Ensuring U.S. Technological Superiority: An Update from Under Secretary Michael D. Griffin

Discussion

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TRANSCRIPT

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REBECCAH HEINRICHS: Good morning, and welcome to Hudson Institute. My name is Rebeccah Heinrichs. I am a senior fellow here at Hudson, and it is my great privilege to host Dr. Mike Griffin here at Hudson again a little over a year since we last had a conversation about his priorities as the head of research and engineering at DOD. And I'm not going to give him the long, full introduction because you know who he is - the most qualified person in Washington to take on the hardest problems at DOD. And so what I plan to do today is have Dr. Griffin give some opening remarks about his priorities and some things that may or may not have changed since the last time we spoke and had a conversation here at Hudson. And then he and I will engage in some back-and-forth, some dialogue, talk about what he mentioned in his opening remarks. And then it is my hope to allow some time for questions from you, the audience here at Hudson. And without further ado - Dr. Griffin.

MICHAEL GRIFFIN: Thanks, Rebeccah. It's a pleasure to be here. In fact, specifically, the last time I was here was in April of 2018. So that was two months after I was confirmed as the undersecretary, and it was still three months before I was the head of an actual legal organization within the Department of Defense. We were still working on establishing a charter and all of the bureaucratic things one does to convert legislation into executive branch institutions. So in the time - in the 15 months since I've been here, we have been busy. We've filled out the senior levels of our organization. I think many of you know the deputy undersecretary, Dr. Lisa Porter, as well as our directors for defense research and engineering, Dr. Mitch Nikolich and Mr. James Faist - Jim Faist. Of course, we also have under us Missile Defense Agency, which has not changed. The director has changed. We now have Vice Admiral Jon Hill running the organization. Lieutenant General Greaves was in terminal countdown mode when I took over, and now Vice Admiral Hill is on station for the next several years. Steve Walker is director of DARPA, as he was then and we expect will continue. So we've got our senior team in place.

We have had a number of successful tests and demonstrations and more to come. Most critically for some of our mutual interests, we had FTG-11 in just this past March, if I recall correctly on the date - and a very successful missile defense test - one of the - one of our real highlights - and many other things as well. We've implemented, or are in the middle of implementing, some organizational standups - the Space Development Agency - as well as some organizational changes. We're currently working on moving the Strategic Capabilities Office, or SCO, underneath DARPA to better align our management team. And we've added a lot of cooperative initiatives in science and technology with our allies and partners. Last year, when I spoke, hypersonics was possibly my - in fact, I stated right out, that was my single highest priority. Over the last 15 or so months, I would say we've made an awful lot of progress in getting that in the forefront of our nation's national security priorities. And I've actually elevated other things that are maybe less flashy but even more important, such as microelectronics and 5G, to our priority stack - and, of course, space, because without space, we really can't do anything.

We've incorporated an assistant director structure within our organization, where, for each of our key priorities, we have an assistant director to be responsible for the strategic shaping of that priority. So for example, we have - we will shortly be bringing onboard an assistant director for 5G, which I just mentioned, and similarly for all of our other things - lots of work yet to do. We are still trying, and will be for a while - trying to get our arms around the overall orchestration of the DOD technical portfolio and priorities. We have - we're trying to rationalize all that with how
we do our engineering prototyping in a world in which, I think, it is recognized that we have to do something different and something better than DOD 5000, so we're working those issues. Broadly speaking, our focus is on doing the right things and then doing things right. That's kind of our motto. So let me stop there. I want to give you as much time as you want for your questions and also for the audience.

**HEINRICHS:** The first one is a general one. Since the last time we spoke, hypersonic defense and getting at the hypersonic threat was your priority, and it still is very important to you and to your - to what you're doing. But 5G is also now a priority. So my first question before we get into the details of both of those things is, how do you come up with your priorities? What informs your priorities? What are you looking at? And how are those decisions made?

