to ask questions, not - to answer questions, not to dodge them. And if I just had to personally pick of all these different things that have been mentioned - cyber, AI, hypersonics, you know, terrorism, whatever - all these different things, if I had to pick the one that seems to me like the biggest national security threat to us today, it's AI. And China has made a very clear commitment to match us in AI by 2020 and be the world leader by 2030, and we really have not had much of a commitment in return to beating them. I asked the Secretary of the Air Force about this in an open committee hearing, I think, last year. It was a really equivocal response. And, you know, the Trump administration recently came out with an executive order on AI which unquestionably is a step in the right direction, but it's nothing - nothing - compared to China's commitment. I think we need to be candid about that, need to be honest with ourselves about that. AI is something that will dominate - that will be a part of our lives in every respect. I mean, you'll have AI in your refrigerator when you get the orange juice out in the morning. But we're also going to have AI on our weapons systems. AI will be essential to our economy, and whatever country is leading in AI will have a massive economic advantage of us - over us. But whatever country - whichever country is leaving in it - is leading in AI will also have a serious national security

advantage over us. And we've got to make sure that we are the number-one country in AI without question if we want to continue to succeed.

**MCGRATH:** I think, as your task force dives into this, one of the things that I would like to offer that would be useful is looking at that particular threat and having smart folks talk to you about how that changes - or what changes it makes to the architecture.

**MOULTON:** Right. Right.

**MCGRATH:** I don't think people understand that yet.

**MOULTON:** No, that's right. Because if you agree that that is a serious threat, then you have to ask questions like, OK, we have this commitment to a 355-ship navy, which is basically - I mean, that's like saying that, you know, well, we have a certain number of, you know, frigates in 1790. And, you know, the - Britain's got more, so we need to get more frigates or something. I mean, it's a very, very old-fashioned way of looking at naval strength. Three hundred fifty-five minimally capable ships is nothing in comparison to 355 really capable ships. Where does autonomous underwater vehicles - where does that fit into this, you know? Where does swarming tactics fit into this? The answer from the Navy is that, oh, we don't count them. We're trying to build a 355-ship Navy. We don't count autonomous underwater vehicles. OK, that's fine in 1980. That's not OK for today. Our adversaries are building these capabilities, and we've got to make sure that we're devoting our understandably limited resources to the right kinds of capabilities that we need.

**MCGRATH:** The number, whether it's 308 or 325 or 355, is always criticized. No matter what the number is it's criticized as too limiting.

**MOULTON:** Yeah.

**MCGRATH:** And if we added unmanned vehicles, the number would be inflated.

**MOULTON:** Right.

**MCGRATH:** And people might take a shot at that. Do you think it's possible to come up with a fleet description, a construct for describing a fleet?

**MOULTON:** Good question. Right.

**MCGRATH:** Yeah.

**MOULTON:** Because my point is that it's just silly to be asking this question about, you know, numbers of ships at all. It's sort of like - you know, I have two cellphones because I have official, you know - Hillary Clinton has a problem with this - I have two separate cellphones to keep things separate. And they're, you know, like, iPhone 7s or whatever. Now, no one would say to me, OK, well, Seth, you know, I've got five rotary dial telephones. You know, I've got five, and you've only got two. Completely different technology, completely different capabilities, right? But that's kind of how people look at our Navy right now when they're just talking about the numbers of ships. You know, what are those ships? What are their capabilities? That's the key question we have to be asking. And you're right. I don't have a good answer to that question. But if you could figure out a way to frame it for people to understand that this is really about naval capability, not about numbers of ships, we'd be in much better...

**MCGRATH:** Sir, nobody has a good answer to that. Nobody does. There are a lot of people - and I am one of them - who says that this - that there is a big strawman out there, this capability versus capacity...

**MOULTON:** Yeah.

**MCGRATH:** ...Question, largely because of the things the Navy and Marine Corps does in peacetime that requires sort of presence missions. That then drives this numbers again. We get back into the numbers game. Can you account for - should this fleet-sizing construct account for those presence missions where a ship can only be in one place at one time?

