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A Conversation with Representatives Elissa Slotkin and Michael Waltz

Speakers:

Representative Elissa Slotkin (D-MI)

Representative Michael Waltz (R-FL)

Moderated by: Jonathan Schanzer, Senior Vice President for Research, FDD

SCHANZER: OK everyone, I wanted to welcome you to our next panel. This one is a pleasure for me to moderate. These are two people who I've known from a former life. You may -- some of you may know that Michael Waltz, Representative from Florida, was actually a FDD Adjunct Fellow for several years -- an alum. So, it was a pleasure to work with him.

And also Representative Elissa Slotkin from Michigan is a former colleague of mine from the American University in Cairo. So, for me to have both of these guys up on stage today is a real treat.

I'll very briefly just go through their backgrounds and then we'll try to dive into the conversation here. So, Elissa, soon after 9/11 was recruited to the CIA where she became a Middle East analyst working alongside the U.S. military during three tours in Iraq. Before becoming a member of Congress she served as Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs where she oversaw policy on Russia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Welcome.

SLOTKIN: Thank you.

SCHANZER: And Michael, after being commissioned as an Army Lieutenant, graduated Ranger School and was selected to the Green Berets. He served all over the world as a decorated Special Forces Officer, with multiple combat tours in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa and he later served as Defense Policy Director for Secretaries of Defense Rumsfeld and Gates, and also he served in the White House as Vice President Dick Cheney's Counterterrorism Adviser. So, thank you both for being here.

WALTZ: Thanks John.

SCHANZER: And so what I want to do is just briefly have you tell your stories to this audience, because I think they're both remarkable. Mike, if you wouldn't mind just to share just a few minutes about your experiences in Afghanistan. I think a lot about the Bowe Bergdahl story in particular when I think about your story, which, of course, you've told in a book that's available on Amazon.com called *Warrior Diplomat*. But please, if you wouldn't mind, just giving everybody a little bit of your background.

WALTZ: Yes, well, thank you John for the book plug. All the proceeds from that go to the Green Beret Foundation. But yea, I had this really incredible experience in the sense that a lot of folks don't realize both the Navy SEALs and Army Green Berets have reserve units, which means you have to have a day job.

My day jobs was with those Defense Secretaries and then eventually Vice President Cheney and had this fascinating, literally, there I was in the White House Situation Room and then saying Mr. President, this is what I recommend and then I had to be the only -- one of the only idiots in Washington that actually had to go execute the strategy that I had recommended and then it would be a lot of fun coming back putting on the coat and tie and saying, Mr. Vice President, here's what's really going on, on the ground, and speaking that truth to power.

And one of those deployments, unfortunately, I had to lead the search for that young man that we know of as Bowe Bergdahl, and make no mistake he stacked up his gear, he left his weapon behind, he denounced the United States in e-mails to his father, and he absolutely cost service members their lives in looking for him.

And one of my first experiences on Fox, actually my first appearance was the night after the Rose Garden ceremony where he was declared a hero, and said, time out America, here's -- here's what really happened.

So, I think that truth to power and that ground truth is incredibly important to policymakers. Fast forward, one of the reasons that I decided to run for office is that we were at a record low in our nation's history in terms of veterans in Congress. In the late 1970s we peaked at around 80 percent in service veterans in the House and in the Senate. Right now we're hovering around 15 to 18 percent. Record low in our nation's history.

Why does that matter so much? Well, one of it -- which I -- one reason, which I think you'll see today with Elissa and I is that ethos of service that we bring to serving in Congress.

I can tell you for sure, on the black helicopter in the middle of the night coming off an objective, nobody cares about race, religion, party affiliation, I'm not asking someone getting on the bird, are you a Democrat, or are you Hispanic, or where are you from? No one cares, it's about mission, it's about country, it's about getting the job done and moving the ball forward. And I think that ethos is frankly what we're missing now in D.C. and what we need to get back to.

So, posting on Facebook and yelling at the television isn't good enough. Get in the arena and step up and serve. And so, what the heck, we won.

SCHANZER: Good to have you here. And by the way, I should just note that my colleague, Brad Bowman, when he was interviewing Congressman Thornberry, they were talking about the dearth of people that come to Congress with that national security background. We don't have that problem with both of you and that's nice to see. Elissa,

if you would tell your story. If I recall, you were one of, or perhaps, the youngest CIA analyst to be giving the regular brief to a president. How did that happen? And how ...