**GRIFFIN:** Well, as Secretary Mattis emphasized when he was on station, as acting Secretary Shanahan emphasized and as our new secretary, Dr. Esper, has emphasized, the national defense strategy that was released now a year and a half ago is our core. That's our guideline with regard to modernization, which is - that's what research and engineering is all about, is our modernization plans. That really is our touchstone, so everything that we are doing can trace its roots back to that. Now, that said, if everything is equally important, then nothing is important. And also, it's fair to say I'm not czar. So things like hypersonics, which you mentioned - I came into office wishing - you know, intending, wanting to make a big deal out of that, not just defense, not just coping with China's offensives and Russia's offensives in hypersonics, but I want to be the offense. We want to hold others hostage. We want bad behavior to be something with which we can deal, and hypersonic capability is a key to that.

So I came here wanting to push that, but at the other end of the spectrum, issues like microelectronics and 5G, to which I was, I would say, well less sensitive and well less educated - the department has taken that on - has taken on 5G as a major initiative at the secretary of defense level. And so our research and engineering - R&E was handed that priority and said, go do. We are - and I mentioned also - I mentioned our deputy undersecretary a few minutes ago. Dr. Porter actually was, by name, assigned as the DOD lead for 5G. Now we're developing initiatives. We have a program plan. We have put that before Congress, and it goes before the OMB this coming year. And as I said, we're hiring an assistant director for 5G, but that's one where others outside ourselves felt that this was sufficiently important, that it now has become a big deal for us.

**HEINRICHS:** Can you explain just briefly what it is when you talk about a new initiative that you're going to be funding for 5G? What does that look like? What is it that you're most concerned about? And then just flesh that out for us a little bit about the initiative.

**GRIFFIN:** Well, we - broadly speaking, we are aware that commercial initiatives in telecommunications far outstrip anything that we can do and would want to do in DOD. We are struggling to become the flea on the tail of the telecoms dog. This is a multitrillion-dollar worldwide industry. That said, we have national security needs, and to the extent that we can help seed the competitive environment or encourage it to grow in directions that are relevant to us, we want to do that. So how can we help there? Well, we have use cases - when we talk about 5G, we talk about greatly increased bandwidth, greatly increased download speeds. We talk about an enormously expanded number of touchpoints - the so-called Internet of Things, where, you know, everything is connected to the Net in one way or another.
Well, DOD has use cases for that that just abound. Smart ports, smart airports, smart depots, smart factories - all of that - all of those things have commercial applications, but they absolutely have national security applications. Well, if we can make available our infrastructure for experimenting and prototyping in environments which different competitors can work in different areas and be assured that their proprietary information is protected; if we can provide venues where local, you know, regional municipal state permitting is not required to operate because they're operating on a DOD base - all of those things can really speed progress in 5G development, which - again, the development won't be led by DOD. We will be looking to be good customers, but if we can help enable that development, then we want to do that.

HEINRICHS: You mentioned SCO. There was a news article, I think, that just came out yesterday saying that you had done away with the spending justification for some of these big-ticket items in SCO. Do you want to comment on that?

GRIFFIN: Yeah, I saw that article this morning. The folks who like to send me bad news lost no opportunity to send that article to me this morning. You know, I talked with our acting SCO director, Dr. Honey, on that point. I should say corresponded - talked via email. And also from my own knowledge, I'll just say that article's completely incorrect. I mean, the essence of the article is I'm now asking our DOD budgeteers for a billion-dollar blank check to do whatever we want to do. I mean, that was the core of the article, and - no, not likely. I haven't been that stupid since I was in my teens. Some may think of a strategy to ask the comptroller and CAPE for a blank check to do whatever you want, but...

HEINRICHS: It doesn't hurt to ask.

GRIFFIN: I guess you can always ask, but, you know, I gave up on stupid requests like that a long time ago. That is not what we are doing at SCO. We are scrubbing every program we have carefully - very carefully - for the coming budget year, and we are going to request money for those programs we deem worthy. But we're not asking for a blank check.

HEINRICHS: When it - back to the prioritization question and hypersonic defense - it's an interest, like you said.

GRIFFIN: Absolutely. Yeah.

