

Foundation for Defense of Democracies
Conference | Rising to the Threat: Revitalizing America's Military and Political Power
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The Path Forward: Recommendations for Revitalizing America's Military and Political Power

Speakers:

LTG (Ret.) H.R. McMaster, 26th U.S. National Security Advisor; Chairman, FDD's Center on Military and Political Power

Moderated by: Clifford D. May, Founder and President, FDD

MAY: Thank you so much for being with us for a few more minutes here, we'll have about a half hour, I'll talk to you for about fifteen minutes then we'll go to your questions, I'm sure you have a lot. I think -- I hope you do -- that this has been edifying and stimulating the entire day. I think we've heard from some wonderful experts.

I don't think we solved everything, and I don't think we're going to solve everything, but that's the -- but the idea here is not do that, the idea is to recognize which are the key problems that need to be worked on over the years ahead. Let me start with this, part of what we heard about today, we have the threat from China, which is long term, they see this as a marathon to use Dr. Phil's various phrase -- phrase, to be the hegemon of initially in Asia, but eventually to displace America.

We have Vladimir Putin in Russia, he does not have a very strong military, he plays a weak hand well, he's very clever, he does a lot with a little, no question about it. We have the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is a threat for all the reasons you and others have described. We have North Korea, which now has military weapons that and increasingly good missiles that deliver them, and we have the many various and proliferating Jihadi groups. Now, I think clearly, we can beat any one of these adversaries, my question for you is can we beat them all at one time? Particularly if they see it in their interest to act in concert.

MCMASTER: Well, I think if the "we" is -- is the United States, and -- and -- our -- our allies and partners, the other free and open societies of the world, yes we can defeat them and I -- I think that the way that we defeat them is -- is first of all to develop a higher degree of understanding of what is motivating and constraining each of these actors. And I think it's -- it's a step that we tend to skip over, and therefore our strategies oftentimes are aimed only at the symptoms rather than what is really driving that challenge. So for -- for -- you know, for Putin's Russia, I think it really is this effort to achieve national greatness again -- right, what Wess Mitchell was talking about on the -- on the panel earlier.

And -- and I think the way that Putin is trying to achieve national greatness again is to -- to drag everybody else down. You know, he wants to be the last -- last man standing essentially. And -- and so I think we have to be very adept at countering the very -- the sophisticated campaign of disinformation and propaganda -- political subversion in this form of Russian new generation warfare. For China, I think what -- what -- what China is obsessed with, the Chinese

Communist Party, is with control of -- of tightening and extending the -- the grip of the party on power.

And so that's why it's stifling human freedoms internally, but it's also what is -- what is driving this very aggressive effort to continue to grow the economy to meet the rising expectations of the population but also to achieve this national rejuvenation, to retake center stage. And -- and what's different I think about Xi Jinping that was mentioned earlier today, as -- as well, is that he is adamant, I think, about placing China at the center by creating really servile relationships with countries in the region who become dependent and are -- and are susceptible to coercion by the Chinese Communist Party.

And Xi Jinping's greatest ally in all of this is -- is corrupt governments -- governments with weak institutions. And you see the party preying on them. So you begin, as you think about what is motivation constraining the other, you begin to really access and see the wide range of tolls that you can bring to bear on that particular problem set. I think, on Iran for example, you know, there's this debate oftentimes about, you know, the moderate factions within Iran and so forth, and -- and I just -- I just don't think they exist within that government, right?

I mean -- I mean Mr. Xi, he speaks really great English, so he must be just like us, right, and -- and he's really not. And -- and he and Rouhani, and others are adherence to this kind of weird blending of a -- of a-- a religious ideology and Marxism. And I think we have to just read more about what they say and then -- and then -- and then respond based on what their intentions might be. And then of course, on North Korea, you have this *juche* -- you know I'm probably mispronouncing it -- culture ideology in the North that the Kim Regime has used for now generations to -- to justify the deprivation of its population.

