Center for Strategic and International Studies

Military Strategy Forum

“Harbingers of Future War: Implications for the Army with Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster”

Featuring:
Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, USA,
Director, Army Capabilities Integration Center and Deputy Commanding General,
Futures, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command

Moderated By:
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KATHLEEN H. HICKS: Good morning, everybody. Thank you for joining us here at CSIS today.

I’m Kathleen Hicks. I direct the International Security Program here at CSIS. And I have the great pleasure of being able to introduce and moderate the session today with General H.R. McMaster.

Let me first thank Rolls-Royce North America, who makes this Military Strategy Forum possible.

And also let you know that, should there be a fire alarm or something of that sort, obviously you know there are doors behind you. There are doors behind me as well. I’m the safety officer for this session, so if anything should happen just follow my lead and we’ll head across the street. As I like to tell people, there is a church and a bar. (Laughter.) They’re in two separate locations, and so depending on what the event is we’ll go to one of them – (laughter) – more maybe in serial order.

But as to today’s event, Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster has graciously agreed to join us today to talk about how the Army thinks about – how he thinks about implications for the Army in the future. And certainly the world today is extremely complex and challenging for our United States Army.

H.R. McMaster – if you do not know, General McMaster has served in Afghanistan and Iraq. I’m not going to do justice to his resume, frankly, but suffice it to say he is a warrior, he is a scholar – he has served as a professor up at West Point – and a frequent advisor to senior Army leadership before becoming senior Army leadership himself. His job today is director of Army Capabilities Integration Center and deputy commanding general of futures, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command.

So he’s come up to Washington in part especially for this event today, so I hope you will greet him with your warm applause. Thank you. (Applause.)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL H.R. MCMASTER: Thank you, Kathleen. What a privilege it is to be here with you and to be at CSIS in particular, an institution that does so much to lend clarity to our thinking about issues involving national defense. And I want to thank you. I want to thank John Hamre; Tony Cordesman; Mark Cancian, who’s done a great – some great work recently on the Army and Army capacity and so forth. So it’s great – it’s really great to be with you.

And what I’d really like to talk to you about is really I think a period that we’re in right now, a period of increasing risk: increasing risk to national and international security for a number of reasons that are, I think, reinforcing in connection with the elevated level of risks to our nation, to our allies, and really all of humanity. And those involve growing threats to national and international security, threats that are taking shape in the form of state and non-state actors both. But it also has a lot to do with reductions in capacity – capacity not just in our armed forces, but reductions in capacity of our key allies’ armed forces as well. And then – and then also reductions in modernization – reductions in modernization for our Army in particular – in a period of time when we have seen potential adversaries investing a great deal in modernization of really all of their services, but of land forces in particular.

And so the situation, I believe, globally – the situation in connection with U.S. vital interests and security – I think has changed, and is changing really in a direction that’s going to raise additional challenges to the U.S. and U.S. national security. So I thought I’d talk about that as a way to kind of
frame how our Army is doing the best it can to prepare for future armed conflict, to prepare to secure our nation operating as part of joint and multinational and interorganizational efforts.

So the world is different, of course. The world is always changing. As General Neller said yesterday at CFR, if any of you watched that – commandant of the Marine Corps, summing it up as only maybe a Marine can – he said the world gets a vote. And I think what we’re seeing is a shift in geopolitics and competitions in a way that imposes great dangers and I think has elevated the risk of a major international military crisis to maybe the highest level in the last 70 years. And of course, a number of scholars are writing about this – Jakub Grygiel and Wess Mitchell in particular in their great recent book “Unquiet Frontier,” where they describe revisionist powers, Russia and China in particular on the Eurasian landmass, that are surrounded by weak states which are now becoming battlegrounds, areas of competition at the far reaches of American power. They also describe Iran as a revisionist power and highlight the threat of North Korea in terms of state-based threats to national and international security. So I think their work is important. But I also think Margaret MacMillan’s great essay written in 2014 making the analogy between 2014 and 1914, and really making the point that geopolitics is back; maybe our – what we might call our holiday from history in the post-Cold War period is over. And so I recommend her essay as well, called “The Rhyme of History,” which is on the Brookings – on the Brookings website. But again, as General Neller said yesterday, the world does get a vote.

And I think what might have punctuated the end of the post-Cold War period is Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. Now, this was – this was not really a new development in terms of Russian aggression. I think you can go back to the denial-of-service attacks on the Baltic states in 2007, certainly the invasion of Georgia in 2008. And, as Zachary Shore points out in a great book called “A Sense of the Enemy,” that what’s important about your adversaries is not to understand a pattern of behavior; what’s important is to try to anticipate a pattern break and to take action to address those threats in a timely manner. So even though it may have been apparent at least since 2008 that Russia was changing its geostrategic behavior and engaged in what Grygiel and Mitchell call probing – probing at the far reaches of American power – our strategic response was to accelerate our withdrawal of our forces, and Army forces in particular, (from Europe ?). And what we’re seeing now is we’ve awakened to, obviously, this threat from Russia, who is waging limited war for limited objectives – annexing Crimea, invading Ukraine – at zero cost, consolidating gains over that territory, and portraying the reaction by us and allies and partners as escalatory, that what is required to deter a strong nation that is waging limited war for limited objectives on battlegrounds involving weaker states – or what Thomas – Mackinder called at the end of the 18th, early 19th century the shatter zones on the Eurasian landmass – what is required is forward deterrence, to be able to ratchet up the cost at the frontier, and to take an approach to deterrence that is consistent with deterrence by denial, convincing your enemy that your enemy is unable to accomplish his objectives at a reasonable cost rather than sort of an offshore balancing approach and the threat of punitive action at long distance later, which we know obviously from – recent experience confirms that that is inadequate.

Of course, this is a sophisticated strategy, what Russia is employing – and we’re doing a study of this now with a number of partners – that combines, really, conventional forces as cover for unconventional action, but a much more sophisticated campaign involving the use of criminality and organized crime, and really operating effectively on this battleground of perception and information, and in particular part of a broader effort to sow doubt and conspiracy theories across our alliance. And this effort, I believe, is aimed really not at defensive objectives, but at offensive objectives – to collapse the post-World War II, certainly the post-Cold War, security, economic, and political order in Europe, and replace that order with something that is more sympathetic to Russian interests.
So other threats that are evidencing this behavior of probing, challenging U.S. interests at the far reaches of American power. I think that you could also look at China as exhibiting an analogous strategic behavior, and also an effort to expand territory and expand their influence at the expense of U.S. interests and the security of our partners in the region. I think what you – you could characterize what’s going on in the South China Sea, for example, as territorial expansion, and in this case really the development of landmass to project power outward from land into the maritime and aerospace domains, to restrict freedom of movement and action in those domains, and to – and to secure Chinese influence across those domains. This is militarily analogous to what Russia’s done in Ukraine, for example, where Russia has established air supremacy over Ukraine from the ground. And this is really what China is endeavoring to do from an operational perspective as well. And again, a sophisticated strategy involving cyberattacks, information warfare, a sophisticated economic effort to undermine the post-World War II economic order in the region. And of course, what this does is it highlights, I think, really the sophistication and the broad range of activities associated, you know, with this activity of probing.

