



A Discussion with Lt. Gen. Eric Wesley of the Army Futures Command

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- Rebecca Heinrichs, *Moderator, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute*
- U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Eric Wesley, *Deputy Commanding General, Army Futures Command*

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TRANSCRIPT

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REBECCA HEINRICH: Thank you all for joining us. This was a collaborative effort between the Hudson Institute, where I work, and also Senator Cornyn's office, as well as Congressman Doug Lamborn's office in the House, so big thanks to them for helping us arrange this. We're here to talk about Army Futures Command and not just about the command itself but the threat that we are facing now and why we're thinking about some of the - some of these things that Army Futures is - has been delegated to think about. And with us today, we have Lieutenant General Eric Wesley, who I'm going to provide just a very brief bio of him. And then after I do that, the general is going to give some brief remarks. He and I are going to engage in some conversation. All of that will be on the record. And then you'll be able to find - if you're interested in something that he said - you know, that's a helpful thing. Then you can go to our website, and then they'll be - that will be transcribed. But then when we go to the Q&A section when we're done having a conversation, that's going to be off the record. And that's for you all to ask Lieutenant General Wesley - any questions that you might have. And that will all be off the record, nonattribution.

So with that, I'm going to go ahead and introduce the general. Lieutenant General Eric Wesley is the deputy commanding general of Army Futures Command and the director of Futures and Concepts Center at Fort Eustis, Va., where he leads the development of future operational and warfighting concepts that align and inform the Army's major modernization priorities. His command experience includes commanding general for the Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning, Ga., and maneuver formations from company to brigade. His operational experience includes multiple deployments in support of operations Joint Guard, Endeavor, Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. And with that, I'm going to turn it over to you, sir.

ERIC WESLEY: Thank you, Rebecca. And thank you to Hudson for putting this together. To all of you, I really appreciate you taking the time out of your day. There's very few people who are as busy as Hill staffers, and I know that. And it's good to have a mix here and the numbers that we have. We want to keep coming back. We want to keep this dialogue open. There's nothing more than - important right now than we communicate on the requirements of the services - in our case, the Army. What I'd like to do is start off, open by maybe 15, 20 minutes and walk you through what we think has changed, what the problem is and then the framework of the Army's solution in terms of a concept that drives our modernization. And the reason I want to do that is I think the Army has correctly been probably criticized in recent years that we oftentimes come to the Hill, and we have a Chinese menu of stuff. But it's unclear why we want the things we do need, why we want to make the investments we are making. So we owe you that narrative, and I'd like to give it to you verbally. Today we also gave out a hand-out there for you that sort of walks you through this in two pages, you know, if you want, you know, Army modernization 101.

So what's changed? You all know this, but it's important to highlight it. There's two things I think in the world that have been fundamental here. One is you've got a revanchist Russia. And the second is you've had this unprecedented economic growth on the part of China and - in which we drive some revisionist behavior. Both of which now puts them in a position where they become what we call a peer, an adversary or a threat. But that's not good enough, right? So what's the problem, Wesley? You know, what is it you're trying to solve with the concept and the investments you're making? We did this once before, right? It was 1981, and we came out with this thing called AirLand Battle. And it was - Donn Starry did a study where he looked at the Yom Kippur War and, you know, looked at what the Soviet satellite states were doing at a time when the Soviet Union was investing in a major way. We could have said, you know, we need to

match the Soviets tank for tank and artillery tube for artillery tube and just gone head to head. That's not what the Army did. The Army and Air Force got together and said, there's another way to skin this cat. With all those numbers in Europe, what we really need to do is fight outnumbered and win and defeat the second echelon. That drove a massive reinvestment in different technologies that allowed us to fight outnumbered and win and be able to fight deep. It changed the entire Army. Well, we're in a similar space today. The problem is threefold as it relates to what both the Chinese and the Russians have invested in. In our concept Multi-Domain Operations, we say we acknowledge that the Chinese and the Russians are different. But they're sufficiently similar to build an army against a framework that enables you to invest in a consistent manner and then diverge where necessary over time.