**MOULTON:** Yeah, sure. But, I mean, again, we've got to ask the question. I mean, what's more important, having a presence with a naval ship there or having a presence on the Internet to cover what's going on in the cyber realm? I mean, these are just - these are tradeoffs we have to meet. What formerly might have required a five-ship naval presence to, you know, surveil an area, it might be irrelevant based on our satellite capabilities, or our capabilities with the Internet or our drone capabilities, right? I mean, you know, back in the day, if we wanted to know if, you know, Britain was going to hit the New England coast, we had to have some ships out there because that was the only way we could tell. All right? That's not the world that we live in today. So we have to keep asking these questions. And there may be this - you know, there's this argument that, oh, you know, you can't just trade off capacity for capabilities or whatever. But let me also tell you this, I've never been an admiral. I've never even been a major in the Marine Corps, but I've been a lieutenant. And never did I have someone come up and say, oh, you can have five more Marines. Do you want them? And I'd never say no, right? I mean, whether you're a guy on the ground who wants more troops or an admiral who wants more ships, everyone - you're always going to want more, of course, right? It's our job in Congress to really set out what is the strategic framework we should be operating under.

Let me give you another example of this. I was in Eastern Europe in 2015 to look at the, you know, European Reinsurance Initiative (ph). And it was the first time that I saw really up front what Russia was doing with hybrid warfare. Now, I saw how they were actively working their political influence campaigns to undermine democracies and elections in Eastern Europe. I did not expect them to try it against us. But in response to this, what we were doing was conducting increased tank drills in Poland. And I talked to some of these, you know, tank company commanders. And they understood that it was a little bit silly, that Putin was probably laughing at us. While he was busy undermining our allies' governments, we were doing tank drills like it was 1949. But even if that tank company commander, that captain in the Army recognized that we were spending our resources in the wrong place, it's not like he had the ability to take some of that money he was supposed to spend on JP-5 for his tanks and put it into cyber, right? That's our job. You know, we've got to make sure that we're spending these resources in the right place up front. And that's something that I think we're struggling with right now in Washington.

**MCGRATH:** You have a unique position on both the Budget Committee and the Armed Services Committee. And there is - there are rumors attendant to the next defense budget that there might be a great big pile of money in the overseas contingency operations, or OCO.

**MOULTON:** Hard to imagine.

**MCGRATH:** Yeah.

**MOULTON:** That's a lot of rumors.

**MCGRATH:** How do you think that's going to go over on the Hill?

**MOULTON:** I think that a lot of what I'm saying is that - a lot of what I'm saying today comes back to just a question of being honest with ourselves. We've got to be honest with ourselves about what the real threats are because it's always more comfortable to invest in what we have. We

have the world's best aircraft carrier, so it's always more comfortable to invest in them versus think about what the Chinese are doing with their missiles that can defeat aircraft carriers, right? We have the best troops in the world by far. It's always more convenient just to think about, you know, investing more in them versus asking, you know, can this job formerly done by a platoon be better done by a drone? And so if we're not able to answer these questions honestly, we're not going to be able to make the best defense strategy. And I think, fundamentally, when we're playing gimmicks with our budget, putting money in OCO that belongs in base defense, we're just not being honest with ourselves. The services come to us every single year and say, don't put fundamental investments we should be making in the future of the force in OCO because it's - you can't predict how the money - you know, we can't predict whether the money will even be there next year. So we can't do any long-term planning. We can't really invest in addressing these long-term threats from places like Russia and China if we just have this little handout every year that's cloaked in secrecy in the sense that, you know, it's just thrown in as an extra thing in OCO and not actually part of our core defense budget. So what we need to really do is be honest with ourselves about what the threats are out there and what we need to invest as a country in the long term to meet those threats. That means being just straightforward about what's in the defense budget.

**MCGRATH:** Here's a tough one for you. Lot of people at the Office of the Secretary of Defense, on the third deck of the Pentagon, believe that the amphibious force of the Navy and Marine Corps has little utility in the - in a China scenario. What do you think?