And of course, China has engaged in the largest theft of intellectual property in history. And so we ought to realize, maybe, from this experience that it is our technological advantage – discrete technological advantages over our enemy are the aspect of our differential advantage in defense that is most transferrable to our enemies. So we ought to – we ought to continue to pursue those advantages technologically, but we have to recognize that we have to seek strengths, relative advantages elsewhere, and I would think, I think, mainly through joint synergy and mainly through the combination of well-trained soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, and cohesive well-trained teams and adaptive leaders with technology. It is our people and our technology that provides us, the U.S. military, with our differential advantage.

And of course, I think it is – it is difficult to overstate the threat from North Korea. Of course, I mentioned the world is changing. As General Neller said, the world gets a vote. And on the Korean Peninsula, when you look back to the Quadrennial Defense Review and the – and the Strategic Choice Management Review, North Korea was not obviously by that time a nuclear power, had not developed and proliferated nuclear weapons to the extent it has today, and had not combined that with its efforts to develop missile technology and to improve delivery systems for weapons of mass destruction.

What makes, of course, North Korea particularly scary is it is simultaneously a conventional – although an aged – military, but a very capability military and numerous military. Now it may be a nuclear power, but it’s also, we could say, a failing state at the same time, which makes this a particularly precarious and dangerous – and dangerous situation.

So I think what the Korean Peninsula ought to be instructive for us as well, for the Army and for the joint forces, is what the – what the experience in Korea tells us is, it tells us about the importance of consolidation. I mean, think about, really, our sustained effort there with international partners and mainly our South Korean allies since 1953. Think about what the picture looked like for South Korea in 1953. It looked pretty bleak. And so this shows, I think, how important it is to have sustained efforts over time, and how important it is for the joint force and the U.S. Army in particular to view consolidation of military gains politically – by developing partner capability, sustained efforts over time economically, reform efforts that really didn’t kick in in South Korea till the 1980s – that sustained effort – there are no short-term solutions to long-term problems, basically. And the Army plays a very important role in setting conditions and facilitating those long-term security solutions.
Other threats, of course, include Iran, which I think we could say confidently has been fighting a proxy war against us since 1979. And I think what we see in the Greater Middle East is tremendous humanitarian catastrophe. I believe the Iranians view this as in their interest. And essentially what we see – I think what we can see Iran doing is applying the Hezbollah model broadly to the region, a model in which they have weak governments in power that are reliant on Iran for support, while they create militias and other groups outside of that government’s control that can be turned against that government if that government takes action against Iranian interests. You see this, I think, to a certain extent in Iraq, where you have obviously, you know, Haider al-Abadi, a tremendous leader, trying to – trying to hold things together while this protest, I think we ought to know, if we pull the curtain back on it, this is not about corruption; this is about Iranian subversion and the use of pressure on the government to ensure that that government remains wholly sympathetic to Iranian interests. And this is an effort, I think, to actually retard many of the reforms that would try to build back into the Iraqi government and security forces a multi-sectarian population that would have improved legitimacy, and that would lead eventually to the consolidation of security gains as we continue the campaign against ISIL.

And so, ISIL. This is an unprecedented threat in many ways because now we have a terrorist proto-state in the Greater Middle East. It’s a problem that we know can’t be contained, right? Half the Syrian population is dead, wounded or displaced. That has affected not only countries in the region and is not only a humanitarian catastrophe, but also it is destabilizing Europe in some ways.

And there are connections, obviously, between many of these security threats. We have Russia, for example, who is funding, we know, some of the right-wing parties in Europe while helping – taking action in this axis of the Assad regime, the Iranians and Russia that exacerbates the migration crisis.

And so ISIL is a problem because of the difficulty of it being contained. For that reason and, of course the terrorist threat to Europe, to the Middle East and to our own nation. But ISIL is a threat that can’t be contained because it’s already a multi-generational security problem. There is a cycle going on where groups like ISIL, who use this irreligious ideology – you know, this perverted interpretation of religion to justify violence – they depend on ignorance and the ability to recruit vulnerable segments of populations to foment hatred, and then to use that hatred to justify violence against innocents. And now how many children are being educated from among the Syrian and Iraqi populations? Is there a problem of that ignorance growing and that hatred growing as groups – sectarian groups and ethnic groups fall in on themselves, and no longer have the confidence that they can live together, that they can advance their interests and allay their fears through the exercise of politics rather than through violence? And so, if the Afghan alumni were a problem that resulted in the mass murder of over 3,000 Americans on September 11th, 2001, the Iraq and Syria alumni is a problem that is going to be orders of magnitude greater. It is already a multi-generational security problem.

And so what do all these conflicts have in common is they’re about the control of territory, people and resources. That has important implications for Army capability, but for land-force capacity. And for land force I mean Army, Marine Corps and special operations forces.

So what are the implications of these threats from a – from a defense perspective broadly? First of all, allies are pretty darn important, right, especially at these far reaches of American power, especially when hoping to deter these revisionist powers. And so really what we want to do is prevent conflict, and our allies are essential to doing that.
The second implication is that American military power is joint power. There is no single service or standoff or offshore balancing solution to these complex political and human problems. And so what we need is that synergy between the joint force, where our forces have the capability and the capacity to deter conflict and, if that fails, to resolve conflict in our interest – to protect our security and our vital interests. And that may entail imposing outcomes without the cooperation of the enemy, and that has significant implications for the Army in particular.

On the bottom left, that’s to really emphasize the importance of deterrence – deterrence by denial and deterrence at the frontier, to ratchet up the cost to potential adversaries at the frontier rather than deterrence by the threat of punitive action later.

And finally, on the bottom right, I didn’t even talk about Afghanistan, a war that’s ongoing; a war that, again, teaches us that the consolidation of gains is an integral part of war and armed conflict. And if we neglect that – if we think that that’s optional – we will not get to sustainable outcomes consistent with the vital interests that brought us into the conflict to begin with.