So the three things that are most consistent in terms of the problem is they are all investing in areas that allow them to contest us in all domains. Now, we throw that term around a lot. And you might say, well, what do you mean contest in all domains? We are a culture that, for 30 years, have lived with the experience that we can go anywhere at will and have air superiority, air supremacy and can talk without being interrupted, as an example. A fight against another peer - that won't be true. We won't have ports that we'll have access to that will be unaffected. We won't be able to talk consistently the way we're used to, so we will be contested in all domains. The second thing that they've invested in - and this one's really important because you've seen this happen before your eyes. Both China and Russia watched us in 1991, and they watched us in 2003. And they've decided that they want no part of close combat with the United States, our partners and our allies because we're really good at that. So the investments that they've gone after have enabled them to keep us at bay at a distance. It's no surprise that China is investing in islands, artificial islands, in South China Sea. It's no surprise that we would see A2/AD as a problem or their IAD system being invested in order to keep us at a distance. In fact, I would say it's no surprise that they delve in the social media realm because we've seen it not only in our own elections - Brexit, Catalonia. And you say, well, what does that achieve? That's the first layer of standoff because if they can bifurcate unity in a given domestic location or across a coalition, they've achieved their effects. And they're really good at it. So multiple layers of standoff is a problem that we have, and it's only been exacerbated by the fact that we've moved on from the continent and the peninsula over the last 30 years, which means it's also harder to get back in to achieve your objectives.

And then finally, they have been leveraging the competition space in ways that we are not. In the NDS, it talks about expanding the competition space. And you say, what's this about? I, oftentimes, will say this - that we are uniquely inhibited - for good reason - uniquely inhibited, not unlike our Western democratic friends and allies, by the idea that we think we're not a warfighting people. And regardless of what you think the truth is on that, we believe we're not a warfighting people. And all - our Constitution, our laws, our policies, our culture believes that war is either on or off. You're either at peace or at war, and it's a digital demarcation - and that war is an anomaly. And so we spend most of our time in the competition space or in act of conflict. And one of the constraints in that space is that we believe so firmly in this that we have Title 10 constraints on the uniformed military, when, in fact, those nations - our peers - don't look at the world that way. They see this continuum of conflict - a space that we're not competing in, a space that we're not challenging them in. Well, is that a problem? If you're - if we're content with Crimea being annexed without firing a shot, without any counter to that incursion into Eastern Ukraine, the incidents in the Sea of Azov in November, if we're content that those things will happen and that which comes next without any means to counter it in the competition

space, then you don't - then this isn't an issue, right? But we don't know what that next one is. And the point I would make is we're not competing on the scale we'll need to in order to continue to influence things in the future.

OK. So what's the solution to these three problems? Contesting all domains, the idea that there are multiple layers of standoff and that they're leveraging the competition space. I oftentimes start with Evander Holyfield. If you're fighting Evander Holyfield, who has great reach, you want to have good posture, and you want to have a good stance, and you want to have - be able to penetrate that reach. In short, that's what we're doing with multidomain operations. We say there's three parts; compete - it's like having good stance. Compete, penetrate the multiple layers of standoff, then disintegrate their systems. That diverges from airline battle, by the way, where we fight formations, echelons. In this case, we have defeat systems that integrate their standoff. Then we exploit for our objectives and return to competition. So if you remember nothing else when you walk out of here, what is the Army doing? To solve the problem of standoff, multiple layers of standoff, the solution - compete, penetrate, disintegrate their systems, exploit and then return to competition. All of those - and I'm going to walk you into some detail on each of those and listen to your questions. But each of those is the reason we're asking, seeking to invest in the things we are seeking to invest in. If you're going to be in the competition phase with forward presence in theater, you need to invest in air missile defense. If you're going to want to penetrate these multiple layers of standards, you need long-range precision fires, as just - as just two examples. Lay out three tenets for you that we think transcend an organization that will be important in the future. A few asks, and then I'll turn it over for questions, if that's OK.