So this -- so this being destitute is just a -- is a symbol of their virtue, and it's almost an ideology of ethnic superiority as well. So, I think -- I think in crafting solutions to these problems, it's very important to understand the perspective of the other, and then of course to work with those who share our interests and our principals to craft, really, strategies that get at what is driving the problem set.

MAY: You -- you've committed your life to national security, 34 years I believe in the military fighting for national -- America's national security. You spent -- you also were a national security advisor, there have only been a couple of dozen of those in the whole history of the country. One of your accomplishments in that position was to oversee the writing of a National Security Strategy. So what was different about what you did -- what did you see as frankly as you can be with us -- that was wrong with previous national security strategies that you thought had have to be overcome so that we knew what we were doing in fighting this war that we are in?

MCMASTER: Well, I think what was -- what was most important for us was to -- I think recognize that we were at the end of the beginning of a new era, and we were behind, as I was mentioning this morning. And we were behind in large measure because we had bought into fundamentally flawed, overly optimistic assumptions about the nature of the post Cold War world.

And -- and foremost among those was the belief that -- that -- that the great power competition was a relic of the past, associated with that was that there's this arc of history that had guaranteed the privacy of our free and open systems over closed and authoritarian systems. Also associated with it was this overconfidence then in -- in -- in our capabilities and in our ability to have a very high degree of agency and control over situations and I think -- and a belief that we could win in these contests easily.

So it was over confidence that I think that bred complacency. And then in more recent years, because of disappointments and strategic shocks, the financial crisis as I mentioned, unanticipated length and difficulties of the war in Afghanistan and in Iraq, I think we became overly pessimistic and we disengaged from complex problem sets.

And oftentimes, I think, if you couldn't have a criticism about maybe the George W. Bush years, and -- and of course everybody debates the -- so I mentioned earlier today, you know, the decision to invade Iraq, it might be that that administration did not take fully into account the risks and difficulties associated with action and I think that if there's a criticism that's fair of the Obama administration's foreign policy, it's that they did not take into consideration fully, as much as they should, the risks and consequences of inaction.

And so I think we need something in the middle. And so we -- we -- you know, we -- we -- we call this principled realism, was this idea, that we would try to understand complex challenges to national and international security on their own terms and view those challenges through the lens of our -- of our vital interests, and then work with partners and integrate all elements of -- of our national power to -- to try to -- to -- to shift -- you know, to shift the balance in favor of the United States and -- and other free and open societies.

Also central to this was the -- the recognition of the need to compete. In this period of over-optimism and complacency, we vacated critical competitive spaces or arenas of competition, and we saw how flat-footed we've been dealing with this new Russian form of maskirovka, you know, this cyber-enabled information warfare for example that is aimed at, I think, polarizing our polity and pitting us against each other in a way that reduces our confidence in who we are and -- and in our democratic principles and institutions and -- and processes.

And I think we were flat-footed in -- in -- in economic competitions, especially with regard to China and the degree to which China didn't do what we'd assumed China would do, which was another one of these sets of assumptions in the post-Cold War period is that they would liberalize their economy, and that as China prospered it would liberalize its form of governance as well. And of course under -- under, you know, Hu Jintao and especially Xi Jinping that's not the case.

So -- so I think the recognition to compete was -- was very central to -- to -- to the -- to the -- this national security strategy, as well as -- as the recognition that we had to do so with a higher degree of -- of -- of competence and -- and confidence.

MAY: You know, there are a lot of people -- probably not a lot in this room, but a lot of people who say, "I don't understand -- I don't like the idea that we're fighting these hashtag "Forever Wars", these hashtag "Endless Wars". We shouldn't -- we should do -- we should just go away from them or declare victory and come home. We have a lot of things we have to do right here. You and others want to spend a lot of money on all this military equipment."

Why -- they don't understand -- explain to them, if you -- if they're listening -- they may be a live -- watching the live stream. Why -- why we have to fight these wars.