And so these are four, I think, important implications for defense strategy. And we could talk more about Afghanistan and the consolidation of gains if you’d like.

So what is our Army doing about this? Well, we recognize, right, in our democracy, you get the Army that the American people are willing to pay for. And those of us in uniform, it’s our responsibility to do the best we can with the resources we have, and to ensure that we make the maximum contribution to our security and to our joint force. So this is just to illustrate that we are thinking about the operational environment, we are looking at these harbingers of future conflict by making a grounded projection into the future, and identifying design characteristics for the future Army. This is a massive effort that involves four fundamental activities.

Think. To think clearly about the problem of future armed conflict to lay a strong conceptual foundation for Army modernization.

Second, to learn. To learn in a focused, sustained, and collaborative manner about the conflicts that I just summarized here today, but also learn through our experimentation – our Capstone learning event, which is our Army warfighting assessment at Fort Bliss, the network integration evaluation that is going on now – right now this week at Fort Bliss, where I’m headed later today. And we’re learning in a different way: we’re learning through warfighting challenges, which are 20 first-order questions, the answers to which will improve current and future force combat effectiveness.

We have to analyze what we’re learning, because we have to prioritize ruthlessly. We have to prioritize ruthlessly because of severe reductions in modernization even as the Army is getting smaller. And the great CSIS report pointed out that the percentage of reduction in Army modernization is greater than at any time that we’ve applied a so-called peace dividend – at the end of the Vietnam War, for example, at the end of the Cold War – but it’s exacerbated by the fact that in those other periods the Army had recently been modernized with new equipment, new aircraft. That’s not the case this time. We’ve improved a lot of our equipment. We’ve developed equipment specifically for Iraq and Afghanistan to sustain counterinsurgency efforts and campaigns there. But we have not modernized our combat vehicles, our aircraft, our weapon systems. And so we have to analyze to ruthlessly prioritize with the assets we have. And then finally, we have to implement. And this has a lot to do, obviously, with requirements and acquisition reform, some of the key priorities of General Milley, our chief of staff.
So we need your help. We need your help in ensuring that our Army is prepared to defend our
nation as part of the joint force, alongside multinational partners. And you can help by contributing to
the warfighting challenges, but you can help by doing what you’re doing here, because you’re
concerned American citizens who care about national defense. And as our military gets smaller, the
greatest danger, maybe, to national security is if we become disconnected from those in whose name
we fight and serve. And so if our citizens don’t understand the requirements for defense, don’t
advocate for those requirements, it’s unlikely that those requirements will be funded. And it’s likely
that the risks to the national security will rise even to a higher level.

So thank you so much. I look forward to engaging in a discussion with you and hearing what’s
on your mind, and what advice you have for me. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. HICKS: Give these gentlemen a second to – very good.

Fascinating review. I love this slide. It is a lot on a slide, but it’s –

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Oh, let’s got to the next one. If you – the next one so – OK, all right,
we’ll keep it up there.

MS. HICKS: I do like this one.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: We’ll keep it up there.

MS. HICKS: You can’t. We’d have to –

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Sorry. I know I was busy. I was going to try to –

MS. HICKS: No, I really like this slide. And I just want to pick on the second one in
particular, which is some – which is listed as expeditionary here. But underneath the word
“expeditionary” is the ability to deploy task, organize forces on short notice, et cetera.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Yes, right.

MS. HICKS: This is something that the Army has been lathered up over, working hard on,
focused on as a priority for many years. Today we have the BCT as the main unit of analysis, if you
will, inside the Army. Can you talk a little organizationally about what you think that means in terms
of the future of Army design?

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Sure, right. So what we need is we need forces that can deploy
rapidly, but then transition quickly into operations. And so because of enemy anti-access/area denial
capabilities now, we know that’s not going on top of the enemy. We know that has to be – it may be
outside of the envelope of these capabilities. So that force has to have mobility. You know, it can’t
just be a force that arrives and begins to walk, right? We have to get mobility to that force.

To move that force over distance, you have to also secure its movement. And that means you
need, you know, vehicles – combat vehicles with lower logistics demand that have the appropriate
combination of mobility, protection and lethality to ensure that that force can get to the objective area
but then – but then be able to conduct offensive operations, for example. And it has to have combined
arms capability, which is really infantry, combined with mobile protected firepower, engineers, fires, aviation, and access to joint capabilities.

So a lot of times when we were talking expeditionary, like, in the ’90s, people would use terms like lean and nimble, you know? But, you know, you don’t send a lean and nimble force to go fight somebody. So you need combined arms capabilities. And so what we’re doing is we’re trying to get into all of our formations the appropriate combination of mobility, protection and lethality that will allow that formation to overmatch the enemy under the mission variables in which that force is committed.

The mission variables and the mission, enemy, the troops you have, the terrain, the time, some main considerations. So our light forces will have – need greater mobility, protection, lethality. And our medium forces do, and so do our armored brigade combat teams. The other thing that we’re doing – I think what you’re alluding to, Kathleen, is that – is that those forces have to be able to task organize rapidly on the fly. They have to be able to receive attachments, detach units. And so a lot of times there are logistical implications, communications implications for that kind of ability to rapidly tailor our force. And so we’re emphasizing that in our redesign effort.

And we’re also emphasizing the ability of smaller forces to have combined arms at lower levels. And those forces, though, also, though, having the ability to operate widely dispersed – so, think about really elevating the tactics of infiltration to the operational level, where you can deceive an enemy who has some of these long-range capabilities that the Russians have, for example, with mass fires capabilities about the location of your main effort, but then also be able to concentrate rapidly to take advantage of opportunities or to guard against unanticipated dangers.

Those forces will have the ability to see and fight across wider areas. And they’ll have the ability to maintain communications in congested and contested cyber-electromagnetic environments. And so these are all – they’re going to employ robotics and autonomy in naval systems. This is part of the SecDef’s, you know, third offset capabilities are very relevant to the Army and are critical to our modernization efforts.

MS. HICKS: Can you speak in particular in that description about the defensive cyber element, the defensive EW element, of having this dispersed force netted, able to communicate in an environment in which, as you pointed out, technology’s diffusion – diffusing – excuse me – and there are threats to that force.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Right. So in the – in the highly readable Army Operating Concept, in the back – and for those of you who are familiar with it, you’ll know that it’s in Appendix B – we have the – (laughs) – we have the first principles for technological development. And one of the first of those is that – is that the technology has to anticipate enemy countermeasures. And also the technology has to be able to degrade gracefully.