The first - the three tenets are this. You have to have calibrated force posture to do this. The NDS taught us about the need to be expeditionary. We call it calibrated force posture because I think it's a little more specific than that. And that is, we think it's a function of four elements. One is for forward presence rotation or permanent; second, expeditionary capacity, because if you want to lower the amount of forward presence, you've got to have a lot more expeditionary capacity; access to national assets; and then authorities. Authorities is something I want to talk about in a minute. So that's calibrated (inaudible) posture. You have to have it to win. And we've worked this through in war games. The second thing is multidomain formations. If you're going to defeat an enemy that's contesting you in all domains, the only way you get overmatch is to stack or layer the domains so that the total is greater than the sum of the parts. That means all formations need to be able to integrate these domains at the tactile or at the operational level. And then finally, the third tenet is this idea of convergence. And this, we'll need help from you all, too. We're working very closely and hard with the other services. But what - convergence is really about two things. One is, it's the ability to layer the domains, like I talked about. But it's also the ability to have redundancy in pathways to employ all the teams. If you're contested in all domains, it means that you can't - no longer have these exquisite kill chains anymore. There has to be redundancy in the kill chains and agility to leverage each of them. Now, if you imagine cyber's moving in milliseconds and ships were moving at 30 knots, and troops are moving at 2 kilometers an hour, aircraft are moving at five, 600 miles an hour. How do you integrate domains to create overmatch and decisive space when those are controlled by multiple echelons across multiple services, authorities residing at varying levels? That's a major problem. So we're working right now with the Air Force, who is leading a multidomain command and control effort that was directed by the vice chairman. And this is something, though, that is going to require investment. It's going to require AI. It'll also require a joint concept, a joint

concept that drives investments. Each of the services have concepts. I'm talking about ours today. But to do this right in the future, to fight multidomain operations, it requires a framework for how you fight from the top down. It can't be several services who federate their capabilities, come together, synchronize them and employ them. It just won't work effectively in that realm.

So I would ask - just a few asks. I think this won't be a surprise to you, but having a consistent budget and avoiding a CR is absolutely indispensable. We have over 30 new starts in this budget. And we can't modernize because all these things (inaudible) because we're still working through it, and we don't want to over-ask. But I think we need to start socializing our thinking as to how certain authorities will migrate downward in order to attain the agility that we will need. And then finally this idea of forward presence, forward posture, calibrated force posture - the Army doesn't have a position on this, but my sense is that the nation will have to come to grips with a debate in the ensuing years as to what degree we re-posture forward in both the Pacific and in Europe and what that looks like. To what degree will it be rotational? To what degree will it be permanent? I believe that debate's coming just because of the needs that are facing us. So I think I did that in 20 minutes, Rebecca, and I want to leave most of the time for...

HEINRICHS: That's great.

WESLEY: But I didn't go too fast. But you can...

HEINRICHS: No. That's great. So you talked about the CR, and I was going to kick off with that question. So - but I do want to ask you just more about timing. Can you talk about - I mean, this is modernizing for a multidomain army of 2035. That's still some years out. So how comfortable are you at this pace? And because I think some of us, we're hearing different briefs, different threat briefs, and it just seems like the threat is just pressing upon us. And I'm specifically talking about in the Indo-Pacific. Is this fast enough? And I mean, is this a fast enough schedule? And then getting back to that CR problem, can you talk about the urgency and how slips are going to affect this? Again, you know, if it's a CR, we're not talking about new starts. And it's the new starts that are going to get at the advanced threat.

WESLEY: Right. So here's a little-known secret. Military domain operations is that which we need right now. We are describing the environment - what I just described to you is the environment you see every day, not the environment in '35. So your first question might be, well, Wesley, you're shooting behind the duck then. The way we've drafted the concept is we've written it broad enough that we believe the dynamics we describe are going to be around for the next 10 to 20 years. So what we invest in now, we will need into the '30s. But to your point, we can't get it fast enough, in our view. We recognize - and what that plan shows you there is by '35, you can build three force packages. That is forward posture in Europe to a degree, forward posture in Asia in two different force packages. That would be one oriented north and one oriented south. That, under the current pathway, would probably take that long to build out. (Inaudible).

HEINRICHS: I mean, it's missiles. I mean, they've just - they have been spending a lot of time building out missiles to hold at risk our allies in the region, our forward presence of carriers and Guam. So when I look at that region, it looks like just a massive missile problem. Can you just give us a little bit of insight about how you're thinking about an offense-defense mix and the importance of air and missile defense, just broadly speaking or as specific as you want to get?