MCMASTER: Well I think first of all, what's clear -- important to point out is it's not a theoretical case, right? We know that these transnational terrorist organizations, jihadist terrorist organizations are gaining power. They -- they're gaining power because they now have access to destructive capabilities previously associated only with nation states, and part of that is cyber capabilities, as -- as General Cardon was talking about, but also it's -- it's this broader phenomenon of the -- of this democratization of destruction.

So they're -- they're more and more potent, and -- and based on this -- this really huge scale sectarian civil war that's going on across the greater Middle East, there are -- these groups are able to portray themselves as patrons and protectors of beleaguered -- in particular, Sunni Arab and -- and -- and Sunni Turkmen communities, and therefore gain strength by being able to recruit people to the cause with this, you know, perverted, warped interpretation of -- of Islam, and a perpetuation of ignorance in the form of brainwashing, as we see them prey on -- on the most vulnerable people in societies, disenfranchised and -- and disillusioned young people in particular, and to mobilize them into -- into the cause.

And so the problem is bigger, right? Remember -- and again, it's not a theoretical case that if they enjoy a safe haven support base, they're able to amass the resources necessary to do the planning, the preparation, and training to conduct the mass murder attacks that they can do it -- we've seen it throughout Europe, throughout the region, and against our own nation on September 11th, 2001. And the perpetrators of those were the so called Afghan alumni. Well, the Al-Qaeda alumni and the -- the -- the Nusra alumni and the -- and the ISIS alumni are orders of magnitude larger than the Afghan alumni ever were.

So this is already a multi-generational problem. I think also that it's important to explain to the American people, not only what is at stake, but what is our strategy to get to an outcome -- to get to an outcome that -- that -- that preserves our security, but to do so also at a cost, and risk that's acceptable to the American public. And I think sometimes what we've done is -- is -- is we've just treated the symptoms and we haven't clearly described how we get to that sustainable outcome. But one of the -- one of the -- I was watching one of the debates, one of the -- one of the town halls in the -- in the -- in the primaries that are going on, on television, and a young student stood up and he said all I've known my whole life is war, now he's never been to war, but he's been subjected, I think, to this narrative of war weariness.

Now, I -- I -- I just -- I think we should recognize that -- that the United States has a smaller percentage of its military deployed overseas, than it has had since 1950 today. And if you think about the importance of the mission in Afghanistan to protect really what is

fundamentally a transformed society; you know, from the enemies that we're facing there -- the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda allies, it is -- it is, I think a cost that is sustainable, and a cost we want to continue to go down and to do more burden sharing with -- with our European allies and others. But it's no longer a war that is involving 130,000 troops, it's a war that -- I think we have 14,000 or 15,000 troops there.

It was a war that was not -- no longer costing \$125 billion a year, it was costing below \$20 billion a year, and that's still a lot, and I think we can get others to pay more, but I think that this is in many ways -- you always think about this is an insurance policy against what could happen, right? What could happen in Afghanistan. Which, if it was the collapse of -- of governmental control over big population centers, it would give the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda allies the ability to say look who we just defeated. We just defeated the United States and really the entire western world. And I think what we have to remember is what is it that they're trying to achieve?

What they're trying to achieve is establish these emirates and -- and -- and Afghanistan, that region Khorasan as they call it, is important to them psychologically and ideologically. And then stitches these emirates together in a caliphate, in which they force people to live under their brutal -- brutal regime, and then to export terror to attack their near enemies, the -- the Arab States, Israel, and the far enemies, Europe and the United States. This is what they really want to do is to continue to commit mass murder as their principal tactic in a war against all civilization. So, is that worth the -- the -- the cost and the risk? I think if we explain that to the American public, they will say yes, it is.

MAY: I've got a dozen more questions, but I'm going to try to limit myself to one and then go to your questions. So think where you are and then I'll go -- probably go over there. We are very good, general you were talking about this recently, about battlefield dominance, we can win. We have more difficulty figuring out what to do after we've won.