Right now, what we’ve done is, in some cases – because we haven’t faced enemies that have the kinds of capabilities we see by – you know, that Russia, China, have, even Iran to a certain extent, even North Korea to a certain extent. We’ve developed systems that are exquisite and that could be prone to catastrophic failure. So the first step is to build redundancy into our systems, so we’re not over reliant, maybe, on a certain suite of capabilities. And so with a degraded satellite capability we can still continue to operate. With an interrupted certain wave form, we can communicate by other means. So there’s redundancy we’re building in.
But then also we have to make a jump at some point to a fundamentally different system, where we have deterministic networks that allow us to really fight through interruptions in a much easier way, and that we develop systems that are much less complex. You know, I mean, some of these – some of these systems actually – even without enemy action – are pretty hard to keep operational. (Laughs.) So we have to reduce complexity, we have to complete the network in a way that gives us the kind of redundancy with deterministic networks. And we have to address the vulnerability.

Many of our systems now depend upon really broadcasting continuously on high-power omnidirectionally. And so there are some things that we can do right now to manage that. We’re accelerating the development of systems, and the Marine Corps is doing this as well, that can, first of all, help us see ourselves from a – you know, from a SIGINT and a HUMINT perspective, and understand what’s emanating, what’s not. We are reemphasizing tactics, techniques and procedures – like deception, dispersion, you know, the ability take passive measures to conceal your positions.

And so we recognize that, you know, our enemies in many ways have become more and more elusive. And we’ve become almost transparent, to certain enemies with certain capabilities. So this is – we’re approaching this with a high sense of urgency. This is part of our Russian new generation warfare study. But of course, that study is going to apply across a range of potential adversaries, and is going to put us on a different path in terms of the way we develop capabilities.

So, I mean, think client systems. If we can have reliable access to the cloud, for example, we’ll reduce the surface space that is vulnerable to enemy cyberattacks. We are working on simplifying things now. Like, we’re doing things right now – for example, wireless command posts – that get rid of all the cables associated with the command posts. We’re developing expeditionary mission command capabilities. The 82nd Airborne and the 1st Armored Division have been key partners with us, as well as European Command and U.S. Army Europe on interoperability issues. So we’re simplifying our systems now. We’re not waiting.

Smart power technology has been tremendously valuable to us. So instead of, like, 14 generators, we have, like, two generators, you know? And so then you have – you know, you only have two trucks instead of the 14 prime movers. And so we’re making these command posts smaller and more agile. And that we can scale them up if we need to, you know, for sustained operations. But that’s what the nation relies on the Army to, right? The Army – the Army provides foundational capabilities for the joint force. I mean, you have an Ebola crisis, who do you call? The Army. The Army integrates with multiple partners, provides that kind of infrastructure.

You know, so we want – it’s not all bad news. We’re pretty darn good right now. But we recognize our vulnerability and we know we have a lot of work to do. And we’re doing things in the short term, but we also have a long-term vision that’s called the network – the network vision. It’s available on the internet. I can push that out to anybody who’s interested as well.

MS. HICKS: You mentioned the work the Army’s doing now looking at Russia and new generation warfare. I wonder if you can share, even at this early stage, some of the lessons learned that you’re developing out of what you’ve seen in Ukraine, and then maybe also what you’ve seen in Syria – going to Syria and in Syria.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: OK. So much of this work has been out in open source. It’s available in Popular Science or the work that the Potomac Foundation and Phil Karber’s done, for
example. And so what are we most concerned about? Well, the first thing we’re doing is we’re doing a vulnerability assessment on our own force. What are we vulnerable to, based on Russian capabilities? Topping that list is cyber and electronic warfare capabilities. So I mentioned that already.

What we’re seeing is UAS capabilities, unmanned aerial systems, remotely piloted vehicles, and the effect that they can have on the battlefield. We see the potential already in the proliferation of unmanned aerial systems, or remotely piloted systems – as General Welsh said yesterday – the chief of staff of the Air Force said, they’re not unmanned. In fact, in the Army – actually, in the Army, some of the most manned units we have are our unmanned units, you know, in terms of the unmanned aerial systems –

MS. HICKS: Because a whole bunch in the tail and the – yeah.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Right, the tail, yeah. They’re still flying and you’re maintaining them.

MS. HICKS: Right.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: So you’re analyzing the data and so forth. So UAS and swarm UAS capabilities. We’ve recognized, hey, we have to get back to air defense. You know, short range, long range air defense, and air defense that involves, you know, missiles and so forth but also a broad range of solutions that might entail our own electronic warfare. We made a lot of decisions in the ’90s, right? We were going to economize in certain areas – fires, air defense – because what did our Air Force do? Our Air Force gave us an unprecedented period of air supremacy, because of their technological advantage, because – mainly because of their talent and their professionalism. I mean, who could match the United States Air Force, right?

So that changed the dynamics of land combat because I knew – I mean, if we went out with a platoon or a squad, your hand mic becomes a flight of two, you know, F-16s like that – (snaps fingers) – you know? So now if you can’t bank on that, if you can’t rely on aerial electronic warfare, on aerial fires, then you need terrestrial systems as well – not just to give us the redundancy we need across the joint force and the complementary capabilities, but also to pose those multiple dilemmas to the enemy. So what we’re calling an area of called cross-domain fires is very important. So when an Army fires unit arrives somewhere, it should be able to do surface-to-surface, surface-to-air and shore-to-ship capabilities. We are developing that now. And there are some really promising technologies that will give us those sorts of capabilities.

So unmanned aerial systems, air defense, cross-domain fires, advanced combat vehicles. You know, the Bradley’s great. I mean, I love it. I mean, I was 25 years ago in Desert Storm. I was in a tank. Bradley’s a tank. I mean, Bradley and Abrams. It was – it was great. I mean, I felt – in the Abrams, I felt like “The Terminator.” You know what I mean? (Laughter.) It was – but so, what we – what we see how is – we see our enemies have caught up to us. They’ve invested in combat vehicles. They’ve invested in combat vehicles. They’ve invested in advanced protective systems – active protective systems. They’ve advanced in improved lethality, robotic and autonomy-enabled systems that are – so these are areas that we’ve got to get – we’ve got to get back ahead on combat vehicle development.

So I’m concerned that the vehicles we have now, we’re already on a path to obsolescence because we’re not doing enough now in combat vehicles. Future vertical lift is going to be important
because of the advanced protection systems there. But the other capability, specifically in Ukraine, are those fires capabilities. We’re outranged by a lot of these systems. And they employ improved conventional munitions, which we’re going away from – which will be at about a 40 to 60 percent reduction in lethality in the systems we have. Remember, we already have fewer artillery systems. Now, those fewer artillery systems will be less effective relative to the enemy. So we need to do something on that now.

