



Virtual Event | The US Army in the Indo-Pacific Region

TRANSCRIPT

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- Honorable Christine E. Wormuth, *25th Secretary, United States Army*
- General James C. McConville, *40th Chief of Staff, United States Army*
- Dr. Patrick M. Cronin, *Senior Fellow and Asia-Pacific Security Chair, Hudson Institute*

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Patrick Cronin:

Hello, I'm Patrick Cronin Asia Pacific Security Chair here at the Hudson Institute. And I want to welcome you to a special program, to talk with the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army, about the future of the Army in the Indo-Pacific region. It's a timely topic. We couldn't have better leaders of our Army, I would say, right now, in terms of our civilian and military leadership. Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth has a career of achievement in both analysis and policy, her analytical chops at CSIS, where I also worked, but more recently at RAND, where she was in charge as the director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center. Which may not be well known to people outside the defense community, but it really is a hub of strategic analysis and thinking directly going into shaping policy at a high level. But she has served at high level in policy, including as undersecretary of defense for policy, which really is the top policy job in the office of the Secretary of Defense. But she's also served at the National Security Council as senior director for defense and other many other positions. So Christine welcome, thank you very much for joining us.

And General James McConville is the 40th Chief of Staff of the Army, a West Point graduate, an Army aviator, extensive combat duty, the longest serving wartime commander of the 101st Airborne Division, what Bob Gates dubbed the tip of the spear. Commander of the Long Knife, 4th Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division at Operation Iraqi Freedom. A great deal of operational experience and leadership. Between the two of them, we have the combined arms that are helping to train, equip, and organize our great U.S. Army. But these are perilous times. And the Indo-Pacific strategy that was released just last month talked about shifting toward our priority theater and then boom, war when you least expect it, or maybe when you do expect it, nonetheless it creates global reverberations for security forces. So Secretary Wormuth, if I could turn to you and then General McConville to you for some brief initial comments, then maybe we could follow up with some conversation.

Christine Wormuth:

Sure, Patrick. First of all, thank you so much for having the Chief and I here. We're delighted to be here. Right at the top I would say it's really important that we as a country and as an Army, I think, be able to walk and chew gum. Keep our eye on China, keep focused on the INDOPACOM theater while doing everything we're doing in Europe to make sure that we are deterring aggression against NATO and supporting Ukraine, for example. I thought I would just talk a little bit about what I see as three lines of effort for the Army in the Indo-Pacific. First is active campaigning which is sort of what we're doing day to day to sort of set the theater, make sure that we have combat credible forces in theater for deterrence. And then to talk a little bit about integrated deterrence, a concept that you've heard Secretary Austin talk about that I think you'll see much more of when the National Defense Strategy comes out.

And then to just say a few words about if deterrence fails what the Army could be called upon to do in the Indo-Pacific. So in terms of active campaigning, I think one thing that not everyone realizes is that two-thirds of the countries in the INDOPACOM theater have CHODs who are Army Generals. In most of those countries, the Army is sort of the center of gravity militarily. And that means that we have terrific relationships with the armies in most of those countries. And the Chief can talk very specifically and personally about the relationships he has with this counterparts. But that allows us, I think, to really

expand on something that I think is a comparative advantage for us, which is our network of allies and partners.

So what we're trying to do with our active campaigning is to be very present in the INDOPACOM theater. And we're doing that, for example, through what General Flynn, our U.S. Army Pacific Commander calls Operation Pathways, or sometimes you'll hear people say Pacific Pathways. And it's really just a series of exercises that we have with countries in the region. So for example, we have the big Talisman Sabre exercise with Australia. We've got Cobra Gold in Thailand, Balikatan in the Philippines. We have a major exercise with Singapore, for example. We have another big exercise with India. And really what we're trying to do with a lot of the countries in that region is build interoperability. It's going beyond building partner capacity, it's really building interoperability and creating opportunities to increase access and basing where we can, if we needed to in a crisis.

Another very important part of how the Army is contributing to active campaigning in the Indo-Pacific is through our Security Forces Assistance Brigade, the 5th SFAB, which is about 800 NCOs who are able to sort of divide up and go to multiple places in the theater and again do a lot of that interoperability development with allies and partners in the region. So shifting a little bit to integrated deterrence. A big part of what we're doing is, of course, again having combat credible forces in the theater. But it also connects back to what we're trying to do in the Army in terms of modernization.

We are modernizing in a very significant way, the most significant way in 40 years. We have sort of six different areas of modernization. All of which are relevant in the Indo-Pacific, but I would highlight in particular air and missile defense network, long range precision fires, future vertical lift. And we are working very hard to bring forward major new weapons systems and capabilities that will I think very much underwrite our ability to deter coercion in the theater.

And the last thing I would just say is if deterrence were to fail, I think the Army has a number of roles that it will play in that kind of a conflict. There's a real tendency to focus on INDOPACOM as solely an air and maritime theater. And I think that looks past the fact that the Army will be central to, I call it sort of the linchpin of the Joint Force. We will be central to setting up bases where the Joint Force can stage from, we will be critical to securing them, again that gets back to air and missile defense. The long range precision fires, our multi-domain task force will have a fires but battery that could include the long range hypersonic weapon, it could include our mid range capability. And then we also will be key I think to command and control, to sustainment. And of course, if necessary to providing forces for counterattacks. So as I said at a speaking engagement last week, there's very much still a role for soldiers on the ground, even in the Indo-Pacific. So I'll just stop there.

Patrick Cronin:

And then in the homeland as well, if it comes there, right? With cyber.

Christine Wormuth:

Absolutely. Which sadly the homeland really isn't a sanctuary anymore. And I think if we were to get in a real shooting war, our homeland would be part of the theater.