HEINRICHS: And it still is a priority, and we still haven't developed a hypersonic defense from especially the Chinese hypersonic glide vehicles, hypersonic cruise missiles, which are holding our strategic assets at risk. And we'd like to quickly have not only an offensive answer to that, but a defensive answer to that to try to dissuade something bad from happening to begin with. And the key to building that defense - you mentioned and you kind of beat the table hard about this leading up to it - was having a missile-tracking layer in space that can track the hypersonic missile from birth to death. And President Trump mentioned this in his missile defense rollout - that we're going to go to space and we're going to have a robust space sensor layer. And then frankly, there just wasn't a whole lot in the budget when the budget came out. So can you talk about still - like, I mean, the degree that we're still vulnerable, the need to have this and then how the tracking sensor layer needed for this is going to fit into the larger architecture that you have planned for this Space Development Agency?

GRIFFIN: Well, I tend to be long-winded, and this is going to be even worse with that question.

HEINRICHS: Sorry.
GRIFFIN: That's a broad question, so let me try to take it from the top. So as I have said for - now publicly for - since my confirmation hearing - a couple of key points. The United States developed not all but almost all - certainly the significant body of underlying research in hypersonic flight. It's a very difficult domain. We chose not to weaponize it. From a policy perspective, you know, we didn't think the world needed a new class of weapons. There was not an extant threat out there against which we should defend ourselves, and we didn't need a new offensive capability. So now you are seeing articles in the public press that the United States, for over a decade, has really not - well over a decade - has not progressed with hypersonic systems development. Well, that's true. That was a deliberate choice. Our adversaries - and again, you'll find me saying all the time, the United States never declares anybody to be an adversary. They declare themselves to be our adversaries, which is frustrating, and then we have to respond. So our adversaries are developing - have developed these systems, and they're quite capable. The advantage offered by a hypersonic offense is that it overflies air defenses as we understand them today and it underflies our missile defenses.

So it goes into the gap between air defense and missile defense, so it's a new class of defensive system that is required to deal with it. It's also extremely high-speed. That's by definition of hypersonic threat. That means that it can fly fast enough, low enough that, by the time we can see it on defensive radar systems, it's nearly too late to close the kill chain. It would be difficult to close that kill chain for one threat, but in a raid scenario, you just can't get there from here, as the expression goes. So we have to see them coming from further out. Well, our long-range radars are already about as good as they're going to get, and so if the hypersonic threat, as it does, outruns our long-range radars, what's your next step? If this were a - if there were - this were exclusively a land conflict, one option would be to forward deploy radars, although they themselves then become targets, but it's at least a theoretical option. But as we look to the future, it's a maritime conflict, and there are not enough islands, and we don't have enough ships to populate the Earth with radars, even if we thought that was a viable strategy. So what else is available? You have to go to space. We can see what we need from space, but because these hypersonic threats are 10 to 20 times dimmer than - without getting into specific numbers, they're 10 to 20 times dimmer than strategic missile threats. We need to be closer to the action, which means lower down, which implies that we need a proliferated layer of sensors because we can't see these things from a few spacecraft in geostationary orbit.

So the requirement leads you to a proliferated sensor layer in relatively much lower orbit, so that's how we get to that point. So you're completely correct in your question or your opening comment that, at this year's Missile Defense Review, President Trump quite correctly enunciated the need for such a layer, and yet, our budget didn't show it. Well, it can take a little bit of time for the bureaucracy to catch up with the elected leadership, and I think this year, we're going to be making a stronger try at getting the funding for that space layer into the budget. So I hope I - it was a long answer. I hope I captured all your questions.

HEINRICHS: It does. And then the one little piece - how does it fit into - we talked a little bit in the green room about how the Space Development Agency as a whole - you know, that the space sensor layer is just one part of it.

GRIFFIN: True.

HEINRICHS: And so you kind of have to think about what it is that you want from the whole - the totality of what you're trying to do in space before you get to the missile tracking part of it.
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**GRIFFIN:** You do. And so for the Space Development Agency, which was chartered by the acting secretary - by acting Secretary Shanahan to, you know, basically oversee the architecture we're going to deploy and to expedite its deployment, the first task that the Space Development Agency was specifically asked to take on was the so-called communications transport layer, a kind of slang for a resilient, highly proliferated mesh network communication system in low Earth orbit similar to what you see commercial companies talking about for LEO broadband but having different requirements, of course, for national security purposes rather than moneymaking purposes. So why is the comms layer - why is that the first thing? Well, the sensor layer is critical, but if it can't talk among itself, then it will not be effective. So the ability to communicate, if you'll forgive the term, underlays every other layer that we wish to deploy, whether it's for space situational awareness or hypersonic threat detection and tracking or, you know, maritime domain awareness or whatever. Whatever other functions we want, they are enabled first by the ability to communicate in a resilient fashion, which we don't have today. So that's why that's first.