So really it’s a cross – you know, it’s really across our ability to maintain communications and exchange information and interrupt the enemy’s ability to do so. It’s to be able to defend against aerial systems. I mean, I never had to look up in my whole career and say is it friendly or enemy, you know? Thanks to the U.S. Air Force. We have to do that now. And so we have to do things in a fundamentally different way from a broad range of measures. And then it’s close combat overmatch I think is the other thing I’d take away – combat vehicles being part of it.

You know, we spent a lot of time talking about winning long-range missile duels. And of course, we want to – we have to do that. You don’t even get into the fight. But if you look at enemy countermeasures – dispersion, concealment, intermingling with civilian populations, the ability to disrupt our network strike capability, our precision navigation and timing capabilities – what that means is you’re probably going to have a close fight, not only for the traditional reasons of, well, I mean, you have to resolve situations politically – you have to secure terrain to deny its use to the enemy, to protect populations, to consolidate gains – but increasingly it’s going to be – close combat overmatch is an area I think that we really have neglected for a while, because we took it for granted. We need to focus on that, I think, in terms of future force development as well.

MS. HICKS: So here’s the question I know you’re likely faced every day, which is: How do you, while ensuring you can improve the Army’s capabilities in those areas, make sure that you don’t lose the lessons from the wars we’re still in, frankly, in Afghanistan and, in a new way, in Iraq. Whether you call that consolidating gains or the far-less popular nation-building or stability operations, can the Army manage to organize itself and modernize itself and be ready across that full range?

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Right. Well, we have to, right? I mean, we’ve always had to do these missions. So there are those who want to view Afghanistan and Iraq as aberrational, you know. And oftentimes, regrettably, I think we debate the wrong question on Iraq in particular, right, which is, you know, should we have done it? OK, well, even if we assume that in the future we will only make wise policy decisions – (laughs) – you know, we’ve always had to engage in the activities required to consolidate gains. I mean, that has been aberrational all, except in military operations were have a narrowly circumscribed political objective. Like, the ’19 Gulf War was status quo ante, right? Return Kuwait back to the Kuwaiti. And then, of course, a sustained campaign to contain Saddam after that. So we have to do it.

And so there are a lot of things we can do in our Army to make sure we institutionalize the lessons of the last 15 years. And we’ve done – we’ve largely done a lot of these. One is what’s called the decisive action training environment. And so a lot of people misunderstand that. They say decisive action, you must be going back to the – you know, the RMA, the Revolution Military Affairs orthodoxy of the ’90s, where war becomes a big targeting exercise again, and you take, you know, the George Costanza approach to war and just leave on a high note. (Laughter.) Like war ends when – after you deliver your munitions and your enemy has acted as the passive recipient of your military prowess, then you can leave. (Laughter.)
So we’re not doing that. So what we’re doing is we are integrating the complexities – the political, the social, the cultural, the religious complexities – into those environments. So leaders in every training exercise, they have to consider how the military operations they’re conducting are contributing to the achievement of the ends that brought them into that fight to begin with. You know, and so I think we are really emphasizing that in a number of areas. One is the need to really help shape security environments by developing partnership and understanding these complex operational environments alongside our partners who share our interests in particular region. The regional alignment of Army forces has gone a long way in doing that; obviously, our partnership and integration of special operations forces and conventional forces in that connection.

The other thing that we have said is, hey, we have to develop situational understanding in close contact with the enemy – because of enemy countermeasures to long-range identification – but also in contact with the civilian population, because these enemies move in and among populations. They expand into other battlegrounds of perception and political subversion and criminality. And we have to compete effectively on those battlegrounds. So we are in full acknowledgement of that. I think sometimes, you know, people actually want to go back to war that’s, you know, fast, cheap, efficient, waged at stand-off range. And it’s just too bad. I mean, I think actually the trend is in the opposite direction. That is becoming less and less likely.

MS. HICKS: What is your sense of the Army’s evolving view of its role in the Pacific, in particular – not just Asia writ large, but in the western Pacific, and how – you mentioned to me before the good work you’re doing with the Marine Corps. Maybe how the joint aspects of that come together for the Army.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Right. So, you know, the Army has always been in the Pacific. And of course, in large numbers on the Korean Peninsula. But obviously the – you know, the military services of all of our major partners in the Pacific – the dominant service in those joint forces is Army forces. So one of the key ways that we contribute to reassuring allies – which is obviously much better done, you know, face-to-face than offshore or, you know, from a distance – that’s the Army’s role, I think, is to help assure allies and help build their capacity. It’s obviously, again, a deterrent, right? I mean, you know, we develop Army capabilities, you know, not to predict a certain war in the future, but to prevent war, rather, from happening.

But also, the way to prevent, we know, is to demonstrate to your enemy that you can impose an outcome on that enemy without their cooperation. And that’s where, I think, land forces are important throughout Asia. Obviously, I think China is giving an example, right, of the role of land forces, by actually building land so they can project power outward from land. And so I think this is in large – in large measure an object lesson for – you know, for the joint force, for all of us to recognize that synergy, right, between joint force capabilities and how, you know, really joint operations – it’s rock, paper, scissors, you know? So if you can – if you have all of those tools available – maritime, aerospace, cyberspace, land capabilities – then you’re able to pose that enemy with multiple dilemmas.

And, you know, this – if you think about even the history of large-scale conflict in the Pacific – something that, obviously, nobody would ever want to see again – the Japanese offensive in ’41 was a land offensive. It was an offensive over land to establish control of the inner and outer island chains, of course delivering a blow with maritime and air power against Pearl Harbor, but really trying to then consolidate control of territory to project power outward from land into the maritime domains, and just make it too costly for the United States to penetrate those defenses. And so that overall approach of using land as a way to influence other domains, I think is important.
The other thing is to recognize that all of the problems that manifest themselves in the maritime, aerospace, or even cyberspace domains, originate on land because people are doing it. So until dolphins become allied with an adversary and are able to take action against us, I mean, we have to deal with the land domain. And the Army is obviously – is the – is the – is the – is the – is the – is the – is the service that can do sustained engagement in campaigns on land.

MS. HICKS: So I’m going to turn it over to the audience in just a minute. I have just one more question from my end. And it’s a toss-up on resources or allies. I’m going to pick allies, and maybe somebody will ask a resource question.

It’s been a – it’s been a tough time for our allies this year from the left and from the right in our political spectrum. Not going to ask you to comment on that, but I do want to have a sense from where you sit looking at the future of the Army and thinking through operations. You’ve mentioned joint – the importance of jointness a number of times. Obviously, many of the campaigns we may be involved in of any nature are going to be in the territory of other countries and often alongside other nations.