And I'm not even sure -- and this is something -- and he may not even have this answer -- who's responsible for that? Is it really the military's job to put together this society and a sustainable way or better, sometimes known as nation-building -- not a great phrase -- or is it the State Department's job or USAID, or do we not have anybody who knows how to do, whatever it is our ambition is to do with the society after we defeat our enemies on the battlefield?

MCMASTER: Right, well, we've -- we've had to do it in the past, and -- and -- and it's our denial of history oftentimes, it doesn't allow us to learn from -- from the past. And what I'm concerned about now is a -- is a resurrection of what Dr. Nadia Schadlow called in her book on this topic, "War and the Art of Governance," the American denial syndrome, right.

And so today it's really a positive development that we are recognizing the importance of -- of the return of great power competition, the need for us to -- to build up our conventional capabilities, our nuclear capabilities to restore what Thomas Schelling said was most important, which is deterrence by denial, right? Convincing your -- your potential enemy that they cannot accomplish their objectives through the use of force.

But I think what's happening now is almost an exclusive focus in some places on the return of great power competition, it's become almost an emotional cathartic, right, to get beyond the wars of unanticipated length and difficulty in Afghanistan and in Iraq. And I think it's almost kind of a resurrection of what the -- older one of us -- ones of us in here, might call the Vietnam syndrome, right, which was -- which was never again, will we fight a protracted counterinsurgency.

And -- and then it was the Vietnam syndrome that contributed I think, to the difficulties that we encountered, you know, in Afghanistan and Iraq, because we just weren't going to do that. That was something that we had written out of our operational concepts and our doctrine and our training and our leader development; despite the fact that we always had to do it, I mean, going back to the Revolutionary War, the wars on the frontier, the Civil War and Reconstruction. I mean it's -- how -- when Admiral Dewey sunk the Spanish fleet in Manila harbor, you know, he said, I better get some soldiers over here and figure out what to do next. So, there's always been a need for the -- for the Army and our land forces to -- to -- to play a role in establishing governance and to consolidate those gains.

And now I think one of the false dilemmas you hear today as well as nation -- nation building is a -- is a -- is a bad word. It's something to be avoided and has become associated with maybe unrealistic expectations about how rapidly some of these societies can transform, or -- or -- or an effort -- a futile effort to make them transform in our image, right.

And so, OK, Afghanistan is not going to become Switzerland; it's just not. But it's going to be -- it can be Afghanistan and it can be an Afghanistan, more like it was in the 70's, you know, than it was under this really short but brutal period of rule under the Taliban from 1996 to 2001. And so, Afghanistan has been transformed, it's -- it's -- you know, it's not perfect, but if you looked at the consultative loya jirga that just happened in the last couple days, that's a form of representative government.

The Afghan people, unlike the Chinese people, for example, they actually have a say in how they are governed. And so I -- I think that we've gotten into this diffused mentality. Hey, what if we just said, hey, I think we already won the war in Afghanistan. Now, that doesn't mean we won't have to continue to -- to invest in Afghanistan and to support Afghanistan and we won't continue to call on our soldiers to make sacrifices, to -- to -- to retain those -- those gains and to -- and to -- and to maintain that -- that victory there, but I do think that you know, not to paper over the many difficulties associated with -- with getting Afghanistan on a -- on a path to long-term stability and -- and self-reliance, but I do think there is -- there is this defeatist narrative now that is -- that is inaccurate and doesn't reflect what's at stake and oftentimes doesn't reflect the actual situation.

MAY: All right, we're going to go to questions. We have -- do we...

MCMASTER: And identify yourself, if you don't mind.

QUESTION: Hi, Rebecca Kheel from the Hill. I was wondering if you could assess your successor's job as national security advisor in relation to the issues in Iran right now, as well as the crisis in Venezuela.