**HEINRICHS:** And to be clear, the HBTSS, which is the acronym for the hypersonic tracking sensor layer - that's really - there still is money in there for that, and we will be developing it in parallel to these other...

**GRIFFIN:** There absolutely is money in the budget for HBTSS. I would not be surprised to see us try to get additional funding for that. And it is the draft - well, actually, the RFP was sent out a while back. We have had responses to that. So we are proceeding in parallel on the sensor layer, but the sensor layer does have to mesh with the overall architecture.

**HEINRICHS:** And just - there's some - I heard some confusion as to - why don't - if we need this, if there is a great sense of urgency to develop these things now and especially to get at the missile threat since we're behind in the Indo-Pacific in particular - that if we wanted to do it faster and wanted to do it immediately, we would just keep it within MDA since there already is an agency there. What is the wisdom in moving it over to its own new agency, the Space Development Agency?

**GRIFFIN:** Well, I don't know that anything is being moved over to the Space Development Agency. The Missile Defense Agency was not charged with or chartered to build a comms layer.

**HEINRICHS:** Right.

**GRIFFIN:** OK? So - and I'm not - if, in the interest of management efficiency, we later consolidate two developments into one, that's a decision for a different place and time and probably not even me. Right now, HBTSS remains under MDA, and transport layer development is under SDA.

**HEINRICHS:** Right. But in hypersonic defense, it's going to be a space development...

**GRIFFIN:** Well, hypersonic defense is - it touches space. It touches, you know, ground stations. It touches detection and tracking algorithms and fire-control algorithms. It is - dealing with the hypersonic threat is even more of an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary problem than ground missile defense was. And having spent now quite a number of years after I left NASA being closely involved, again, with the Missile Defense Agency on ground missile defense, I got to the point where I regarded the ground missile defense system as being more complex than the space shuttle. I honestly came to that view, and that was saying something. The problem of
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dealing with the hypersonic threat is even more complex than dealing with GMD because of the requirement for persistent, timely, global awareness, you know, that hypersonic threat poses.

HEINRICHS: That's a great segue. I wanted to talk a little bit about GMD. So GMD's the Ground-Based Midcourse Defense system. That is the primary - it's the only homeland defense system that we currently have deployed today that provides protection of the U.S. homeland and Hawaii against the ICBM threats from North Korea and then, as Iran develops them, from Iran, as well. And the MDR specifically said that we're going to continue to primarily defend the homeland against these rogue state after threats and their ICBMs. The - we were developing a new kill vehicle for the GMD system to increase its reliability to handle some of the threats that continue to progress. But we've stopped. There's a stop order on that now. Do you want to speak to that? And can you comment on the plans for improving GMD, especially the kill vehicle component and whether or not there's going to be something before we get to the MOKV, which was going to be the follow on after the RKV?

GRIFFIN: OK. I need to be careful because I - we never want to get into classified topics in public environment. So you're right. We had a redesigned kill vehicle program to follow on our Exoatmospheric Kill Vehicle, the EKV, that is deployed today in Alaska and California. And we had a follow-on program to deploy, as you know, 20 more. That was a development program. Sometimes, development programs encounter problems. So we found some results in testing that were not what we would have wanted them to be. And after a certain amount of due diligence, we decided we were not going down a path that was going to be fruitful. So we issued a stop work on the kill vehicle. And I've spent - I say I - I and the team because I've been involved regularly. I and the team have spent the last three months studying alternatives. We're close to the end of that. And when we get to the end of it, we'll tell you what we can tell you in an unclassified mode. So we're still pursuing a GMD program. And there still will be a follow-on kill vehicle development. But we did have to drop back and punt in order to get forward progress because we were going down a path that wasn't going to bear fruit. So we're fixing that.