What work are you doing to make sure that you are aligned to and working with partners and allies? And what role do you see them playing?

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: OK. So I think we’ve learned a lot over the last 15 years. And so some people have looked at – you know, the term that – or the phrase I would like to almost banish, it would be “building partner capacity,” right, because capacity isn’t really what’s caused us, you know, frustrations a lot of times in some of these missions; it’s really been being to – able to develop, you know, the will among that – within that force or – and to understand it.

Oftentimes these forces that we’re trying to develop are in and of themselves the prize in a political competition between various factions, some of which are criminalized, some of which are infiltrated by adversaries.

And so these – the large-scale security force assistance efforts we’ve been engaged in have been frustrated in large measure by a failure to put that kind of political understanding at the center of our efforts.

So I would say there are certain things we have to focus on, and they all begin with “I.” And let’s see if I can remember all of them. So the one – one was improve intelligence and understanding, really understanding, to be able to work with our partners to understand, you know, really what are the capabilities and limitations associated with their – that – with that – with that force and how we can assist them. And part of that understanding is also interest mapping, understanding the interests of your key partners and recognizing where they’re congruent with ours and where they may be divergent from ours.

And in that case the other “I” is influence. We have to just recognize what we’re – you know, we’re there for American interests, but we’re also there for interests of those whose – who align with ours, those whose interests align with ours. And so we want to exert influence, I think, through cooperative means ideally where we use common understanding as a basis for common action, but also through persuasive means, you know, by incentives and disincentives.
I mean, we know from the Afghanistan experience that the approach of, hey, if you don’t reform, I’m going to give you twice as much money next year – we know for sure that doesn’t work. (Laughter.) I mean, so I think incentives and disincentives are really – are really critical because our partners want they, they want us to apply those incentives, disincentives. When we don’t, they kind of – they kind of conclude that we’re either incompetent or indifferent or both or maybe in collusion with somebody else, you know, so – because of the conspiracy theories.

And then – and then finally the other “I” is institutions. So, hey, we can build battalions. I mean, we can build a battalion that will go and be very effective at fire and maneuver and close contact with the enemy. But that institution that’s behind them that provides them with intelligence, that helps plan their operations, that sustains their operations logistically, that allows them to conduct operations in a way that is sophisticated given the political and dynamics – and human dynamics.

So we have to – I think we have to focus more on institutions. And as General Milley mentioned last night as well, you know, that has a lot to do with leaders, making sure that leaders are in positions of leadership. And we have to be good partners in this, but we have to go in with a clear-eyed view that these forces in and of themselves are oftentimes battlegrounds between – between various groups. And I think we’ve learned that, and we have to really be able to apply that knowledge, I think, to future contingencies and future missions.

MS. HICKS: Great. OK. Sydney had a question first. So we have mics coming around. Just identify yourself, and please make sure it’s a question.

Q: Sydney Freedberg, Breaking Defense. Good to see you both up there again. A formidable tour d’horizon.

I wanted to zoom in on one area that has application to both the Pacific and to Europe, which you mentioned is – the issue of fires –

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Yes.

Q: – and as we’re – our being outranged and outgunned. But you talked about some very interesting things: long-range surface-to-surface fires, improved air defense, surface-to-air, a brand-new anti-ship shore-base capability, restored electronic warfare. But those are all things that we have in very limited ways or don’t currently. I mean, there is no – in the U.S. inventory – shore-based anti-ship missile at all. Our long-range missiles, surface-to-surface, are constrained by getting rid of cluster munitions –

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Right.

Q: – and by the INF treaty 500-kilometer limit, which is being observed by long-range precision fires.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Yeah.

Q: You know, IFPC and lasers and railguns for defense – air defense are very new and nascent. So how do we actually get from there to here? What of all these very cool ideas is becoming real?
LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Right. Well, I think a lot of them are. And so, you know, I can’t really go into any details about it, but I would say that what’s really powerful is the vision from the secretary of defense and the deputy secretary of defense on this. And so what that has done is it’s galvanized action within the services and between the services in a couple of key areas, you know, obviously in the area broadly of cross-domain fires but also cross-domain fires that are – that are – that are enabled by robotic and autonomy-enabled systems but are also enabled by a higher degree of cross-domain awareness.

So it’s not just like the rocket, right, but it’s also the – you know, it’s all the information-collection systems and the analytical tools that allow you to have cross-domain situational awareness and to fight effectively as a – as a joint force.

So we want to enable freedom of action and movement for our Air Force, right, and we want our Air Force to be very confident, supremely confident, that we’re never going to fire one of our missiles at them, you know, for example.

So the situational awareness part of it is important. The physical fires part of it is not as hard as you’d think it might be. In fact, there may be ways to use existing systems in new ways. And then – and then, of course, it’s the combination of those technological capabilities and inclusion of those into an operational concept that solves real problems against real potential enemies in a real area, whether specific or elsewhere.

And so what we’re – what we are hoping to do and what we’re working very closely with the Marine Corps in particular, is to recognize that this is not just about fires but it’s about maneuver, because what maneuver does is it poses multiple dilemmas for an adversary; it places something of value to an adversary at risk, which oftentimes then forces action that allows you to seize the initiative over that adversary.

And so what we want to do is show that this fires capability is not an end in and of itself but it’s connected to maneuver. And oftentimes maneuver is what allows you to get your fires, for example, into an advantageous position.

So really what we want to do is work on a concept that addresses a real problem, that really unpacks this idea of expeditionary maneuver; the rapid deployment of combined arms formations that possess the mobility, protection, and lethality to overmatch the enemy, and that are also capable of conducting operations for ample duration and in sufficient scale to accomplish the mission, right.

So it might not be, you know, dropping off an infantry squad somewhere. I mean, what is that going to do, right? I mean, it right – it might under certain circumstances be everything you need, but it’s unlikely.

So other technologies, Sydney, that are important to this are demand reduction for logistics. Some of the – you know, some of the – some of those – you know, the – those capabilities will enable smaller forces to achieve a higher degree of freedom of action at the end of extended and contested maybe lines of communication, in austere environments. And that will enable maneuver, enable fires with smaller units with a lower logistics demand.