WESLEY: Yeah. I'm going to be descriptive 'cause I want - I'm hoping that you can start to get a lens that we have. I forgot to answer a question on the previous line, though. You said impact of a CR. I want to answer that first. A CR loses us a year we will never get back. That's a quote from the secretary of the army. So for every time we push this thing to the right, is another year we (inaudible). The answer to that is, that's what we want to preclude. And the only way we can preclude that is to have sufficient deterrents. Those three things that I mentioned that they've invested in - that is, contesting us in all domains, leveraging the competition space and multiple layers of standoff - have resulted in deluding our deterrence capability because they know that we can't get there to the degree, the speed that we would want to. So how would you envision, as an example, air missile defense or long-range fires, and what does that do for you? Well, the first thing it does is, it can test their capacity to present a problem to us. The second thing is, it means that you can have an ability to control certain space yourself, not unlike the way they do. And third and most important as it relates to, I think, deterrence, is it forces any peer to recalculate their objectives.

Right now, if we were to face certain incursions in Europe, for example, there's not much we could immediately do. In fact, we get two options. The one option is to do nothing. The other option is protracted conflict with a major power. What we want to do is provide, through multidomain operations, is provide two other options in the middle there. One is to expand the competition space. If we're aggressively competing each day with them, that forces a certain recalculation because we know - they know we're engaged. If that competition effort fails and they seek to achieve a fait accompli attack and we have the ability to stop the fait accompli attack, again, what you do is you force a recalculation. Now, all three may fail, and you may have protracted conflict, in which case you'd use surge forces. The first three, though, are all about blunt and contact forces. So I believe what we're doing is we're presenting a outcome that they might not want to pay the price for. And as long as the cost exceeds their calculus, I think then we're getting back to a position where we can deter.

HEINRICHS: And even just complicating their calculation bolsters deterrence.

WESLEY: Right.

HEINRICHS: And then can you talk about - you know, we talk about cross-domain operations, and then this administration is particularly interested in space, in the space domain. Just talk about the importance of that and how that integrates, you know, across the rest of the domains, how important it is to have space protection, space sensors - I know that's been a big, big thing of General Hyten's - and how that might affect what the Army's thinking about and doing and how necessary that is. And then my last question before I turn it over to Q and A.

WESLEY: I'm not a studied space expert, but here's what I do know. You mentioned it, Rebecca. That is that there are two things that space brings that allows the domain effects to give us the advantage. No. 1 is the sensors. One of the biggest challenges if you pursue long-range precision fires, if you continue to extend your fires out, you've got to know what you're shooting at. You've got to have a target. And so one of the ways - and clearly, if it's that deep, you might not have somebody physically, or a reconnaissance element or a drone that deep. Space gives you those options in terms of sensors. The second one, though, is the ability to stimulate other nodes. And I'll just leave it at that. But if we're trying to see, the stimulations that you can get from that are going to be helpful. Authorities - so as I mentioned, we know that tactical formations will need to think, axis and employ all domains.

So I just mentioned space. Do I think a tactical commander at the brigade level's going to control satellites? No. But he needs to think about the capability that resides in that domain, be able to access it and employ it as appropriate. That's going to require a certain amount of authorities at some level to pull the trigger on those kinds of things. There will be opportunities on a very lethal future battlefield that is hyper (inaudible) where decisions will have to be made and resources applied that we won't be able to wait weeks and months to get certain targets approved. So we need to think through what capabilities within those domains can either have pre-approved (inaudible) core level. And we're going to do the analytics and come back to you. I'm just giving you a heads-up that what we'll do is we'll learn, we'll identify what allows us to win and come to you with certain proposals. And that'll come right up through the Army staff to the joint staff in DOD, and we'll talk to our counterparts here on the Hill.

HEINRICHS: I'll just say, sir, I mean, that was - especially on the space part, you said that, you know, that you wouldn't be the right one or, you know, to talk about space. But I think that was exactly - very, very helpful and exactly right and - because it's not only just a - we're not racing with the clock in terms of timeline just, you know, 2035, but also in the battlespace when it comes down to it. We just - because of the peers that we are going to be trying to deter and then defeat if deterrence fails, our decision-making time is just much shorter than what we're used to or where we're at right now.