HEINRICHS: And then for clarity's sake, and every time we talk about what we're doing to improve the systems, it seems like there's just this narrative that develops and sort of just mainstream sort of information that that GMD is not a reliable system and that it isn't up to where it needs to be to handle what our policy dictates, which is to provide a defense of the homeland against the North Korean missile threat. What is your confidence in the technical ability of the Ground-Based Midcourse Defense system?

GRIFFIN: Well, the last two - I mean, we don't want to use up all of our spare rounds doing testing. But the last two high-speed intercept tests that we have done using the deployed system were extraordinarily successful. I mean, they were hit to kill in very aggressive scenarios with the deployed hardware. I don't want to go beyond that.

HEINRICHS: That's great.

GRIFFIN: They were very successful. I have a great deal of confidence in the technical capabilities of that system. Now, if we want more rounds, we're - you know, as I like to say with all of these systems, you get to the point where you can't buy the parts anymore. You have parts obsolescence issues. So if we want more rounds, we're going to have to have a redesigned kill vehicle. And we are pursuing that but the system we have in the ground today is obviously quite capable.
HEINRICHS: And then once we do have a space tracking layer, that isn't just for the hypersonic.

GRIFFIN: No, not at all. That can track anything.

HEINRICHS: And so that would actually - that would even significantly qualitatively improve the reliability of the homeland defense system that we have in place. Could GMD utilize that tracking layer?

GRIFFIN: Well, our existing detection and tracking capabilities are quite exquisite. As I said, there were not - they were not designed to address the hypersonic threat. So what we're trying to do is to develop an additional set of capabilities that is, not to replace but to add on. When we add on those new capabilities, I'm absolutely 100 percent sure that it will have a lot more customers than just hypersonic defense.

HEINRICHS: While we're talking about GMD, again, the Missile Defense Review policy document - you don't do policy.

GRIFFIN: I don't do policy. My second-fondest hope in life is never to have to do policy.

HEINRICHS: But a lot of what you say, because you do the technical aspect, informs policy. And so the - it is still the policy of the United States to provide a defense of the homeland against the threats from North Korea and Iran. And then the Missile Defense Review said that we are still going to primarily rely on nuclear deterrence to handle the pure strategic threats against the homeland - China and Russia. Is that, in your estimation - because we are not technically able to provide a robust defense of the U.S. homeland against the threat from China and Russia? Or is it not a technical problem? Is it a policy issue?

GRIFFIN: I don't want this to come out sounding like we - R&E and USD policy are not together because we are, actually. John Rood and I get along famously. And we're well-aligned. But I think you would have to say that well beyond Department of Defense policy, it has been national policy that we are not trying to defend against China and Russia, that that level of threat is a step up. But it is not a technical step up, OK? We know how to do it with existing technology. It would require buying systems that we don't have today. It would require buying more of some of the systems we do have. So it becomes a budgetary priority. You'd be spending money on missile defense systems that we're today spending on other things. That's a budget priority discussion. And it's a deterrence policy discussion in - within which I don't engage. But it is not a technical issue. We know how to do it.

HEINRICHS: And that includes capabilities that that already exist today. And then we've talked about directed energy or the other technologies that we'll be working on the future. But you're even talking about some of the hit-to-kill technologies that we've developed.

GRIFFIN: Yeah. I mean, if the United States wanted to do it, we could deploy a much wider span of hit-to-kill technologies than we have today. Today's systems are designed to counter rogue states. If you want more, you can buy more. We've not chosen to do that.

HEINRICHS: And then my last question then is on the North Korean missile problem - still exists, even as this administration pursues negotiations to come up with a peaceful conclusion to the North Korean nuclear missile problem. From a technology aspect, though, are there things that you perceive that we should be pursuing with a greater sense of urgency that would close some gaps that are there against the North Korea missile problem? Because, again, the
MDR said that missile defenses - we understand them as a matter of policy - empower diplomacy, that they're not in conflict. And they're not destabilizing. They're stabilizing - that the United States should be pursuing with a greater sense of urgency even as, in concert, we pursue negotiations with the North Koreans?

**GRIFFIN:** I don't want to offer a comment beyond what the Missile Defense Review has offered and beyond the president's speech when it was rolled out. I think it was a superlative speech. It's a - it was a great review. I think we'll have to let the system catch up with the leader. From a technology point of view, we're - in R&E, we're ready to support.