Patrick Cronin:

Excellent. We'll come back to some of these points. But General McConville.

James McConville:

I think I always follow the Secretary's lead on this thing, which I think is very, very important is the relationships that we have with our allies and partners. Many of the chiefs of staff and the chiefs of defense, that have gone to our schools, who have worked together over the years and as a result, we have a very, very strong relationship. And they are very integral into really allowing us access and to allowing us to be present. We work very closely with their forces. And that helps us build their capacity, build their capabilities, and also really important is the fact that we're reinforcing them or at least reassuring them the will to defend their countries. And I think everyone realizes that is in their theater is they want a free and open Indo-Pacific. They want to have prosperous lives and they don't want to have to make tough choices about who they're with or what's going on. They just want to be able to live their lives. And I think we're giving them that opportunity. In many cases, we're the security partner of choice. And we work very closely with them and I think that's one of the things we provide as a military force.

Patrick Cronin:

Excellent. Well there's a lot to follow up on these points. But I wanted to turn back to Secretary Wormuth and just talk a bit about the Indo-Pacific strategy that was released last month. And you made the point that we have to walk and chew gum. I think everybody who works on Indo-Pacific knows that we're a global power and the Army in particular has global responsibilities and you see the interchangeability of brigade combat teams and where they can be dispatched and how they can be used. So it's not really either or. Nonetheless, the fact that we have this Russian invasion, unprovoked war suddenly emerging in Europe and potentially escalating. Threat of chemical and biological weapons, nuclear level. How is that affecting your plans to try to make sure the Army can walk and chew gum in terms of being ready for deterring potential conflict should it arise in East or South China Seas for instance or around the Korean Peninsula?

Christine Wormuth:

Yeah. Well I would say a few things about that Patrick. I mean, I think first of all, we have as we look at our different war plans, contingency plans, we try to make sure that we have an Army that's sized to be able to meet the demands that we think are out there. And because we've done I think a very good job of maintaining readiness, we've been able to deploy forces from the United States to Europe quite rapidly. But we still have our forces on the Korean Peninsula, we still have forces in INDOPACOM that are assigned and allocated to Admiral Aquilino. And we're working very hard, I think, to try to maintain deterrence even as we do the things that we are doing in Europe. And of course, I think an important part in this day and age of maintaining deterrence is our nuclear triad. That's sort of the ultimate insurance policy and I think that's something that our adversaries have to bear in mind, frankly. As they think about contemplating opportunistic aggression.

Patrick Cronin:

Well on that nuclear issue since you raised it, I mean we have allies including in Japan, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, talking about the need to at least start debating should we be housing U.S. nuclear weapons because how do we strengthen extended deterrence to make sure that a potential adversary

like China doesn't miscalculate, or North Korea as well. And so there's an open debate, also in South Korea, with the newly elected president-elect Yoon Suk Yeol. So in an extended deterrence, partly it's dealing with the people and those relationships and making sure they trust us, partly it's having those troops on the ground as we do, when you think about the Eighth Army and Korea. But how can we help prevent, how can we make sure that potential adversaries understand our determination to defend our allies and partners with all available means?

Christine Wormuth:

Well I think there's a number of ways that you can go about that. And it's been awhile frankly since I've been in sort of into the heart of nuclear policy. But I do know, we have an entire dimension of our alliance with Iraq for example that talks about extended deterrence. And there's a whole platform there to try to make sure that they have confidence in our extended deterrence. And I think I would, again it's been awhile since I've sort of been in these debates, but I would hesitant to contemplate for example bringing nuclear weapons back to the peninsula for example. But I think that's why we have forums with the Koreans to be able to talk about those kinds of issues, and the Japanese as well. And as you know well the issue of whether Japan should develop its own nuclear weapons is a bit of a hardy perennial that sort of ebbs and flows. But I think it is very important that we have a very robust dialogue in both of those alliances about extended deterrence so that they do have confidence.

Patrick Cronin:

And I know we've been beefing up air and missile defenses and that's maybe an easier way to defend our allies and partners through defensive means like those systems. I see a Patriot battery getting called into service right now in the Korean Peninsula just in response to Kim Jong-Un's latest missile threats. General McConville, I was reading through your chief of staff Army reading list, and I was stuck by the very first reading, which was FM 7-0, the field manual for training. And I thought what an appropriate thing to read at this time. And I started to go through it and it's better reading than you would expect for somebody who's much more comfortable reading Colin Gray or some of the other books on your list. It starts off with a winning attitude, first of all. And people and it basically says, "To all the troops, if you want to win, understand these concepts first and then we'll build from there and we'll do it together." But you want to just talk about how we're training the Army to be prepared for the wars we see happening and that could happen?

James McConville:

Yeah. I think if you take a look at the Secretary and I, we talk about people first. And it's really getting our people highly trained, disciplined, and fit. It's about building cohesive units in our organizations because as we see when it comes to conflict, you can have all the capabilities which is the best gear, you can have a lot of capacity, which is a whole bunch of gear, but if your soldiers don't have the will to fight, if they don't believe in what they're doing, if they don't believe in their leadership, they're not going to stay when things get hard. And I think you see that happening in Ukraine right now where they believe they may not have the best kit, they may not have the most, but they're standing strong because they believe in their country and they believe in their leadership.

Patrick Cronin:

It is impressive and also horrifying to see what they're having to fight with and the civilian population and urban warfare on television, essentially, and on Twitter.

James McConville:

That's right.

Patrick Cronin:

Are we prepared for that kind of fight?

James McConville:

Oh, I think we are. I think our troops, we've seen it. Those who have fought in Iraq, we've fought in Sadr City, we've fought in Baghdad, we've fought in Fallujah, in Najaf. So our soldiers are very well trained for those type of operations. But we can never take our eye off the ball. That's why readiness for us is one of our top priorities.