MCMASTER: Well you know, I -- I've -- I've left, you know, in April of 2018, so I can't really -- I can't really comment on it, except to say that, I mean, I really do wish him and the -- and the administration -- I think we all should -- the best as they -- as they grapple with these very significant challenges to national security. You know this is an area -- you know, you mentioned Iran -- where we should have tremendous bipartisan consensus, right? Iran has been waging a proxy war against us since 1979.

The JCPOA was fundamentally flawed. It was fundamentally flawed in all the ways that FDD's highlighting and that you heard today. But it was really flawed in another assumption -- another one of these flawed assumptions, that -- that Iran, if they're -- if they're welcomed back in to the -- to the international economy, that they will -- that they will liberalize.

I mean, we always think that, you know, maybe the mullahs, it'll be like the Grinch, right? Their hearts will become two -- two sizes bigger, you know they'll give back the toys to Whoville. I mean, but it's not going to happen.

(LAUGHTER)

MCMASTER: OK, and so -- so I think the we -- we recognize that what the regime was doing was using all the benefits from the JCPOA, to -- to become more effective against us and to increase the resources that were available to Qasem Soleimani and the -- and the IRGC. In really the Iranian effort I think, to threaten Israel, but also to keep the Arab world perpetually weak by essentially applying the Hezbollah model broadly to the region and essentially to -- to have weak governments in power that are dependent on Iran for support while Iran grows militias that are outside of those governments' control and could be turned against the government, if that government acts against Iranian interests.

You see that sort of situation in Syria now, in -- in Iraq; this is what -- what Iran was trying to achieve, and this is what they're doing in Yemen as well. And most troubling was this -- this development of a Levantine land bridge across Syria that they would use, I think to place a proxy army on the border of Israel. And so when -- when we developed an Iran strategy, strategic options for the president, we -- we said, hey, what was wrong, I think about the approach previously, is the JCPOA was the Iran strategy. What we needed is we needed Iran's strategy into which efforts to block all paths by the Iranian regime to a nuclear weapon would fit into.

And so we reprioritized other aspects of that strategy, such as drying up the resources that are available for the IRGC. And I think what you've seen is a very effective implementation of that strategy, and a real integration of diplomatic efforts, financial efforts, economic efforts and military efforts, which is really, I think the essence of strategic competence. I think what you've also seen though, is a great deal of cooperation with allies, partners, like-minded countries.

It'd be interesting to know how many letters of agreement and contracts have been canceled. One of the reasons is we and -- and other of our partners have highlighted the fact, "Hey, guess who the beneficial owners of these Iranian companies are?" I mean, it's the IRGC and it's the bonyads associated with the clerical order.

So any -- any fantasy or pipedream about opening up to Iran commercially as a way to -- for alternative, you know, sources of power to develop within Iran was -- wasn't going to happen.

And so I -- so I think that there's been a fundamental shift, not only in the -- in the U.S. policy, but I think a lot of our partners are -- are coming with us on this, and there's great angst and consternation about the -- about the JCPOA, but I think the -- the behavior of that regime, what they've announced in the last 24 hours, for example, is going to expose their true intentions, and I think what you'll see is an even -- even more coherent, cohesive approach from the international community to confront the -- the regime and its -- its behavior in the region.

MAY: Well just to follow up -- the -- our European allies, I would argue -- I don't need to be diplomatic -- have not been great about coming along and supporting -- I know they have personality problems with the president, I know that -- nor -- and again, I -- we celebrate the 70th anniversary of NATO, NATO's a wonderful organization -- how many of our partners in NATO actually have the capability and readiness to fight tomorrow if Putin decides to -- to march into -- to Estonia?

And the number two military power in NATO of course is Turkey. We really think Turkey's going to back us up? It's backing up Russia right now.

Again, I'm not asking you to solve these problems.

MCMASTER: Yes.

MAY: I think it's important we recognize these are some of the challenges we face.