**MOULTON:** Well, you know, it's interesting. I had this conversation with the commandant recently. And I think that when people say the amphibious force has little utility, they're imagining that the Marine Corps is going to pull up and invade mainland China, right? But in some ways, what's going on in China, you know, immediately specific - like, for example, in the South China Sea - is a red herring for all the places where China is expanding its influence around the globe. That's where we need to be focused. China - I'll tell you what folks, China already owns China. They got it. They've had it for a long time, a lot longer than we've had this country here, all right? We're not talking about invading China. What we need to be concerned about is that as China expands its influence, they'll be taking over countries, allies, places on the periphery where we might need to fight back. Those are the scenarios where - these littoral combat areas where the Marine Corps, I think, will be increasingly relevant. So it's not back home in China. It's farther afield.

**MCGRATH:** Understood. So you're sitting in a think tank started by one of the titans of nuclear weapons theory and strategic weapons theory. The Navy is moving at full speed ahead on recapitalizing its leg of the triad, the SSBNs. Do you believe the Navy's got it right?

**MOULTON:** From all that I know, I think they're pretty close. And this is a position that's not going to be popular with all of my Democratic colleagues. But the simple fact of the matter is that, you know, the laws of physics are limiting the longevity of the Ohio-class submarine. And while we could all agree in this room, I bet - but certainly I would like to see nuclear weapons eventually go away - right now, we need nuclear weapons to defend our country, to prevent war. And the SSBNs are the most survivable leg of the triad. So in some ways, those are the most - that's the most important investment that we need to make in our nuclear arsenal. So I think that we have a lot of money to spend and some tough choices to make because money is not limitless. And if we spend a lot on the Columbia class, we will have to cut other things to do so. But I think it's a necessary choice. And so, you know, we'll continue to conduct strict oversight of the Navy and ask tough questions of them. But so far, I think that their program makes sense, and it's headed in the right direction.

**MCGRATH:** You've talked a little bit about backward thinking and vestiges of the mid-20th century. Is the triad one of those?

**MOULTON:** Well, it may be. And Secretary Mattis, to his credit, asked this question. He came in - he's, I think, said this publicly - he's come in to the - you know, this new position as Secretary of Defense and really questioned whether we need the triad. His conclusion was that we do, but this is a question I think that you don't just ask it once and put it to bed for 50 years. We need to continually keep asking this question as technology evolves but hopefully also as arms control evolves. And this is one of the points I tried to make in my brief remarks, is that we've got to expand our view of arms control from the - sort of the strict Cold War sense that we still live in. You know, the only really big arms control treaty that anyone's talking about right now, beyond the INF debate, is New START, which is a very - it's an important treaty, but it's a very Cold War-era treaty. I was an advocate, even more so five years ago than I am today, for a treaty limiting drones. And the reason - there's basically two reasons for that. One, I think drones are actually very dangerous. And given our capabilities with drones, you know, it's going to be pretty frightening when other - when our adversaries get those same - that same level of capability themselves, but also because, five years ago, we had such a huge lead on drones, and if that was where we drew the line in the sand and limited them, I think it would have given us a huge strategic advantage. Now, I think even today some sort of treaty limiting drones could still give us a strategic advantage, though maybe not as much as before. But these are the kinds of questions that we need to be asking. An arms control done right gives us an advantage that we should have over our adversaries, just as the best arms control treaties from the Cold War did with the Soviets.

**MCGRATH:** Am I correct in assuming that your support or your commitment to that idea has diminished over five years because our leadership in the technology has diminished over the five years?

**MOULTON:** Well, I just - it might not have - let's be fair - it might not have even made sense five years ago, but it was frightening to me that no one was even asking the question. We still need to be asking that question today. My intuition is that it still may be valuable. It still may be very worth doing, but perhaps our strategic advantage to be gained from such a treaty isn't as great as it would have been if we had done it earlier.