SLOTKIN: Yea, sure. I don't know -- I don't know that I hold that title at all, but the -- the way that I actually came to work in the Bush White House, actually at the same time as Michael, was I had already served two tours in Iraq and President Bush decided to change policy and surge in Iraq, as we all know, and to his great credit, he realized that he had been insulated from what was actually happening on the ground and in Iraq and how things were going. And so, he said, I want to see young CIA analysts in the Oval Office every Monday without their bosses.

So, they come back to Langley and they announce this and they said, who wants to go first. And I was like, uh, yes, this is what I've been working on. This is what I have been hoping to do and I thought it was a great opportunity.

The analyst core tends to be a little bit more introverted, so there weren't that many hands that went up. And I went down the next week and gave a brief to the president, the vice president, the national security advisor.

We got into what I would call a healthy debate about a certain Shia militia that I spend a lot of time working on and after the back and forth we walked out of the Oval and the then national security advisor said, if you can argue with the president and not piss him off, you should come and work here. And so, that is what I did. I started another week or two later.

So -- but same kind of thing, I think Michael is right, I know on the Democratic side, among us freshman, we have 10 people with a service or veteran background who just are newly in office, and I think it's a completely different ethos and it affects the culture of the place, which is good.

WALTZ: Yea, if I could just add to that, you should -- this panel today I hope should leave you with a little bit of optimism. You know, it has surprised me in a positive way. When we have hearings on the Armed Services Committee, if you closed your eyes and just listened to the questions, I really don't think you could tell which side of the aisle that we're coming from.

They are very much focused on how to help the military be trained, and equipped, and ready to do the missions that they need to do. And despite what we're seeing in the vitriol in the other committees -- on Judiciary and Oversight, what have you -- we really don't see that on a day-to-day basis on Armed Services, which is a great thing.

SCHANZER: That's nice to hear. So what I want to do is I want to just sort of get our hands dirty for a little bit here, I want to start out with the issue war on terror, which both of you have fought on frontlines and from behind. I want to talk about how that's going and how we can begin to pivot, even as we're still losing ground in some cases,

how we can begin to pivot toward these great power conflicts that everybody keeps talking about.

Does the United States have the ability to work the issue out, what do we need to do -- perhaps more specifically from a congressional perspective, what are you guys doing to help ensure that we make that pivot properly? Elissa, you want to start?

SLOTKIN: Yea, I don't think it's terribly hard because the Pentagon is really singing this tune pretty loudly. I think they've made -- you know, the Pentagon that I know and love is sort of like an aircraft carrier, it takes a lot to turn it, but I think that they've turned, and I think that they realize that great power competition and, you know, managing our relationships with Russia and China is extremely important and we have for a long time underinvested in modernization that allows us to compete in sort of the new battlefields of the future.

So I think we've been hearing, I think positive things from them and of course I don't think they're shortchanging the counterterrorism fight, I just think that they're realizing that we need capital investment in a big way on modernization. Their budgets reflect that, and I think the committee has largely been supportive of that.

The question will come when we, you know try to bring others along -- not just the committee, to invest that kind of dollars in the Defense Department. I think that's where the controversy, at least on my side of the aisle, is certainty going to lay. But I think we're singing the same song between the Pentagon and the Committee.

WALTZ: Yea well, I think that's largely right, I do have some concerns somewhat on the margins, you know the -- we tend to move in to big pendulum swings and hearing after hearing, we are -- the National Defense Strategy says we do need to shift back to great power competition, that we have underinvested in these 18 years on the war on terrorism.

I'm somewhat concerned that pendulum is going to swing too far, and that we could risk repeating what we did post-Vietnam and flushing those lessons learned that have been bought with blood, sweat, and tears. Those wars are still ongoing in Afghanistan, in the Middle East, and in other places. ISIS may be defeated as a caliphate, it may be defeated as a country but it is not defeated as a movement.

Al-Qaeda is resurgent, ISIS is resurgent in some places and spreading -- metastasizing, and we just can't take our eye off of that ball. The Pentagon's comfort zone is buying big things that fly high, far, and fast -- learning local cultures, learning languages, you know -- don't create a lot of jobs and don't have a huge constituency.