MCMASTER: No, so we're always going to fight -- face these such -- sorts of challenges, right? And as you know, the burden sharing arguments on -- on NATO go back to the 1970s. And -- and so the question is are -- are more NATO countries stepping up to meet the -- the goal from the Wales Conference? Yes they are. Are some of them lagging behind for a broad range of reasons? Yes.

I think what we ought to really be very cognizant of, though, is the effort by Putin and -- and -- and Russia to break apart the alliance. So if the alliance is so impotent, why is Russia prioritizing breaking it apart? You know, if -- if -- if the United States doesn't benefit as much as we might like to think from our transatlantic relationships, why is Russia doing everything it can to end that -- that relationship?

And so you see -- you see Russia's efforts in certain countries, in -- in -- in Eastern Europe to support some of these nativist political parties in -- in a way that -- that -- that

polarizes those polities while they also support left -- leftist parties. And -- and you see the same sort of efforts to undermine the EU and so forth.

So I -- I think, you know, the -- the problems in Europe, you know, I mean, President Trump didn't create those. I mean, they -- I think the Europeans kind of created those themselves in large measure on -- with -- and -- but I think we ought to be supportive of -- of the Europeans' efforts to regain their confidence in what binds them together, which is -- is their commitment to our democratic principles and institutions and -- and what -- what binds all of us together as -- as free and open societies.

On -- on Turkey, I think the -- the shift in Turkish policies is very regrettable. I think if Turkey were continue -- to continue this drift away from the West, you know, which was a pillar of Kemalism, was westernism, you know, secular -- secularism, and nationalism are the three pillars -- I think that this is -- this is probably the -- the biggest geopolitical shift since, you know, the Cold War and it's -- it's against us, right?

And -- and this is why -- you know, Russia says, "Hey, I've got a great deal for a air defense weapon system for you," because this is a great way for Russia to break the relationship. You know? And -- and -- and so I -- I think we have to -- to recognize the very sophisticated and nuanced ways that great power competition is playing out on -- on these battle grounds in -- in Europe.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. Dan Raviv i24 News. General McMaster I can't blame you for not wanting to speak much about your successor Ambassador Bolton, but you have a huge advantage on all of us in that you were the National Security Advisor to the man who is still the president.

Now your analysis of things seems not just eloquent, well-read but even cerebral. A lot of us don't really know what Mr. Trump is like, and can you just fill us in? I mean could he follow -- no, no I don't mean to be in the slightest insulting. Did -- did he -- but I mean did he follow your form of argument filled with information, background, history? We really don't know.

MCMASTER: Well you know that wasn't what my expectation was of the president, and it shouldn't have been, right? So I think people tend to skip over the fact that the president got elected, and so those who serve in the administration, I think, fall generally in to three categories -- those who are there to serve like I was in my 34th year of service to -- to the country and our military, to provide the elected president with options.

And then once the president made decisions to assist with the sensible execution of his decisions and policies. There's a second group of people, and I think this is true to any administration, not just this administration -- who are not there to give the president options, they're there to try to manipulate decisions based on their agenda, not the president's agenda.

And then there's a third group of people who maybe cast themselves in the role of saving the country -- you know, the world from the president, right? So -- and I think those latter two

categories of people are actually a danger to the Constitution of the United States. Because nobody elects generals or any military officer, or any intelligence officer, or any law enforcement officer, or any diplomat to make policy. And they're not accountable to the American people.

And the radical idea of our revolution was sovereignty is with the people. They exercise that sovereignty through whom they elect into the administrative branch and into the Congress. And that's where -- if we think there's -- a check needs to be on the president, that's what our founders set up for us.

So I've felt as if it was a privilege every day to serve, I thought that it was my duty to the president to not tell the president what the president wanted to hear, but to -- but to help confirm what the president was trying to achieve, and then not for me to come up with the bright ideas, right?