So all of this is being integrated now into – you can see the headliners of this in your Army operating concept, but now we’re refining this into a real maneuver concept that emphasizes shaping
security environments as a competency, deterring conflict, developing situational understanding – again, in close contact with the enemy and civilian populations – integrating the efforts of multiple partners, because many of our partners are here today, we’re going to fight as a multinational interorganizational team; expeditionary maneuver, which I’ve described; joint combined arms maneuver, which I talked about earlier, you know, operating while dispersed, elevating the tactics of infiltration and so forth; and then the consolidation of gains as an integral part of all this.

So those are the outlines of how we think Army forces will have to fight in the future as part of joint – clunky term – interorganizational civil-military and multinational teams.

MS. HICKS: Great. OK, other questions? Let’s see – we have one right here at the end. Just wait for the mic. It’s coming. Yep.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Good to see you, Ambassador.

Q: (Off mic.)

MS. HICKS: Oops. I don’t think it’s on. Hold on. We had a – we’ll substitute your mic there.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: I can’t believe the State Department is not technologically savvy. (Laughter.)

Q: This is so common. You hand me a defective piece of equipment, then blame the State Department for the lack of ability. (Laughter.)

MS. HICKS: That’s true. That’s true. It is an evil plot by CSIS.

Q: Anyway, Ron Neumann, now with the American Academy of Diplomacy.

H.R., you talked a lot about situational understanding, sustainability long-term. One of the things that – my observation has been that has been really in the way of situational understanding and of building learning organizations is our short tour length. There is a huge tension between how long you can expect people to stay deployed and how you build a learning organization and don’t constantly start over, you know, in John Paul Vann’s words, what you’ve experienced 12 times.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Right.

Q: Are you looking at that tension and bringing any different or new ideas? You know, we had individual replacements. That was rotten in Vietnam. We’ve had enormous personnel costs with changing whole units out every year. Where do we go in the future?

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Yeah. Well, it’s a great – it’s a great question, and we’re probably not thinking hard enough about that. We are – we have – obviously, this is in – part of our campaign of learning, something that is under that, war-fighting challenge number one for us, is how to develop and sustain a high degree of situational understanding in complex environments and against adaptive enemies. And so that is our war-fighting challenge number one.

Now, what have we done under that? It has a lot to do with leader development and education, but it – what we’re talking about is a different sort of organizational approach to sustained operations
over time. What we have done under the idea – this is one of our really big areas of emphasis – is expeditionary mission command, is we want to develop – and we have developed – command posts that can deploy rapidly with baseline capabilities and then execute reach-back back to home stations where the bulk of the staff remains to provide analytical backup to those that are – that are forward.

This is – this is under an effort called home station as a docking station, OK, because we have to come – I don’t –

MS. HICKS: Give everything names.

LT. GEN. MCMASTERS: – it’s an acronym that’s probably pretty snappy – no, maybe it doesn’t – that doesn’t work very well. We have to – maybe have to change that. But anyway, it’s – (laughter) – home station as docking station. So that – so that would give us the communications capabilities. Now, to what degree are those going to be reliable in a contested environment? We have to make all those tradeoffs, and that will determine how much is forward, how much is back. It’ll be one of the factors.

If you do that, you can rotate personnel forward but keep the same organization focused on that problem set to build the database. So I think what you’re getting to is when we went into western Ninawa province, an area that the 101st Airborne Division had been in from ’03 to ’04 and had done a tremendous job figuring out the complexities of this crazy quilt of ethnicities and religious sects and tribes and – you know, and when we got there, their server was offline at Fort Campbell. So we had to call up, hey, could you put your server so we could, you know, search the database or – so we – and actually they – we brought some of their experts over and learned from it.

But we have to – we have to get better at – knowledge management is a big part of this. Policy, though, I think, as you – as you’ve mentioned, is really key, right. So regional alignment of forces will help us get to this to a certain extent because if you’re – if you’re a Chinese linguist, you know, oftentimes in the Army the joke is, well, you’re guaranteed to go to Germany, right – (laughter) –

MS. HICKS: Right.

LT. GEN. MCMASTERS: – or if you’re a German linguist, you’re guaranteed to go to Korea. So what we want to try to do is build – you know, build expertise over time with individuals, get the right people who understand some of the complexities, who have the relationships, right, with our allies and partners in the region, but then – but then also I think we have to do some harder thinking about in contingencies how we sustain knowledge over time. Right.

And we’re – we’ll rely on State Department expertise, right. We’re never going to – we will never have the depth of knowledge in rank-and-file leadership in our Army to understand this. So this is why the partnership with the country team, academic experts, is super-important to us.

MS. HICKS: OK. We are low on time, so I’m going to group a couple questions.

LT. GEN. MCMASTERS: Sure.

MS. HICKS: So let’s start over here, gentleman right here.

LT. GEN. MCMASTERS: I’ll try to remember them. Should I get my – I get my –
MS. HICKS: I can – I can do it for you.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: It’s unseemly to walk off stage. I know –

MS. HICKS: It’s just going to be two questions. I’ll be OK.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Let me get my – OK.

Q: Hi, I’m Scott Maucione with Federal News Radio.

You know, you talked a lot about cyber capabilities and kind of ramping them up. On the other side of that is the personnel and we need the personnel to be able to do that.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: The National Guard, the Reserves – they have a backlog, a training backlog –

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Absolutely.

Q: – and they can’t – they don’t have the capacity for the trainers. What is the Army, the active-duty Army, doing right now to address that, and where are you now in terms of your backlog?

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: OK.

MS. HICKS: OK. One more right here next to you, Kathleen (sp).

Q: Thank you. Patrick Tucker with Defense One.

You have spoken a lot and written a lot about the importance of gains consolidation, but it seems to me that the barrier is less one of technology than it is of politics. Committing sufficient ground troops to consolidate gains in a place like Iraq or Syria or Afghanistan is a political nonstarter. So, to your mind, how would you rank a U.S. political unwillingness to commit sufficient ground forces as a weakness against an adversary like Russia? And, two, do you see any technology that can overcome a U.S. political unwillingness to commit sufficient ground forces to consolidate gains? Thanks.

MS. HICKS: In either order you like.

LT. GEN. MCMASTER: OK, all right. So, first of all, cyber, I think if anybody is interested in writing a thesis or doing a story on military innovation, I think Army cyber is a great case study. What General Ed Cardon has done there I think is extraordinary, and his predecessors as well. But he’s really helped bring it to fruition. And what we’ve gone from is really a very – like, zero capability to a pretty significant, you know, tactical cyber capability and a contribution to – you know, to Cyber Command that is significant, you know, across – in the Army but, you know, obviously, this is happening across all services as well.