Patrick Cronin:

Secretary Wormuth, when I think about Taiwan, or the Koreans, or the Japanese, I could see them being just as much in the fight completely to protect their interests and their sovereignty and yet I think about the PLA. They've not had any recent combat experience, but they've had formidable modernization plans that they've been working on for years. How do you characterize and think about the PLA challenge or threat to the region and to our allies, as well as to our direct interests?

Christine Wormuth:

Well I'm quite concerned, obviously, about the PLA threat. As you know well, and all of the folks I'm sure who are watching this forum, they've embarked on a very impressive 20 year effort to comprehensively modernize their military across every single service. The creation of the Strategic Rocket Forces. As you said, they have very impressive capabilities. Now I have always been of the view that one of the... We obviously continue to have overmatch in the undersea domain for example, but I think another really important area where we have a strong comparative advantage is in our soldiers. It's in that human dimension, A) our force has 20 years of combat experience, holistically, if you will, but it has the kind of training that General McConville was just talking about. I think we have a much more decentralized, empowered force, I think, than the People's Liberation Army. So those are areas, I don't think we should be at all about that because I know that the PLA has been studying us, looking, they've made some major reorganizations to become more joint, for example.

So I think they are watching the way that we train and maintain readiness very carefully, but I still think we have some important advantages. And I think, again, and the chief mentioned this also, I think one of the really key things that's happening right now, if you're Japan or Taiwan or South Korea, is looking at the difference in the will to fight. And the fact that the Ukrainians are fighting and frankly the Ukrainians have done a lot of work, since 2014 in particular, to increase their proficiency. And I think that's something that I would imagine that the Taiwanese are looking at carefully.

Patrick Cronin:

There was some very impressive testimony this past week, Assistant Secretary of Defense, Ely Ratner, talking about the PLA and the challenge building on the administration's new Indo-Pacific strategy, Admiral Aquilino as well, talking about the priority theater and how we were going to continue to be focusing on building capability, but very much wary and aware that the Chinese could escalate their own gray zone sort of coercion on allies and partners. And indeed, that's what we thought maybe Russia was doing against Ukraine until they jumped above the gray zone and hybrid warfare into more direct kinetic action. So are we prepared for that kind of leap, a sudden attack either it could be a North Korean attack or could be a Chinese seizing an island of the South China Sea, or suddenly putting an offshore island of Taiwan, is the army ready to work with a joint force on these contingencies right now, today?

Christine Wormuth:

Yes, absolutely. And I think I would ask the Chief to talk. We were actually just in a meeting a couple hours ago on what we call Project Convergence, which is sort of our premier sort of campaign of experimentation. And one of the things I think that's so important about what we're doing there is that we are working together with the Air Force, the Navy, the Marines, Space Force, and looking ahead to our Project Convergence '22, we're going to be bringing in some of our closest allies, but that's where we're trying to really look at some of our new technologies and how we tie them together. How do we get an F-35 to be able to send data to an army platform on the ground, for example, but that's the kind of stuff we are working on right now. And I don't know if Chief, if you'd want to elaborate on that.

James McConville:

I think the Secretary said it, we're ready today, but we're not satisfied where we're at. We've got to modernize the Army and we want to keep that overmatch we have. And one of the general concepts we're working on, as the Secretary talked about is the future to us, it's about speed, it's about range and it's about convergence. And so you have weapon systems that may go really fast, they may go really far, but when you bring them together with convergence and you pass data very, very quickly, you can get effects, lethal effects on a target, much faster than we ever did before. So tens of seconds buys tens of minutes or of tens of hours. And that gives you decision dominance, which quite frankly gives you the overmatch we need, and the ability to sink ships, the ability to suppress air defense in these capabilities is a deterrence factor, knowing that some may want to seize an island, or they want to do those type things. And if you're going to seize an island, that means you're doing one of three types of operations, or maybe all three, you're doing an amphibious operation, you're doing an airborne operation, or you're doing an air assault operation. All those are very complex, they take highly trained troops to do it, and anyone with a certain capability can impede that from happening.

Christine Wormuth:

And the other thing I would add Patrick, is that not only do we have incredibly proficient soldiers, but we have incredibly capable leaders and leaders who are able to bring together allied and partner capabilities. So if you look at, for example, Erik Kurilla, who's about to go be our CENTCOM Commander or General CD Donahue, who just... There was a change of command so he was the Commander of 82nd Airborne, now he's 18th Airborne Corps, but they are out in Europe now, and again, not just

commanding and making sure that our soldiers are able to do what they're doing, but to bring together allied and partner capabilities so that we can work together. And that's another thing I think that we have an advantage over the PLA, we are used to working in coalitions on the ground and have real time experience in doing that in a way that they do not.

Patrick Cronin:

It's all very impressive on the convergence side, I wanted to come back to both sort of the high end and the low end of that. On the low end, let me start there because of the Russian military operation, Ukraine seems a set of lessons on what not to do. I mean, besides the big strategic miscalculation and to have bad policy, the logistics, even ammunition and water and food running out from their armor columns, how could they do this for one thing? I mean what were they thinking? This is premeditated and planned and that's-

James McConville:

Well, you know the old adage, professionals study logistics and amateurs study tactics. But I mean, the plan was a very complex plan when you took a look at it and I think a lot of people had seen the plan and it was multiple accesses and then had airborne type operations, air assault type operations, and even amphibious operations, all involved in that. And the proof becomes in the execution, in order to do that, you have to have highly trained soldiers that're able to do that. And if you have a conscript army where people only come on duty for a year, when you go into the Super Bowl, you may not have the right people to execute that. And if you haven't run those type of operations before, while you're contested, they become very, very challenging. And I think everyone that has done those type operations, only the very, very best could execute that plan, and now we're seeing some of the challenges that go along with that.