**HEINRICHS:** Fair enough. I'll take some questions from the audience. If you can just - when I call on you, if you could just say your name and affiliation before you ask your question, that would be really helpful. Yes, sir, in the front row.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** A few years ago during the development of the F-35, Lockheed lost roughly a terabyte of data on the F-35 to China. The government spent billions of dollars trying to resolve the issue and make changes. We're putting a lot of money into research and development and new technologies. What's the government doing to ensure that technology is delivered uncompromised and that the taxpayer doesn't have to keep paying for things that get compromised because organizations aren't protecting it and the development?

**GRiffIN:** I'm research and engineering. I'm not the CIO. I don't know anything about any of that. And so I won't comment.

**HEINRICHS:** Over here. Yes, sir, yellow tie.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Dr. Griffin, as you consider the 5G rollout for the DOD and the proliferation of high-powered microwave weapons, are you considering protection against those devices in your specifications as you move forward?

**GRiffIN:** Well, with - I mean, that's really part of a broader question. The simple answer is yes, of course. But let me elaborate a little bit. The advantage of 5G, succinctly stated, is everything's part of the network, right? That's a bit hyperbolic but only a little bit when you talk about, quote, "Internet of things." The disadvantage of 5G is if everything's part of the system, everything's part of the attack surface. And so with regard to all aspects of cybersecurity, you know, everything electromagnetic now becomes a potential threat, as well as a potential promise. You know, you can't put your iPhone in front of a radar and expect it to survive. So a high-power microwave attack is probably going to kill what it seeks to kill. But for other forms of electronic attack, electronic warfare - cyber warfare, cyberattack, and there's a very blurred line between those - we're just going to have to learn how to deal with it.

In brief, we're going to have to learn how to have trusted communications in untrusted networks because we will never be able to certify perfect hardware. Moreover, the national security community has to go places where people don't want us. And we have to do things they don't want us to do, and we're not going to be able to bring our own networks. So the national security community has to accept as a starting proposition that we have to be able to operate in an environment where it's not that we suspect it's not trustworthy, we know it's not trustworthy. And so that's one of our ground rules. So this is - some of this is a math problem. How do you assure yourself of trusted communications, broadly speaking, in untrusted software, untrusted networks, untrusted hardware? We're working on it.
HEINRICHS: Yeah, in the - lady here in the sweater.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi, Dr. Griffin. I know that the assistant directors you mentioned are working on - I guess it's individual or combined roadmaps for the Research and Engineering Directorate.

GRIFFIN: They are.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Can you talk a little bit about the status of those roadmaps and how they will be publicly articulated?

GRIFFIN: Probably not.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In any form?

GRIFFIN: Well, we're - as you say, we're working on modernization roadmaps in different technologies. And of course, they're related to one another. It's impossible, for example, to think about developing a communications transport layer without the people who are working on, you know, what the design of the network CQ should be, just to pick an example. But no, in this environment, I'm not able to go in any significantly more detail than that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you. President Trump yesterday tweeted - well, tweeted a lot, but one of his tweets was related to the recent incident in Russia during the test of a nuclear-powered missile. And according to Trump, the U.S. has similar technologies but more advanced. Does it mean that the United States is developing the same technology? Thank you.

GRIFFIN: I don't have any comment on that.

HEINRICHS: Right here - right there, yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I wanted to ask you about the Space Development Agency, and you touched on some of this during your comments. But it does seem like the Congress has been reluctant to back the agency. House appropriators, for example, want to see more plans. And you've also recently lost a director. I'm just wondering if you feel that the organization is stumbling out of the gate, and can you just comment on the status and kind of the health of the SDA? Thank you.