**MCGRATH:** One of the areas that the Russians have wished to bring into negotiations more so than they do - than exists now is missile defense. There are some in the Navy who question whether the Navy ought to be protecting dirt. That's the way the Navy people put it. Do you think the Navy should be heavily invested in ballistic missile defense, or is that something that ought to be done by the Army?

**MOULTON:** Well, here's the reality today. When you look at our missile defense sites, in Poland, for example, there are Aegis destroyer sites. And if you visit it, it literally just looks like the top of a ship put on the ground, right? So - which says amazing things about this naval capability. So we have this incredible capability right now in the Navy, and I think without question there is value in having it being transportable around the globe. So we have to ask a question about whether - you know, when we have, for example, ships doing donuts off of Israel, whether there are perhaps places where we could do that mission more efficiently with ground-based systems. But I don't think we should just eliminate that capability from the Navy because it's an incredibly valuable capability to have, that we can shift to different hot spots around the globe.

**MCGRATH:** Two summers ago, the country was captivated, in a terrible way, by collisions of two destroyers. Seventeen sailors lost their lives in the Pacific. The Navy has put a good deal of

energy and corporate interest into learning lessons and implementing those lessons. How do you grade their progress so far?

**MOULTON:** Maybe a B? I...

**MCGRATH:** Is that a tough Harvard B or is that a UVA B? I mean...

**MOULTON:** (Laughter) There's a rumor of grade inflation at Harvard, so I'm not quite sure how to answer that question.

**MCGRATH:** (Laughter).

**MOULTON:** But, you know, I think that they're making progress. But I think that sometimes in - the Navy really needs to ask some real tough questions about leadership. And, you know, I'm biased because I come from the Marine Corps. But the Marine Corps does - makes no bones about the fact that they focus on leadership. They teach leadership. They embody leadership. If you go back to that - you started off this discussion by asking about my decision to join the Marines, and I basically explained how I came to decide to join the military. I didn't explain how I chose the Marines over the Army or the Navy. I mean, seeing those names on the wall made me want to be on the ground, but it was actually an Army lieutenant colonel who convinced me to join the Marines. And he had done everything you could ever want to do in the Army - Ranger, Special Forces and everything else - but he said he just so admired the Marine Corps' respect to integrity and leadership, no matter what job you had in the Marines - that he thought I should be a Marine. And the point is that so many of these questions really do come back to questions of moral leadership, and that's why I ended the speech there. That's why I talk about just being honest with ourselves when it comes to the defense budget. And I think that when you look at some of the recent failings in the Navy, whether it's the ship collisions that you just mentioned, or it's the incident with Iran in the Gulf where several sailors were captured, I think you have to - a lot of these come down to the basic leadership training of sailors in the Navy. And I think they need up their game.

**MCGRATH:** Excellent. Sir, I think we have a few minutes for questions - you game?

**MOULTON:** All right. Absolutely.

**MCGRATH:** All right. Remember, in the form of a tightly constructed question, we have staff walking around with - back in the back room there in the gray suit.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Hi, Congressman. Good morning

**MOULTON:** Good morning.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** My question is about Southcom, the lowest priority command. Back in 2017, Southcom requested the U.S. that the U.S. Navy recommission the Perry-class frigates so that it can be utilized to crack down on drug trafficking in the eastern Caribbean - in the eastern Pacific and the Caribbean. The Navy declined to do so. Meanwhile, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard continues to crack - to combat maritime drug trafficking in those said waters. So my questions will be, what's your opinion about Southcom's situation nowadays? And will Southcom, now under Admiral Faller's command, and the Coast Guard ever receive the platforms that they require to carry out their operations, such as maritime drug interdiction in their AOR? Thank you.