So I do worry about it swinging too far, and all it's going to take is one -- God help us, but one suicide bomber in a mall somewhere in America, and then suddenly we're going to be shipping that aircraft carrier way back again.

So the billion dollar question is how do we maintain the war on terror, which I believe is a multi-generational war into the foreseeable future, while competing with Russia and China overlaid between \$22 trillion and growing in debt, right? How do we do all of that?

Two -- broadly speaking, and I know that there's a lot of things you want to get to -- one, I think there's a lot more than we could do with the Guard and Reserve, and the civilian skill sets that they bring to capacity building, stability, and to cyber.

And then two, I think there's a lot more that we can do with public and private partnerships, and space is one example where, as a conservative, I love the fact that the private sector is leading the charge for the U.S. research into space. Space X, Blue Origin, OneWeb, Firefly and I could go on and on with the companies. But those are areas where I think we could realize some great return -- more return on investment in how we try to do both of those things.

SCHANZER: You raise a lot of points and I want to get to a couple of them. Just briefly, are we negotiating our own defeat in Afghanistan?

WALTZ: So we eventually need to get to a negotiated settlement. Of course, almost every counterinsurgency in history has done so, but we have to do it from a position of strength.

The Taliban believe that they are winning right now, we have to send the right signal -- and most Afghans that you talk to don't know or don't care whether we have 8,000 -- 10,000 -- or 15,000. What they need to hear is that we are with you, you cannot outwait the enemies -- our enemies need to hear that you cannot outwait us.

And at the end of the day I think we should be past the debate do we stay or do we go? We cannot walk away from half the world's terrorist organizations. It's -- the debate should be how do we do it better? How do we do it more efficiently, and how do we really rely on our allies for more burden sharing?

SCHANZER: OK. We'll talk about allies in a little bit.

WALTZ: Sure.

SCHANZER: Elissa, we had this emergency trip by Secretary Pompeo to Iraq, expressing a lot of concerns that the country perhaps is in -- overly influenced by Iran, we've got Shiite militias that we're now beginning to designate one after another as terrorist organizations. Have we lost control of this country that we've put so much blood, and treasure into?

SLOTKIN: No, I mean we've had this problem frankly from the moment we invaded. I mean, I think we need to be clear about the fact that we -- I mean, I am a Shia militia analyst by training, so I watched this for a long time and Iran has always had their

fingers in Iraq, they've always seen it as extremely vital to their national security to be heavily involved in attempting to influence the direction of the country. They certainly used those organizations to try and get us out of Iraq and increase the price of being in Iraq.

So that is to me, is not new. I actually think that based on the combination of leaders we've had over the years, you actually have some better leaders who are less influenced by Iran than others in the past, which I think is very, very important.

I just, unfortunately think that we are always going to have this problem in -- with the geography of the place. I don't think that means the country is going over, and I think it's important to just stay measured about it.

I do think that some of these groups that were very, very important in overthrowing ISIS, and getting them out of Mosul, need to be incorporated in to the state or they need to be disarmed, right? We need to have a monopoly of power by the state, and that remains a real concern for me and lots of groups I now represent, quite frankly, the Iraqi Christians.

But I don't think that it means the country's about to keel over, I think it means we need an intensive and ongoing diplomatic effort there, we need an intensive and ongoing military effort there. We are not going to be able to pull up stakes in Iraq anytime soon. Won't mean 100,000 troops, but we need to -- I think evolve in the way that we think about global war on terror.

Large land invasions in the Middle East are deeply complicated, expensive in blood and treasure and maybe not the best approach unless absolutely threatened and required, smaller limited operations to make sure that the militaries in the countries we invest in don't get thrown over the minute we leave. Yes, that is sort of what we're in and what we're going to be in.

SCHANZER: So the way that you just described that I think sums it up perfectly that we're trying to basically contain these challenges that we have been fighting for the last two decades with smaller forces by -- in a smarter way, and perhaps draw down a little bit on the investment in capital as well as the human investment as well as we begin to shift towards China and Russia in particular.

To have both of you just speak a little bit about the way that you view China from Capitol Hill right now, it's what everyone's talking about right now, it's the focus of everything, right? You've got the Chinese threat, what they're doing in the South China Sea, the I.P. issues, the cyber issues -- what does this mean, are we into a new cold war, or is it something that looks more hybrid? Elissa, why don't you pick this up?