GRIFFIN: Well, the SDA is vigorously busy. We had an industry day last month that was in a large auditorium, standing room only. Press was, in fact, there for part of the industry day, so I think you're aware of all that. We are pursuing - both with internal resources and through, you know, the network of government and university laboratories, we're pursuing architectural design, pursuing sensor requirements, communications requirements, all of those things. So we're quite busy. Yes, the SDA was chartered in March by the acting secretary and has met so far with a mixed reception on the Hill. I have four oversight committees, broadly speaking, and the views of those oversight committees range from full support to, as you said, let's see more plans. That's neither uncommon nor unexpected when you're rolling out a new approach. Let me hit rewind for a moment. In January of 2018, we - well, skip January. In 2018, we got a law from Congress, the National Defense Authorization Act, directing, by name, the deputy secretary of defense to provide a plan to Congress as to how we were going to manage space within the Department of Defense.
Now, the subtext of that, of course, you don't get asked to specify such a thing if everybody's already happy with you. So the subtext is, we're not happy. And that's not a surprise because in the prior several years, a variety of senators - and Congressman Mike Rogers comes to mind - had said, you know, we want to see a different approach to managing space. So the deputy secretary took that seriously. I worked, and others worked very closely with him. And later that summer, we rolled out a plan, central to which was the creation of the Space Development Agency, which would have expedited hiring and acquisition authorities and would be threat-driven. The key to all that is we just need to move quicker because our adversaries are executing on three and four-year timelines, and we're executing on 15-year timelines. So we needed to do something different. If we just keep doing everything the same way, you shouldn't expect a different outcome. Now then, also in the course of last summer, as you know, President Trump called for a space force. I'm a huge fan of that idea. You know, I couldn't be any more of a cheerleader.

And so we, in our submission to Congress, the so-called 1601 report addressing Section 1601 of the NDAA, we said if the Congress chooses to approve a space force, than the Space Development Agency should be realigned under it. If the Congress - and it's a congressional option, we understand that - if the Congress does not choose to approve the creation of a space force, then the SDA will remain aligned under R&E, with the goal, as I said in my earlier comments, of first executing the development of this transport layer and integrating it with the sensor layer that we have to have. So the Space Development Agency is our approach to getting a move on with the space architecture development that we need to supplement our existing capabilities. I ought to ask for a show of hands for people who think that you can stand up a new agency to do a new thing not yet done, never been done before in the history of humans, if you think we're going to stand up that agency without some turmoil and commotion.

You know, I can't execute a shopping trip to Home Depot without some turmoil and commotion for a home project. We're not going to stand up a new agency without a certain amount of churn. We wouldn't do it if we didn't think it was necessary. We think it's critical. And so I am going to continue to use, and others will continue to use every bit of our persuasive power to convince the Congress that this is an agency worth standing up and worth funding. Acting Secretary of the Air Force Donovan and I, I think, could not be more closely aligned on the need for an SDA. And again, if the Congress chooses to create a space force, he's going to inherit it. So we're - this is not an example - this is not an example of power struggles within the DOD. We're getting along very well. And I think all of the key decision-makers are completely lined up on the need for the SDA and what it's trying to do. I can't - I guess I can't say it any better.

**HEINRICHS:** There's a lady over here. I wanted to get to her.

**GRIFFIN:** But I'll just finish off by saying don't expect us to stand up a new capability with no management churn. I mean, if that's your expectation, go somewhere else because I can't deliver it.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** I was wondering what your current assessment is on North Korea's missile capabilities, especially after it launched 10 projectiles over the last two weeks.

**GRIFFIN:** I have no public comment to make about North Korea's missile capability. That would - that assessment would properly belong to our intelligence community, and that's not my job.
HEINRICHS: I would just point to - I just hosted the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency here at Hudson. And we talked a lot about missiles. So - and that's on our website. I think we've got time for one last question. And we'll go here in the back, if you could ask it very, very briefly.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Just one question on Iran - last year, General Samuel Greaves told Congress that - he said the assessment at the Pentagon for Iran to acquire a hypersonic missiles was "extremely high," quote, unquote. I just want to know what the assessment is today, and has Iran intensified its moves since the withdrawal from the JCPOA? Thanks.

GRIFFIN: Well, I'm sorry you wasted your question. One more time, I'm not in the intelligence or the assessment business. And if I were, I probably couldn't comment. But since I don't actually know anything, it's easy to say I'm not going to comment. Sorry.

HEINRICHS: If I could point to another event, I hosted Brian Hook here, special envoy to Iran, and we discussed about how north - or Iran's missile program has not - has continued to improve since the JCPOA. The JCPOA did not slow the missile program. And that's - the transcript is on the website as well. And with that, please join me in thanking Dr. Griffin for his time and remarks.