Patrick Cronin:

Yeah. When you see conscripts sort of being captured, wandering around the battlefield and lost and abandoning their armor...

James McConville:

It takes a long time to train soldiers, and we're very blessed. We have a Non-Commissioned Officer Corps with the United States Army. So as the Secretary said, a lot of our Non-Commission Officers have 3, 4, 5, 6 combat tours, and they've been doing it for a long time and it'd be like a professional football team, if you only played one year and you have to go to the Super Bowl and you didn't get to practice much, it's probably not the best team to bring to the game.

Patrick Cronin:

So this sounds like the state of the Army is very good right now in 2022 even though we want to get better, but we're bringing on all this transformation, all this technology, all these new investments in modernization. So on the higher end of this convergence, is there a cost to be paid as we bring in these new technologies and we introduce the speed in other attributes, whether it's hyper velocity missiles or the new vertical lift platforms that we're trying to build?

Christine Wormuth:

I see two areas of risk, Patrick, one of them, I think one of the hardest things the Chief and I have to do is, look at our finite set of Army resources and make judgements about how to spend that money and the kind of once in 40 years modernization push that we're going on is not inexpensive. So that's a big bill right there, but we've also got to make sure we're maintaining readiness. We've got to make sure that our soldiers and families have good houses to live in, good barracks, and have quality of life. So managing all of that simultaneously is a challenging thing. There's always going to be another set of barracks that we'd like to upgrade, we'd always like to get another improvement to our quality of life programs, for example.

So those kinds of choices, that's a challenge I would say, as we sort of embark on this major transformation, and then I think the other potential risk area I see is, there is going to come a point, we're not there yet, where I sort of think in terms of three timeframes, we have the Army we have right now that we're trying to improve and sort of the current five year defense program is really focused on that. Where can we add in capabilities? And then 10 years out there, is that Army where we fully brought online future vertical lift, next generation combat vehicles, all those types of things, but there's going to be that midterm transition phase where I sort of think of it, it's like, you're on a trapeze, you're holding on and then you've got to let go to grab the next trapeze thing, whatever it is. But that moment where you let go and you're in between, there's some risk there. So I think that crossing that bridge safely when we get to it is going to be something we'll have to pay a lot of attention to.

Patrick Cronin:

Now I assume it's partly because we're introducing these platforms while we're keeping the old ones at the same time.

Christine Wormuth:

Exactly.

Patrick Cronin:

So we're minimizing risk in that sense, but General, I'm wondering, as somebody who's flown helicopters and I'm watching those Russian helicopters be shot down with fairly simple hardware that we're helping to provide, if we're going a lot faster and we're in a very expensive helicopter and we're shot down with a relatively inexpensive weapon, although it can cost maybe 800,000 dollars, I think, for a Stinger missile, nonetheless, are we able to afford to build enough platforms or are they going to be able to protect these platforms in the kind of combat environments of the future?

James McConville:

Yeah, I think we can, and we've done a lot of analysis to make sure. Interesting enough if you take a look at the Turkish UAV, which they call the TB2, that's flying around pretty much what we would consider, we say a legacy system, flying around an altitude and you would think any good air defense system would take that down. I don't know why it hasn't, but with our aircraft, as we look into the future, it'll be

manned and unmanned aircraft. We like to lead with unmanned aircraft to kind of set the conditions. There's certain protection systems that are, we can't really talk about, in this thing that we have for our aircraft. There's also tactics, techniques and procedures, how we employ those aircraft and when you use them, do you use them at night, do you use them during the day. So we're pretty comfortable with where we're going and what we're doing, that we need that capability, but it's just not... We don't want to be a one option force. Flying helicopters by themselves is probably not the way you want to do it. You want to use multiple options and really present multiple dilemmas to the person that you're engaging against.

Patrick Cronin:

Mm. I wonder if we can switch back to the Korean Peninsula a bit because it's on my mind, Kim Jong-Un is threatening to launch ICBM and the U.S. has said that the last two missile tests that he's conducted of more than a dozen this year already were oriented toward building a new monster ICBM, the Hwasong-17, which was on parade back in October 2020 I believe. If North Korea conducts a test that leads to a threat to Korea, to Japan, to the United States, are we prepared to, and ready to work with an effective response? I'm thinking about the lack of exercise that we've been doing in recent years with the Korean Peninsula, partly to feed into the diplomacy of trying to negotiate constraints on North Korea, so are we ready now? Are we going to pick up where President-Elect Yoon is talking about, let's resume military exercises as soon as possible, let's redouble our efforts on defenses, air and missile defenses? How do you assess the Army's readiness and the joint force readiness in a Korean scenario?

Christine Wormuth:

Well, I think certainly, I think the Army is ready to do what it's going to be called upon to do potentially in Korea, General LaCamera was just in town and he and I talked about that. So we're ready to do what he needs and what, again, Admiral Aquilino, needs. I think some of the exercise activity changed because of the pandemic, obviously. I mean, it wasn't just the diplomacy, but there was that, but we've continued to conduct training as you know, with South Koreans. And I think with the new administration, sort of where training goes and whether it scales back up again, and to what degree will really be sort of a US/South Korea Alliance decision. But I think if there is a decision by the Alliance to scale that training back up, I think the army would be ready to participate in that and do what's needed.

Patrick Cronin:

What do you think General, are we ready to scale up our exercising?