SLOTKIN: Yea, I mean I just think that the Chinese are just way more sophisticated when it comes to mixing military strategy, economic strategy, social and

cultural strategy -- we tend to really see them in silos and we don't think about using those different tools in a united front, and they do and they're effective at it.

I know back home in Michigan, I mean there is real passion and anger about what the Chinese are doing on the global stage, less so on the military front and more on the economic front.

I think that one of the major problems that I'm worried about for the future of warfare in general is how do you establish deterrents in a world where the weapons of war are things like cyber, and use of A.I. -- and you know, I'm trying not to get stuck in a cold war model, but making sure that we knew that we had a strong fence, and defending that fence, and having a high punishment when you violated that fence was critical to us winning the Cold War.

WALTZ: Was that a wall?

SLOTKIN: Pardon?

WALTZ: Was that a wall that you're --

SLOTKIN: I am not pro-wall, let me make it very clear. But the -- I think that is a huge question for me is -- you know, if the Chinese steal a ton of intellectual property, they attack our OPM and steal all of our records, right? You know, they attack private organizations, private businesses -- what is the appropriate proportional response, how do we reestablish deterrents?

Is there room for something like an arms control regime related to new tools? That is really interesting to me because I don't understand how we're going to engage in the way -- in sort of something short of war with people -- with countries like China. I do not see the path right now, and that concerns me.

SCHANZER: Well we've had actually people that have come to FDD that have suggested that we need that new Cold War mentality, that we're better at fighting those sorts of wars than we are fighting the ones that we have been.

WALTZ: I think what's so unusual is never before in American history have we been so economically intertwined with a potential adversary, certainly not with the Soviet Union, and certainly not with Germany or Japan. But I'm incredibly concerned, I certainly -- I applaud the president for taking this on, in a very forceful way.

I think China is -- has become the payday lender of the world. We all know how payday lenders work -- you know, give me the deeds to your car, and your house and I'll give you a loan you can never pay back. But in this case, it's to critical infrastructure and the ports.

I brought a chart with me that Admiral Faller from SOUTHCOM recently handed out at a hearing, so I think the Chinese are essentially -- have completely undermined, or become termites undermining the Monroe Doctrine. The chart shows Chinese engagement in South Central America, 19 to 33 countries have signed up to One Belt, One Road.

The Chinese recently put a satellite tracking station in Argentina on land that it basically took through debt. They now control both sides of the Panama Canal and the list goes on, and on, and on, over \$155 billion in loans since 2007. So to Elissa's point, diplomatic information, military economics, the Chinese have truly mastered it.

They're payday lending their way around the world. I can't believe Italy has now bought in to this, the first NATO ally -- and then at the same time have stolen -- not are stealing, have stolen our technological edge with very little if any repercussions from the United States. I don't even know what repercussions there were for the OPM thing -- none.

So I think we do need to very quickly move to a deterrence model where we will stand firm, there will be consequences, and we need to work more closely with the private sector so that they can also enact consequences thus eliminate this business and private sector of the government divide in the cyberspace that heretofore I think has really been hampering us.

So I -- hats off to the president, I was thrilled to see Senator Schumer tell him to stand strong because trade is absolutely linked in to this dynamic, and you know, I think we need to stand firm as a country as we take this on.

SCHANZER: You know, I do note that really we have this economic link with the Chinese that does probably limit us significantly right now, and that I think is probably one of our greatest concerns moving forward.

Let's talk Russia for just a moment, I think there's real bipartisan agreement on China, but it's a little less so on Russia. But I think still there's a lot where we can probably agree -- where do you see things going right now on that front?

SLOTKIN: I mean, I'm probably just a Russia hawk based on my experience of running the U.S.-Russian defense relationship the last three years I was at the Pentagon, and having to negotiate with them constantly on our regional engagements in Syria.

And I just -- I do not think that they have accepted their post-Cold War status and they are clamoring to be seen as our equals again and they're going to use a whole host of tools in their arsenal to do it.

And I think the thing that – you know, obviously there's lots and lots of attention on the Mueller report, and on what we learned in the Mueller report -- I don't think it told us a ton more on the information warfare side than what our intelligence community had

already come out with. But I don't like Russians being able to buy political ads in our system. I don't like Russians being able to -- any foreigner -- being able to impact the American political system.