I'm not the oracle on foreign policy and national security -- but to avail ourselves through a process of the expertise that lies across our departments and agencies, at FDD and the think tanks and academia -- and use that process to generate those options to help -- to help advance and protect American interest, to promote American prosperity and to extend our -- our influence.

And so I think that we did that, and if you think about the big policy shifts that occurred, I would say in that first year they're pretty historic. OK, so the first priority was North Korea because of the nuclear test and the missile tests. So we went from a strategy of strategic patience, how was that working out? Not well.

I think -- there's broad consensus that wasn't working well, to a strategy of maximum pressure. How will that play out? Well, we'll see. We'll see, but I think it is a fundamentally sound approach with really unprecedented international cooperation there.

If you think about the strategy with China, the strategy was one of strategic engagement, again, on this assumption that China would liberalize its economy, play by the rules, liberalize its form of government. That has shifted now, to a strategy of competition. All this is in the highly readable, page-turning December 2017 National Security Strategy.

And then -- and then the competitive stance with Russia, the broad range of actions they have put in place to confront Russia's destabilizing behavior. If you look at the Venezuela strategy, I think that's been -- been effective. And then of course, the South Asia strategy and the strategies in place to help influence the resolution of this humanitarian catastrophe that is centered on a Syrian Civil War. And to -- to get to a sustainable political outcome in the Middle East, they can end the suffering of people and they can -- they can also achieve an outcome that's consistent really with the interests of the people in that region and in our interest in the region as well.

So, I could go on about that. Obviously I don't need to -- I know we're almost out of time here. But I do think it works. I think presenting the president with -- with multiple options,

giving the president access to whatever consultative form -- I'll just tell another quick -- quick anecdote on this fast, and I'm sorry Cliff.

MAY: No, no.

MCMASTER: But it gets to your question a little bit, which is a great question, you know.

But on my second day in the job, I called all the national security council staff together, and I said, hey -- Mike Bell's here, he'll remember this -- and I said hey, we can come up with what we think is the perfect NSC process and we will draw out of the process what we think are the perfect NSC products and give those to the president and say, hey, please change and adopt -- and adapt to what we think is best for you. Or what we can do is try to understand how the president makes decisions and how to present information in a way that's effective for the president and do it that way, you know. And we're going to -- I think it's important for us to do the latter, and that's the best way to serve the president and the country.

MAY: We have many more questions, but I'm not going to take more time right now. I want to thank you for being here today. I want to thank you for your many decades of service to the United States of America. Thank you for advising and guiding CMPP, we're really privileged and grateful, I mean that so sincerely, to you have to talk with. And I hope this -- this conversation this whole day has been useful to all of you. By the way, there is a podcast that we've done, and what I've done with Brad Bowman as well, that I think is still up to date, so you can hear more of General McMaster's ideas on this and it's available on our website or anywhere you find podcasts.

There's so much work that needs to be done. We just hope and believe that CMPP can make a meaningful contribution to that work that needs to be done for the sake of this country, for the sake of future generations, so they may live in freedom and opportunity, which is my definition of the American dream. Before we conclude, I want take a moment to thank the FDD staff who made this event possible.

A lot of you do know, I hope they make this look effortless. It is not. This takes a tremendous amount of planning, and our people do it better than anybody, and we're just -- it's such a wonderful team and I'm proud and honored everyday to be part of them. One quick note of appreciation to FDD's investors. This conference and all the work we do at FDD is only possible thanks to you.

We take no foreign government money, we take money from American citizens who care about these issues and are able to -- able to help us. And so we just want to thank you for your tremendous support of this work. And finally to all of you joining us in this room or through live stream, I hope you found today's conversations useful. I hope you found them edifying. I hope that you learn more today about why we believe that this Center on Military and Political Power is so important.

This conference only marks the beginning of CMPP's work. We hope to see you all work closely with you as we assess and evaluate the greatest threats to our national security and how to prioritize what to do with them. So thank you and we look forward to continuing this conversation with all of you. Thank you again. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

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