James McConville:

I think so. I think if you've seen our training philosophy in the Army, it's really, if you could put it into a... This may not make sense, but it really looks like a wedding cake, so we want to spend the most time on our soldiers, our squads, platoons, and work our way up to the top. And when you get highly trained soldiers at the bottom, then when you come up with a plan, they can execute it and so what you're seeing is a lot of the bigger exercises are more helpful with the logistics, but the units that we send there, they're already fully trained before they go. And we rotate forces in there, they're at our highest level of readiness when they go there and they continue you to practice that. So I'm very confident in the Army units that go there, that they're ready to fight tonight, and that's their mission.

Patrick Cronin:

The question of long range, precision fires has been a priority, especially for the Army as it's going to give the United States and the Army and the Joint Force, a lot more ability to push back at the anti access and area denial capabilities of countries like China. How are we progressing? How is the Army progressing with the long-range precision fires and the move toward making sure that we have lethal long range strikes that can deter conflict, can make sure that we're not blackmailed from introducing our forces forward to protect allies and partners?

Christine Wormuth:

We are progressing really well. I mean, first of all, we are developing a whole suite of new systems for long range, precision fires, from the extended range cannon artillery piece, for example, all the way up to our hypersonic weapon, which is the long-range hypersonic weapon. That right now we're sort of co-developing with the Navy and the ground equipment for that first battery is already out with a unit in Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state, we are on track to actually have the weapon system itself, the missile, if you will, be fielded in '23. So we're doing very, very well, I think.

Christine Wormuth:

So we're doing very, very well, I think. And we're also developing the precision strike missile, there are a few different increments that have a range of ranges, and then we also have mid-range capabilities. So I think we feel really good about where the Army is in that part of our portfolio.

Patrick Cronin:

And I want to ask you about the multi-million task force as maybe related to that, but General, on the long-range precision fires, how do you see the progress in the field?

James McConville:

Actually exactly what the Secretary said, we're very pleased with how fast this is moving. This is a three, four year program, going from an envelope to a fielded capability is significant. And what it's going to give the co-combatant commander is really multiple options. So when you think about the fact that we'll be able to sink ships within a fairly good range, so you can even set up no-sail type zones using the midrange capability. Have hypersonics in some of these long range systems, you can basically suppress an integrated air and missile defense capability to give the joint force more capability and to basically penetrate an anti-access area denial capability. So there's a tremendous amount of capability there that we think is going to provide a lot of options.

Patrick Cronin:

Good. And the multi domain task force; I mean, as I understand it, this really brings together the space, cyber, kinetic, non-kinetic effects that we're trying to bring on the battlefield, but presumably the long-range precision fires fits into that, but also the communications and networking. How is that progressing? Are we learning things out of Europe right now that may change what we want to do in the Indo-Pacific as well?

Christine Wormuth:

Yes. Yes to all of that. I mean, we have an MDTF for the Pacific. We have an MDTF in Europe. We are ultimately planning to develop at least five multi-domain task forces. I think one thing that not everyone knows is that they are tailorable, I would say, to the different theaters. It's not a one size fits all. Obviously the distances that you're looking at in the Indo-Pacific theater are much, much greater than in the European context, for example. So on the fires battery that can be part of the MDTF, the types of systems; you would see a lot of applicability, for example, to the long range hypersonic weapon in the Indo-Pacific theater, whereas you might focus more on prism for the European theater.

But the other part; and you alluded to it, Patrick, with the MDTF; is the focus on it's not just about kinetic fires, it's also about the non-kinetic fires. It's looking at how do we bring together cyber effects, how do we bring together electronic warfare, even information advantage. And when you were talking to the chief a minute ago, I think that's something that we're really seeing in a very stark way in the European context is the importance of the information warfare that's happening. And the MDTF, I think, will allow us to be more skilled in that domain than we have been in the past.

Patrick Cronin:

Indeed, the information domain coming out of the Ukraine war is a lesson every day in terms of how people are speaking or what's being cut off or how they're communicating. Are we going to be able to control the information battle space in the Indo-Pacific?

James McConville:

I don't think we want to control it, I think we want to make sure that we're in a position to get the truth out. I think it's very, very powerful to lead with the truth. And we're seeing that happen in Ukraine. And if you think about really what any type of conflict is all about, it's someone trying to impose their will on someone else, and you want to make sure that you have the will to fight, and that can all be impacted by the information space and what's happening there. And I think it's really important for us to get the truth out, to lead with the truth. And I see that happening in Ukraine right now. And what you're doing is you're uniting a whole bunch of people and you're turning them against what's happened. And I think that really makes a difference when we talk with nation states.

Patrick Cronin:

Of course, the Chinese are very good with their own information campaign, even denying the word "invasion" and then accusing the United States of disinformation by saying that they're not neutral in this war, they're not trying to seek peace. They're actually on Russia's side to some extent. Without getting into that political issue, the question of China's propaganda machine and political warfare machine, it's immense compared to, I think, what the U.S. has. This is central to their political system surviving.

James McConville:

Yeah. Well, I mean, we're a little more challenged, I'd say in a democracy, but we have an obligation to certainly inform and educate the American people what's happening. And we do that and we play by

different rules, which makes it more difficult. But I still believe if we stay true to our moral compass and do the right thing the right way, the truth will precede it. And we're seeing that in Ukraine, there were some people said they weren't going to attack Ukraine when we had a pretty good idea they might. And so those type things are happening. And when people get to see with their own eyes, because there's a lot of social media out there capturing what's happening, I think the truth can prevail.

Patrick Cronin:

And when you're speaking to the chief in India or the Philippines, you have a good sense that you see eye to eye on most things?

James McConville:

I think so. It's interesting, you talk about information age. I mean, we want to make sure that... A lot of these folks have been to our schools, and so they know what we're about. They know about our values. And quite frankly, I think they respect them.