And so there is -- you know, I have a bipartisan bill that closes the loophole that is currently open that allows foreigners to buy, you know, an ad for or against a candidate in our system. That's totally legal.

So I think that there is the question with Russia similarly to China, I think we have to be more clear-eyed about it. And while I would love to live in a post-Cold War environment that's happy and go-lucky, they are not playing that game. And they're using the exact same playbook on us that they've used in Eastern Europe for a long time, and I think we need to just be open and honest about that.

SCHANZER: Mike.

WALTZ: Well look, I think if the active measures are not new, the Soviets used them, you know, throughout the Cold War, but if the Kremlin's goal was to have Americans opposed to each other, so that we're not opposed to what the Kremlin's doing, it's working

SLOTKIN: It's great.

WALTZ: And there couldn't be anyone more happier right now at watching American at each other's throats than Vladimir Putin. I think we need to draw a very fine line, or a very bright line, excuse me, between Russia engaging in active measures and in hacking to pieces there in trying to influence our social media and hack our electoral system between having influenced the election in 2016 or any type of collusion.

There was clearly no collusion coming from the report and I don't think they influenced the election, but our democracy is absolutely under attack. We need to keep a bright and -- a bright spotlight on that and the difficulty is, our elections are determined at the county level. So, those are literally thousand of different systems, thousands of different protocols, DHS is working with local election officials but we have a long way to go.

I sit on the Intelligence Subcommittee, on the Armed Services Committee, we have made huge strides towards protecting our electoral system, but we have a long way to go and we can't lose sight of that was spin ourselves in circle with this debate over the -- over the Mueller report.

SCHANZER: OK, so moving from Russia, I want to speak briefly about what's going on with our NATO allies. Directly related, of course, and there's been quite a bit of debate about burden sharing, about the roll of some of these multilateral alliances that we have. Where are we with that? I know that there is some debate here about whether we should be asking more or whether everybody's fine where they are.

SLOTKIN: No, we should be asking more. I mean, and we've had that policy for a long time. They've been underpaying for a long time. And some of the countries that have the most capacity to grow, right, because German is different than Montenegro, are the ones that are most reluctant to actually increase their defense budget. So, and you need to just call a spade a spade.

So, I don't have a problem calling out our NATO allies. We did it when I was in, for their underpayment, but we also need to realize that publicly poking our allies in the chest does come with costs.

And I think that we need to acknowledge that for some of these allies, it's become politically hard for them to be seen as going with the Americans on things, because it's bad politics for them. And I'm a pragmatist, right? I want more allies and more partners coming with us in more conflicts and doing more on the world stage, so that we get to do a bit less.

And I think that the way that it was gone about repeatedly, alienating allies, including people who were fighting and dying with us in places like Syria, to me, is more than we needed to do. It was enough. But, pushing them to live up to their commitments of two percent, 100 percent, and exposing that when you have a NATO defense ministerial or a summit, absolutely.

SCHANZER: So, what's the way to bring them along if, well we have -- what we've done so far hasn't gotten where they need to be, what ...

SLOTKIN: I mean, I think we have to acknowledge that right now the Europeans are openly talking about hedging and having their own foreign policy and national security approach that's separate from the United States. That is just factual.

You go to the Munich Security Conference, they are just openly, Chancellor Merkel gets up, speaks, gets a round of applause, for talking about, for the first time since the end of -- since World War II, going their own way and having their own approach to national security, that, we should be concerned about, just straight up.

And I think that there is quite a bit that other senior officials have tried to do to maybe repair some of those relationships, but we've got to call it out and say that anything that is making it harder for allies to engage with us, that is having them think that they're going to deal with China or others their own way, it ain't good for the United States.

SCHANZER: Mike?

WALTZ: So, I think we're probably in -- and I think Elissa and I are in violent agreement in terms of pushing our allies and our partners to step up to their commitments in terms of burden sharing. If I had a dollar for every speech I wrote as well, and serving

in the Pentagon and asking nicely, in private and polite European forums for them to step to their two percent, I'd be a much wealthier man.

I think where we probably have some differences, the fact is to get there, I have no problem at this point, after so many years and so many decades with the president naming and shaming those who aren't stepping up to the plate despite their commitments.