**MOULTON:** It's a good question. It's a very important question. I'll be candid with you. I'm not a Southcom expert. I haven't visited recently, so I don't have a very specific answer to your question about these frigates. But I do think the entire mission of Southcom is now increasingly tied with our questions about immigration back home. And in some ways, that's one of the elephants in the

room that we don't like to discuss. But we need comprehensive immigration reform. I don't think there are many people on either side of the aisle who think that our immigration system is working well right now. And one of the big questions that we have is, is there a role for our foreign policy in addressing some of the drivers of these migrants from South and Central America that we should be, you know - do we need a Plan Colombia for other parts of the world? I think that's a really important question, and obviously it's intimately involved with Southcom. So the answer about - you know, the answer to the specific question of whether or not we need frigates for this particular mission has to be a part of a larger discussion about the role of Southcom in our broader national security.

**MCGRATH:** Sir? One of our allies in the room.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Yeah. On? Yeah. Alliances are...

**MOULTON:** By far the best-dressed person here today, so...

(LAUGHTER)

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Oh, you're going easy on me. Sir, thank you for your comments. I'm one of the Navy attaches in the Canadian embassy just down the street. I look at this picture on the wall over here. It's a wonderful picture, and there's a whole bunch of allies in there. And alliances are often about how you treat your allies. So what are we going to do with 232? Are we going to fix these steel and aluminum tariffs? Because I know you're from a shipbuilding and a repair and overhaul state. And do you think we can move past that so that we as partners and allies can collaborate more closely?

**MOULTON:** Well, I'm going to be - I'm going to start by saying something that may surprise many of you in the room, but I don't have great insights into our president's thinking. So I don't really know the answer to your question. It's an important question, and I don't mean to make light of the question. But the fact of the matter is that we have a really unpredictable commander-in-chief who often doesn't take the advice of those even closest to him. That, fundamentally, is why Secretary Mattis resigned and many other Cabinet members have resigned. And so I don't know where this is headed. But I will say this. The United States Congress is absolutely committed to our allies. And I'm sure you can find a couple of exceptions here or there, but by and large there is a bipartisan consensus in the Congress that our allies are incredibly important, that our alliances around the globe are incredibly important. And when I was last in East Asia attending a security conference there, the overriding message that I heard consistently time and again, every time we sat down with a different ally - from not the Democrats especially, but from the Republicans - was don't forget that we have different branches of government. They were acknowledging that they don't agree with the administration's approach to our alliances and to our allies. But they said, don't forget Congress is an equal branch, and we're here for you, and we will continue to be here for you. And I think that's the important message that you need to hear from me.

**MCGRATH:** Right here in the front row, gray tie.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Thank you so much. And my question to you is you've made some pretty large calls to action for policymakers surrounding new warfare fronts and different aspects of reconstructing NATO and all these different agreements that we have that they're kind of outdated. So how do you plan to push for the actual motions on these when you bring - present these ideas to Congress and to the House and Senate? What's, like, your plan to action to make these things actually push through and have policymakers make the decisions they need to make?

**MOULTON:** It's a great question. And thank you very much for your work with the American Legion and all that you do for veterans like myself. I say that as a proud member. The first thing I'm going to do is I'm going to chair this task force on the future defense. In many ways, what I've presented to you today is not a series of answers as a series of questions. And the important thing right now is that we're seriously asking these questions. I don't know what exactly the right answer for NATO is. There are differing opinions on whether a sort of NATO in the Pacific makes sense at all or not. So I don't know all the answers, but we have to be asking these questions. And the first place I will be doing that is on this new task force on the Armed Services Committee. That's a place where we can start having the discussion to come up with some better ideas of what our policy should be, what our big-picture strategy should be throughout the globe. I met with - just a couple of days ago with an old friend and colleague from my battalion in the Marines who's still in the Marines today and has become, you know, I think a lot of people think a leading thinker in the Marine Corps. And, you know, one of the things that he was pointing out is that we just don't have a very big-picture strategy right now in the United States of America that even people like, you know, the commandant on the Marine Corps, you know, the secretary of the Army, whatnot, can agree on or understand. And what that means is that when you go to a place like Afghanistan, and you talk to the troops on the ground, and you say, what is your mission here? They don't really know. And that's a real problem.