Patrick Cronin:

Well, the power of strategic education. I think we've seen this, it's such a tool to build a network of like-minded people with the same kind of interoperability skills, but also common strategic vision. What's the army doing to try to make sure that we're building that network for the future?

Christine Wormuth:

Well, I mean a few things, and I know that General McConville can elaborate on this probably better than I can, but first of all, we have officers from foreign militaries coming to our schools through IMED, for example. We have our FAOs out, we've got FAOs who are Northeast Asia, Central Asia, Southeast Asia. And that's another tool that we use. But I think General McConville probably can talk a little bit more, since I know some of his colleagues have been in our schools.

James McConville:

Yeah. One of the best examples I can give is with the Thai military. Their chief of staff had been to a lot of American schools, really appreciated the training. So we did a joint training rotation with them at our combat training centers. And usually they would've sent a small amount of people, about a company, about 150 soldiers, and get a chance to train with one of our brigades. What he did was he basically went to his military academy, the equivalent of his West Point, he took the entire, basically about senior class, put them in that company, because he wanted them to come to our schools to get that training experience, work with our leaders. And he thought it was that important to... So his entire year group of officers was going to have that experience. And that goes throughout how we do business with many of our allies and partners.

Patrick Cronin:

And hopefully coming out of COVID, we're able to do more of this in person than we-

James McConville:

Yeah. We are. And we've been doing it ever... That did not stop us during COVID.

Patrick Cronin:

And the FAOs, the Foreign Area Officers; I mean, I just briefed a large group of them, and what an impressive set of resumes and experiences these have. I mean, diverse, from Rhodes Scholars to people who have had tremendous experience in the field for years specifically focused on big countries or significant countries. But are we developing that kind of expertise and bringing it into the decision making centers as well, where you are operating all the time in terms of all the people you're dealing with, Secretary Wormuth, they're all making high level policy decisions. Are we bringing that expertise that often gets, in the case of the military services, put into boxes of expertise and go deal with the Thai, go deal with this country, up into the policy making arena?

Christine Wormuth:

Patrick, we could probably do more of that, given what assets our Foreign Area Officers are. That said, I can think of... It's not an INDOPACOM example, but we are going to be selling fantastic, extremely modern tanks to the Poles, for example. And this was something that was in motion before Russia invaded Ukraine, but the attaché there was very, very helpful in terms of working with us as we were in that dialogue with the Poles. And our FAO there did have a role, I would say. They weren't piping into the situation room. I mean, frankly, we weren't talking about the sale of Polish tanks in the situation room. But they were able to bring their perspective, I think, to our thinking about going forward. But that's probably an asset that we could leverage a little bit more.

Patrick Cronin:

And how about in the field, General?

James McConville:

I think they're absolutely critical to what we're doing as a sector. Every time we go somewhere, deal with any foreign leader, our FAOs are there. They're bringing us up to speed. When you go down and meet with them, they're in the room, they're there to provide that insight, they're attachés, they're doing all those critical roles. And so I think they're a critical part, especially where we don't have a lot of presence. So what we're seeing in the future is a lot of places, we're not going to have a brigade inside this country. So that FAO, that attaché, if he or she is highly qualified, is working very closely with the senior leadership of that country, getting the right resources in there, getting the right training, making sure they get an opportunity to go to school, and setting up, helping facilitate exercises. So I think they're extremely important.

Patrick Cronin:

Thinking about small partners like Taiwan, they become force multipliers in terms of understanding the complex situation on the ground and what's happening, where we don't necessarily have a lot of people on the ground.

James McConville:

Right. And I think it's really important for opening up avenues for us, understanding where their interests are and what they may be receptive to and not receptive as we're developing these relationships. I've found them very, very important in my travels.

Patrick Cronin:

We talked about exercises in the opening, but I'm very impressed with the exercises right now with the Philippines, where we're taking advantage of prepositioned afloat forces. Can you speak to that, Secretary Wormuth, and talk about whether we have the adequate funding to make sure that we can fully preposition the kinds of forces that we saw in Europe being so effective to get the readiness of our troops working with allies, like the Philippines, say, should there be a dust up in the South China Sea?

Christine Wormuth:

That's a great point, and it's something General McConville has been observing quite a bit in the last couple of weeks, that the fact that we had the preposition stocks that we had in Europe was a big part of why we were able to move as quickly and effectively as we have. So I think it speaks to the importance of having that in the Indo-Pacific theater. And this is something I think we're trying to look at where can we build that out and how can we perhaps use the PREPO that we have in theater already in more effective ways. So when General Flynn was in town recently, we were talking about offloading some of those stocks and actually using them to do some training and then loading them back onto the ships.

We're very interested, and I think looking for, more opportunities to have PREOP in theater. I think it's really great that Secretary Austin was able to make the progress with the agreement with the Philippines, to be able to sort of open back up some of that hard work we did on the EDCA a few years ago. But part of that is we've got to let the defense diplomacy move forward, but I think we'd be very interested in finding more opportunities to have greater PREPO in the theater.

James McConville:

And I think by way of example in, as you see what's going on in Europe, we've had prepositioned stocks over there for quite a while, but what we did about two years ago, we really invested in them, because it's nice to have tanks and all these different type things, but if they're not the most modern tanks, if they're not kept up to speed, it's like putting a vehicle in a garage for two years and then we're going out to start it and then you have to use it and there's cobwebs. That's not what we did it all. We put the very best equipment in there, so when our soldiers went over there, they were immediately ready. They were able to draw it. And we basically had the 82nd drawer and infantry brigade worth of equipment. And we had an armored brigade combat team draw an armor brigade, and they do it in days. And with the transportation that saves and everything else, it makes things very, very quick.