I was on the ground in Afghanistan for years when the Europeans weren't providing what they had pledged and when they did provide what they had pledged, they burdened them with so many caveats, that it was essentially -- it was essentially useless on the ground.

At the same time, look, we -- I 100 percent think the United States has to continue to lead in this global, lowercase L liberal world order that we have enjoyed post World War II. But if we look at countries that can step up and do more, what do we do in terms of China? I think we work with Abe government to continue to reform title nine of their constitution, think it's time 70 years on for the Japanese to be able to have an offensive capability. I think it's time for the South Koreans to pay more.

They've gone from a -- basically an occupied country in the 1950s to one of the largest economies in the world. So, I completely support the president in pushing for all of our allies to take more of a burden share with -- with -- this is important, with American leadership.

SLOTKIN: So, the one thing I would say, there is one conversation about burden sharing and dealing with our allies on those issues, which I think we're, like Michael said, we probably more or less agree. I think, though, to see burden sharing as separate from a greater, the greater kind of conversation that's been going on with our allies is just -- it's artificial, right?

So, when the President of the United States tweets that he's going to get out of Syria, right, and we have allies and partners who are fighting and dying with us, Jim Mattis resigned over it, let's call a spade a spade, that -- that is a really difficult thing to explain to our allies and it's -- it basically ensures that the next time we go and ask them to come with us, they're going to at least think longer about it. I certainly would.

And I will tell you that if the American handshake doesn't mean anything anymore, that you ask them to come and die with us and then we just let them know out of thin air that we're not there anymore, that is a dangerous moment for American leadership if our handshake does not mean something.

SCHANZER: We have a few minutes left. What I want to do is briefly just speak about the kind of state of play in the broader Middle East. You hear a lot speaking of allies, we hear a lot about this Arab NATO. I know Mike, you fought alongside some of these militaries. I know, Elissa, you worked with many of them. Are we looking at capable militaries?

I mean, we look at Yemen right now, for example, and that's just been a hot mess. What can we expect out of this region? We see them coalescing in a way to counter Iran, but on the other hand there's perhaps a lack of professional capabilities. What would you like to see out of the region if you could help guide it?

SLOTKIN: I mean, I think the goal, wherever we are in the world, is that you have capable militaries that are responsible, that act in a decent, proportionate and humanitarian way to fight off the bad guys in their country so that we don't have to do it, right? That's always our goal, and I think it's a patchwork in the Middle East. I think that you have places like Jordan and the Emirates where you have militaries who are actually kind of coming up in the world and doing better. The most important thing to me is will they do a lessons learned process after an operation to actually learn from their mistakes? That's my, like, litmus test for whether a military is actually on the road to improvement or if they're stuck in a stalled position.

I think there are other militaries that still don't acknowledge that they're not perfect, and they therefore cannot do basic combined operations. And I think that we should all be invested in those militaries becoming more professional. We have huge programs that do that through the U.S. military, and we should continue and fund those programs.

But I think it's still a real patchwork, and to say that we're going to have a professional forward-leaning Middle East that takes care of its own problems in -- in our lifetime feels more like a pipe dream to me.

WALTZ: Look, I -- you know, as a Green Beret by background, we specialize in by, with, and through local partners. I -- I spent a tour in Afghanistan with three of us -- me and a communications sergeant and a medical sergeant embedded with about 90 Arab soldiers from the UAE, partnered with 200 Afghan soldiers from the Afghan Army. So I tell people if I never eat goat again in my entire life, I'll be fine.

(LAUGHTER)

WALTZ: It was a long year. But in areas where we are interoperable from an equipment standpoint, interoperable from a training standpoint, and we have those on-the-ground relationships -- I've kept in touch with all of those officers from 10 years ago to this day. We have a fantastic relationship, both on the ground and I think at -- at a more strategic level, and that needs to continue.

Look, separately but important, the president and John Bolton fully understand -- and I think rightly -- that the Achilles heel with Iran is its economy. I was thrilled to see us go to no more waivers. We should not if we're going to go down this road have half-measures. The Iranian economy now is looking at 50 percent plus inflation, daily labor strikes, spending billions abroad on its surrogate operations, and I think is in -- I think is in real trouble.

So I fully support -- I fully support the president's policy, I think we need to keep it up and I think our allies are -- are -- are thrilled to see us moving in that direction.