And I contrast that with my experience in Iraq, where, even in the midst of a war that I personally disagreed with and that was - you know, had a lot of problems, we understood what we were trying to achieve. We understood our mission. We had made this decision to support the government of Iraq. We had a great debate, in fact, about whether we should divide Iraq up or whether we should keep it together. Not everyone agreed, but we decided we're going to keep it together. This was the mission. So whenever I went out on patrol any night in Iraq just to take care of a neighborhood, I knew that the ultimate goal was to strengthen the government of Iraq and that was our ticket home. Go ask a private, a lance corporal or even a captain in Afghanistan today, what's your ticket home? I'm not sure they can really tell you. Or they might give you an answer and then sort of say, well, we know that's not going to happen, sir. That's the kind of answer I get a lot when I go and visit the troops, and that is a problem. So we got to ask the right questions. Do that first. And then we've got to come up with a strategy that we can implement. Thank you.

**MCGRATH:** Side of the room, way in the back.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Thank you. Earlier, when you were talking about the need for restrengthening alliances, you mentioned the idea of NATO for the Pacific. What would that look like for you?

**MOULTON:** Well, I mean, this is - I alluded to in the last question, there's a lot of debate about whether that's, you know, possible or not. But the basic premise, that you have an alliance to provide mutual security, is something that was - I think many people feel is central for the protection of Western Europe against the Soviet Union. And with the rise of China, there seems to be a pretty clear at least strategic-level analogy with that. Now you sort of have to have to ask the questions, you know, what are those allies like? Are they willing to work together? You know, two key partners in this alliance, in theory, would be Japan and South Korea - not the best of friends, right? So there are some real questions about actually putting something like this together and its implementation. But there's no question that, one, we have great allies in the Pacific that share our concern with a rising China and, two, that they are pretty concerned right now about our commitment to the region. That's something that you hear every time you go there. Maybe putting together an alliance like this would not only benefit our mutual security but would just

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strengthen each individual country's commitment to - you know, to be defensive of - if China, you know, really tries to do much more.

**MCGRATH:** Congressman Moulton, thank you very much. We got about 30 seconds left till your hard stop at 11:15.

**MOULTON:** All right. That's really good.

**MCGRATH:** I want to thank you for coming. I want to thank you for your service and your continuing service. Any last words for us?

**MOULTON:** Well, I just want to thank all of you for being a part of this discussion. Many of you come here with different particular vested interests or whatnot. But what's most important at the end of the day is that we think about the future of our country. And when I - you know, one of the controversial battles that I got in in my - I think in my freshman year was over the A-10. I'm sure there are people out there who love the A-10 because the A-10 is a great ground support aircraft, but the Air Force said it is not the right way to spend our money. We need to invest in future capabilities. And many people said to me, well, Seth, this is easy for you to argue because, you know, you're not the congressman who represents the largest A-10 base in the world and is an A-10 pilot, you know, and was in a really tough congressional race last year, like my opponent in this debate. And I said, actually, you know, the single biggest employer in the single biggest city in my district is a GE aircraft plant that spends - that will make hundreds of millions of dollars off of re-engining (ph) the A-10. And I had to go back and explain to those workers why I was not fighting for that engine. But they didn't give me a lot of pushback because they understood that I was doing the right thing for our national defense. And it brings me back to the most memorable conversation that I had with anyone in my first campaign. It was with a United States Navy veteran from World War II. He had fought in the Pacific. And I came up and introduced myself to him in a little diner in Rowley, Mass., that's been there since 1940. And I said, you know, I'm running largely because of my experience in Iraq. I'm running because I'm a veteran. And I thought this fellow veteran would be impressed by this and have a lot to say, and he really didn't. I mean, I think he's probably seen his fair share of politicians over the years. But he did say one thing. He said, Seth, if you win this race, promise me that you'll go to Washington as an American - not as a Democrat or as a Republican, but as an American. That's the kind of congressman that I've tried to be every single day. And I think those are the kinds of people that we need to be as Americans fighting for our national security. Thank you very much.

**MCGRATH:** Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

**MCGRATH:** Appreciate it. That was wonderful.