As you mentioned, the most important thing is really growing expertise in an area that, really, we didn’t have a lot of expertise. But we do have some. I mean, we have some Army senior leaders
that are incredibly, incredibly knowledgeable and savvy in this area. And of course, they’re worth their weight in gold and they’re managed very – you know, very carefully. No, hey, there’s this opening for this general officer. We have this one that fits, right? I mean, luckily, but we do have that one right now.

The key is really the mid-tier and junior, to get – to get them going. And what we’ve seen is a number of – a number of, like, cadets and midshipmen that are coming out of the military academies that have extraordinary capability and that also have what is also important: knowledge of security problems, and that what is also important is knowledge of our military and our systems, right? Because one of the key areas that’s going to be a growth area in cyber is the area of mission assurance. And so whereas we have been – you know, everybody wants to focus on offensive cyber. That’s probably the coolest thing to do, right, like an offensive military, anything. That’s – who doesn’t want to attack, right? I mean, so – but the defense part of it, the mission assurance is a growth area.

So we couldn’t do this, obviously, without partnership with academia. And there’s some programs that I’m sure everybody’s aware of that are really on the cutting edge of this. And so I was just recently at a – at a university, and I met some extraordinary lieutenants who were there, who already had a very strong undergraduate grounding in electrical engineering and computer science, and now were in a cyber program to get their master’s in cyber before they joined the unit as, you know, platoon leaders, cyber platoon leaders.

And so it is happening. Is it happening fast enough and in the scale? And as you mentioned, the Guard will be a great area to do this, right? Because the National Guard and the Reserves, you can have people who this for – in the financial sector, in industry, and then who can serve, you know, as citizen soldiers, you know, in – you know, in Guard units and then give us the depth that we need. And they can work on the problems, really, as well.

So, anyway, I think that – I think we’re doing pretty well on it. The biggest thing, though, we – is we have to recruit the right people. So if there’s anybody – if you know anybody who wants to come into the Army, in the cyber specialty, they can send me an email directly, I mean, and I will connect them to General Jeff Snow, the head of Recruiting Command, which I did. I mean, so in this – when I visit universities, I meet these young men and women. There is a tremendous untapped desire to serve in our nation, I think, and some people just don’t know how to do it. Now, our recruiters do a great job, but oftentimes, you know, we – the recruiters are not always incentivized to bring in an officer into the Cyber Corps. They might – to meet their goals, they might be focused more on something else. We have to be very adept at identifying these young men and women who want to serve, who have these skillsets, and to bring them in in a very agile way. And so you just hit on a great point. I agree with you. This is the important – most important aspect is the personnel. I think we’re making progress. If anyone wants to write about what Army cyber’s done at the level we can give you access, I do think it’s an amazing story, what General Cardon has done there.

On politics, no, there’s no technology that can do it. I don’t think – you know, I mean, unless – do you remember the love bomb? Do you remember the love bomb that was being developed in the ’80s? Maybe if we can come up with one of those – right? – to make people, like, love each other, you know? I don’t think we’re going to – it’s not going to work. (Laughter.)

So I think really what’s necessary, right, obviously, is the – is political accommodation, essentially is really what needs to happen. And so if we don’t really conduct operations and plan campaigns in a way that gets to the accommodation between communities that are really motivated by
what Thucydides said motivates people to fight 2,500 years ago—fear, sense of honor, and interest, and the belief that they can only allay their fears and protect their—them and their people, that they can protect their sense of honor and they can advance their interest through violence—if you can’t convince them that they can do that through an alternative means and that they can put their faith not in their own weapons, in their community that’s fallen back on itself, or the patronage of a criminalized, you know, militia or network that gives them the security, then you’re not going—you’re only addressing the symptoms of the violence.

So does that have to be U.S. forces? In some cases, it probably will have to be U.S. forces, but it doesn’t always have to be. And so I think there is an effort. Whether it will succeed or not, we don’t know. There’s an effort to develop, you know, multi-sectarian, multi-ethnic forces in northern Iraq, for example, that would allow Iraqi forces, enabled by us and our coalition partners, to be able to defeat these bastards, you know, these enemies of all humanity, and then to be able to establish security in the wake of their defeat. But the most important activity will be to broker local ceasefires, understandings, political accommodations at the bottom to build confidence and try to stitch the fabric of this crazy quilt of ethnicities and religious sects back together. Every time that fabric is torn, you know, every time it’s torn, you know, in Iraq, or anywhere, it’s tougher to put back together, right?

So this is not going to be an easy effort. There has to be, obviously, an equivalent top-down effort to—in the Iraqi government you see nascent efforts that are oftentimes foiled by Iranian subversion, for example, to have a top-down, more inclusive government and confidence-building measures there. This was all downhill—right?—since the election really was stolen from Ayad Allawi real—through Iranian subversion in 2010. So how do you get back on a path to bringing these communities back together from the bottom up and top down? And then, of course, many of the drivers of conflict in Syria and Iraq are external drivers of conflict, and so there has to be a top-down and a bottom-up approach, but there obviously—over time, there has to be an outside-in approach. There’s an inside-out and an outside-in approach, and that’s really to convince key actors in the region that their interests can best be advanced by supporting that kind of an accommodation between groups, rather than sponsoring extremists that represent one of those groups and to perpetuate violence that pits those groups against each other, continues to pit them against each other in a zero-sum game, really, for survival.

So, I mean, the short answer to your question is, there’s no technology to do that, and that’s why, you know, more planning, that’s why strategy has to begin with what you’re trying to achieve politically, and then what you’re doing militarily has to support it. The—I think, you know, American military officers did do this in a much different situation—right?—in Iraq in 2007, ’08, ’09. It was—it was the physical breaking of that cycle of violence at the local level that set conditions for those accommodations, and it was Army officers, like the one who’s there now, Sean MacFarland, who was a tremendous mediator, really, between communities, that brought those communities together. And this was happening across the country—that led to the uprising, that led to the sawa (ph), that led to the removal of support in many areas in west Baghdad, in many ways much more complex, removal of support for Shia Islamist militias among the Shia community and removal of support for these Takfiris or Salafi jihadist, you know, groups represented by at that time al-Qaida in Iraq, now as by ISIL. So, anyway, I agree, I think, with the point that you’re making, is there is no easy technological solution to this very complex political and human problem.

MS. HICKS: Well, Lieutenant General McMaster, I don’t think there’s anyone who could pack as much thoughtful information and insight into an hour as you have just done here today. I just want
to thank you very much for your time, and I hope you’ll come back another time where we can quiz you nonstop for an hour, because I know we will all benefit.

    So please join me in thanking General McMaster. (Applause.)

    LT. GEN. MCMASTER: Thank you.

    (END)