SCHANZER: OK, we need to wrap up here. I'd like to give you each just a minute to maybe just talk about what you are thinking about for the future, whether it's legislation or whether it's achievements that you would like to see within the House Armed Services Committee, whatever's on your mind. Elissa?

SLOTKIN: I mean, to me, I -- I would just say I think that there is an extreme media focus on the far left and the far right, and there's actually a bigger pool of reasonable people in the middle, it's just not sexy to be moderate. And I -- for me, there's real power and opportunity in that middle.

And I think the -- that there is a real opportunity on legislation, maybe not on things that are at the top of the headlines, but when it comes to veterans' issues, defense-related issues, even homeland security issues -- I am on the Northern border, I think there's a lot of agreement on our Northern border and how to help up there. I think that there's real opportunities for reasonable people on both sides to come together and actually pass legislation.

I think it's important that we -- we continue to work on the things that affect the people in our districts. So for me, if I want people to be engaged and care about what happens in national security, they need to understand what it all means, how it fits into their life, and how it fits their pocketbooks and their kids.

And I think -- I will just put a plug out for the foreign policy establishment in Washington, as someone who went home -- and I don't know if Michael had this experience, but as someone who went home and ran, I was probably asked about national security issues maybe 10 times in 18 months. And I was every day all day up there, people are talking about healthcare, prescription drug pricing, infrastructure.

And as much as we as foreign policy professionals can remember that we can't just talk to ourselves, we actually have to get out of the beltway and explain to people why this -- why this stuff is important to our safety, to their grandkids, we are going to see less and less public support for the things that I think a lot of people in this room want to do.

SCHANZER: Yes.

SLOTKIN: And as someone who has worked with a lot of young people over the past 2 years, a lot younger people than I'm used to working with, a lot of these young people have seen us -- they don't remember 9/11, they have no memory of it, and they've only known us in long wars that are expensive in blood and treasure, and they do not believe that American leadership is good abroad.

It kills me. It kills me. They see no difference between Russians or Chinese engaging and leading. They would look at this map and say, "Well, so what? Why do we have to be the world policemen?" And that scares me because I am a staunch, staunch believer in a strong American role in the -- in the world.

SCHANZER: Mike?

WALTZ: I told you that she'd give you hope.

SCHANZER: Right?

(LAUGHTER)

WALTZ: Couldn't agree more. And it is incumbent on us to constantly make that case. I think one of the things that Americans don't do as well as they should is really look at historic perspective, and what we often do is take things for granted. And this world order that has been guaranteed by American leadership and American economic and military power is under threat, and is something that we constantly have to explain when we go home, but is something that's absolutely worth doing.

If I can make my Harley mechanic uncle understand why Syria matters to him, then that is -- to me, that's a good day.

And I'll tell you just in closing, I'm very focused -- focused on space. The 21st century space race is absolutely on. The Chinese and Russians have explicitly in their national security strategy said that if we ever come to blows, they're not going to defeat the United States by sinking aircraft carriers or -- or going to head to head with tank divisions, they are going to take out what all of those entities depend on. Which is how we navigate, how we communicate, and -- and -- and how we do things with precision.

And that's all in space. I remind people that the Chinese do not have a civilian space entity like NASA. They're not just up there to explore for humankind. Everything that they're doing up there is backed by their military.

It's also worth reminding folks that the average person touches space 36 times a day and doesn't even realize it. Half a trillion dollars of our economy is dependent on it now, and it is old, it's rickety, it's not meant to be defended, it's not resilient, and it's certainly not redundant.

The good news is the private sector is leading the charge for the United States. We are on track to go from a few launches per month to one per day in the next 10 to 20 years. We currently have a -- about -- a little over a dozen launch sites around the country. We are going to need to go to over 200 to -- to handle that volume of what we're going to need up there and what we're going to do, and I think it's just another area where the United States has to maintain its dominance, has to maintain its leadership, and it's just something I'm absolutely focused on.

SCHANZER: Thank you. OK, I want to let everybody know now that we're going to be breaking for lunch, and that at 1:30 we're going to come back here to hear CENTCOM Commander General Kenneth McKenzie.

But first, I want to thank this bipartisan tandem of Elissa Slotkin and Mike Waltz. Terrific panel. Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

END