Patrick Cronin:

This is where the politics have been preventing some good things from happening that could have happened in Thailand because of the junta that we're still able to deal with very well these days with Cobra Gold and other exercises, but we're coming back out of a hole with that relationship in the

Philippines. Rodrigo Duterte has been a delicate partner to have as an ally. And yet you're right, Secretary Austin was able to go back and give the visiting forces agreement, sort of re-signed up for that, get the enhanced defense cooperation agreement, the EDCA, back on track, start to get those multiple sites around the Philippine archipelago ready for exercising, training, prepositioning. And they have an election in May, and we're likely to see Marcos.

Christine Wormuth:

That's right. The son.

Patrick Cronin:

Exactly, the son, Bongbong Marcos, rise to power. And that bodes for another complicated relationship. And yet I think there's still going to be progress there and opportunity for the Army to keep moving along with the other services with a critical piece of Asia Pacific, Philippines is right in the middle, so critically important. I wonder if I can ask about a very different part, and that's the Arctic strategy, and what is the role of the Army in the Arctic? So going from the middle of the Indo-Pacific to something that is outside of the Indo-Pacific technically, but it relates to it. So what is the Army's role in the Arctic?

Christine Wormuth:

Yeah, we've been trying to push our thinking about that, and the army put out a climate strategy, I think in March of last year. And right now we have an administrative headquarters up there, we've got forces, obviously, that can work with INDOPACOM to do Arctic types of training; whether it's with Japan, for example, or India. But I think there's more that we can do, and we've been looking at how can we perhaps build out on the capability that we have in the Arctic right now. It's obviously a very important strategic location, and I think our forces there could get to the INDOPACOM theater more quickly than our forces in Hawaii, actually. So that is something that we're looking at. It's certainly, I think, something to look at vis-à-vis Russia. There's very much a view that the Arctic needs to remain. We've been a good citizen, I would say, on the Arctic Council for many years. I think the strong desire of the United States is to keep the Arctic defensively oriented. And we're in support of that, but we are looking at how we can do more with Army forces there to contribute.

Patrick Cronin:

Absolutely. This is where the enemy gets a vote though, so if Russia or China, China as a so-called near Arctic country, self described, wants to militarize the Arctic or space, we have to find ways to respond. How do you see the Arctic General?

James McConville:

Well, I see it as a potential campaigning area, if you want, or competitive space. I think we need to have those type capabilities. And as Secretary said, we do have forces up there. We have an airborne brigade and we have a striker brigade, but historically we looked at it as a basing option. Move the striker brigade over into the Pacific or do something with that. We can envision having an Arctic type brigade that's equipped, trained for the coldest periods of time. And they also have the maneuverability in that environment. Strikers are good for a certain terrain, but when you start to get into heavy snow and

those type things, we're taking a hard look at how that brigade should be equipped. And there's other opportunities when it comes to multi domain task forces. What type of capabilities would we want to tailor up there? And as the Secretary said, the headquarters historically has been administrative type headquarters. We can see that becoming more operationally because you may want to employ those forces up in that area. And you want a capability to do that.

Patrick Cronin:

Yeah. My father was in the Aleutian Islands during World War II and it was not hospitable territory and that's-

Christine Wormuth:

Minus 30 degrees in the winter.

Patrick Cronin:

That's short of the Arctic. I want to turn to a serious topic about the withdrawal from Afghanistan. On the one hand, our troops are so experienced from the recent wars. On the other hand, very contentious issue of withdrawing from Afghanistan. But putting that aside, what are the lessons that we should be taking forward out of the experience of the Afghan War?

Christine Wormuth:

I think one of the big lessons I think for looking across the full 20 years of our involvement in Afghanistan is there are at least two I can think of. One is I think we have to constantly be asking ourselves, what are the vital national interests that are at stake in any given situation? And frankly, I think if you look at how the United States is handling the current invasion of Ukraine, that question is, I think, front and center. And that is a big part of why we have made it very clear that we're going to defend every inch of NATO territory, but provide assistance to Ukraine. And I think that's grounded in thinking about what are our vital national interests vis-a-vis a nuclear armed country, for example. And I think just reflecting on my own experience as a policymaker at the time, for a portion of those years, sometimes we spent a lot more time talking about should we have 40,000 troops or 80,000 troops, and not as much time talking about what are we trying to do there?

What is at stake? And are we making progress towards the goal that we've set? And I think the other thing that I see more tactically in a way looking at how we left Afghanistan is always question your assumptions. And the intelligence community was very much of the view that the Afghan government was not going to collapse quickly, that it would take the Taliban weeks and potentially months to take over the country. And that didn't prove to be true, but assumptions are key. And again, if you look at Ukraine and Russia, I think, going to the chief's point about logistics, I think Vladimir Putin assumed that the Ukrainians would crumble rapidly and hence he didn't have to worry about a lot of fuel, a lot of supplies and things like that. Well, that assumption was fatally flawed.

Patrick Cronin:

General, your thoughts on this lessons.

James McConville:

Yeah, I think when I take a look back, certainly did not like the way that ended. Many of us had served multiple combat tours there. All my kids have served there. My son-in-law served there and my son was there at the last minutes. But I think as we take a step back and we take a look at what happened. We went there to get Bin Laden. We were successful in getting Bin Laden. We went there to make sure that Al Qaeda was not operational. They were not operational for 20 years. And then we tried to give the Afghans an opportunity for a future. We built a security force. And I think we talked about it. We gave them the capabilities I think they needed. They were well equipped. We gave them the capacity. There was enough people there to defend the country. But for some reason or other, the assumption they would stay and fight and they would stay and govern, those assumptions did not turn out to be what they were. And by then, we were in a very challenging situation and that's how it ended.

Patrick Cronin:

The violence extremism of course goes on globally, trans-nationally, but a lot of it's popping up in Africa, still in the Middle East, but parts of Southeast Asia as well. How do you view the violent extremist threat and what the army is still doing, for instance, what we've done in places like the Philippines to help allies and partners combat radical jihadism and other threats?

Christine Wormuth:

Well, I think first of all, we have to keep our eye on the violent extremist threat, particularly in terms of, are there groups out there that pose again, a real threat to the United States homeland or a significant threat to close allies for example? Those kinds of threats, I think, have to be dealt with, but a lot of the other VEO threat is going to be a slow steady thing that's just going to be out there, but the Army has tremendous capabilities to be helpful in that regard, particularly in terms of our special operations forces. They're always going to, I think, be very relevant in terms of dealing with the threat, but also our SFABs, which were originally designed, frankly, more focusing on building partner capacity in the CENTCOM AOR, for example, is also another great tool to help countries be better able to defend themselves against the VEO threat.

Patrick Cronin:

And General, your thoughts on the level of the threat in the region?

James McConville:

Well, I think the threat is there. The violent extremist groups are not going away, but I agree with the Secretary, we need to do all we can through the appropriate advice and assistance for them to help them solve the problem that they have. And giving them the capability, giving them the capacity that they need, our special forces can certainly train high end units in their countries, along with our SFABs, which can build a conventional capability for security. But at the end of the day, those countries are going to have to do it. They need to be the lead and they need to be responsible for security. We can support them. We can help them, but we can't do it for them.

Patrick Cronin:

Secretary Wormuth, as time winds down here, I want to turn back to allies and partners in particular, because this has been a centerpiece of the administration's Indo-Pacific strategy, global strategy really, is to work on building that collective effort. In the Indo-Pacific there's no NATO, obviously. There is something called the Quad and those Quad countries, while they're at the moment focused on the positive agenda and not the negative agenda as our Indians will remind us, at the same time, a lot of latent potential, and a lot of overlapping bilateral, and trilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, India, on real security issues. And place like India massive army. Australia and Japan, more oriented toward of course, maybe the Naval and air component, but land forces continue to be a very important part. How do you see the cooperation with those particular countries?

Christine Wormuth:

I think the Quad is a really important security mechanism, if you will, or I should say regional mechanism, because as you alluded to the Quad has really not, particularly with India, focused or highlighted the security dimension, but we have a lot going on bilaterally with each of those countries in the security dimension. I think that's really important. And I think India is moving. As I look at where India was in 2010, compared to where it is today, I think India has grown increasingly concerned about China, looking at how China has been operating in the region. And the MacArthur Foundation actually commissioned a study from RAND a couple years ago that was looking at cooperation of countries in the region with each other, not even with the United States, but one of the biggest drivers of more defense cooperation, defense investment was Chinese actions.

And so I think the Quad is a really important mechanism for us. I think those three countries are incredibly important. The Australians are incredible partners for us in the Army. We have a lot of activity with them. They're, I think, very receptive to doing more with us. I think we really should, and the Quad frankly, has gotten China's attention. They're, I think, a little nervous about what's happening in the Quad.

Patrick Cronin:

I think so. General, any thoughts on the Quad countries?

James McConville:

No, we have very strong relationships with each of their armies. I've personally met with their chiefs and they're very interested in working together. We train together. We work together and I think we share a lot of the similar interests in the region.

Patrick Cronin:

I wonder if I can just turn inward. The audiences you have to deal with every day, whether it's the Joint Chiefs of Staff or whether you're dealing with the Secretary of Defense and other secretaries around the region. How much of a consensus is there that China indeed poses the pacing threat and challenge for the United States and for the region? And are we like-minded enough to be willing to act in a common strategy?

Christine Wormuth:

Certainly, I think there's a very strong consensus inside the United States government, particularly sort in state, defense, the intelligence community, that China is the pacing threat, but I've been very pleased. I think that is a fairly strong shared understanding with countries in the region as well. And I think, again, looking at how China is handling the situation with Russia and Ukraine right now, I think is getting the attention of the Europeans in terms of how they look at China and certainly getting the attention of countries in the region. I just had a senior Australian defense official come and see me a week or two ago. And I thought we would talk quite a bit about INDOPACOM, but they were talking about how focused they are and what's happening with Europe and what it means for INDOPACOM. I think there's a strong and growing consensus,

Patrick Cronin:

And General, what about among the chiefs and your counterparts?

James McConville:

No, I think so. We're certainly in line with the national defense strategy and we're also realized there's other concerns we have out there, like what's going on in Ukraine, but you see some type of connectedness. When we take a look at, it is just not one theater. It just not in Asia. It impacts the whole world. All these events because of the way the economies are tied together, the way the diplomacy's tied together, they all impact. So something happens in Ukraine, it affects China right now, and it affects the rest of the world. We just need to be aware of that. And the value of having a whole bunch of partners come together, and it's not just Europeans that are coming together on this, there's people throughout the world that realize that this is a serious incident going on in Ukraine right now.

Christine Wormuth:

And, Patrick, just to two finger on that really quickly. I think we fully understand that we don't want to force countries in INDOPACOM to choose. That's not what this is about. We recognize that countries that live in the neighborhood are going to want to have trade relationships and so on. And I think they often, most of them look at the United States as the security partner of choice, but I think, again, all of those countries are look looking at those relationships and dynamics in real time and making some shifts.

Patrick Cronin:

Well, I see our hour has flown by and Secretary Wormuth and General McConville, on behalf of Hudson Institute, thank you so much for your service and for your time and insights and good luck to you both. Thank you.

Christine Wormuth:

Thank you.

James McConville:

Thanks for having us, Patrick.

Christine Wormuth:

Great to be here.

James McConville:

Appreciate it.

Patrick Cronin:

Thank you.