

**MAY:** Thank you for joining us today and welcome to another timely conversation from the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. I'm Cliff May, FDD's founder and president. We're honored to host INDOPACOM Commander Admiral Phil Davidson for a discussion on how to reverse America's eroding military edge in the Pacific. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley has called China, "The main challenge to U.S. national security over the next 15 – 100 years." And Secretary of Defense Mark Esper named the Indo-Pacific America's priority theatre. Earlier this year, Indo-Pacific command warned Congress that it lacked the resources and capabilities necessary to fulfill its mission in the region. The command warned that the military balance within the region is becoming more unfavorable and risks inviting aggression from Beijing. Today, Admiral Davidson will discuss these challenges and what must be done to protect American interests and deter aggression from Beijing.

This event is hosted by FDD's Center on Military and Political Power, which seeks to promote an understanding of the defense strategies, policies, and capabilities necessary to deter and defeat threats to the freedom, security and prosperity of America and America's allies. This event is also hosted by FDD's China Program, whose experts work closely with FDD's three Centers on American Power to leverage economic, financial, military, political, cyber and technology tools to expose and challenge the full scope of the challenge from the Chinese Communist Party.

CMPP is led by former National Security Advisor Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, who serves as chair of CMPP's board of advisors. CMPP is run by Brad Bowman, the Center's senior director, who will moderate today's session. Brad served as national security advisor to members of the Senate's Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees as was more than 15 years an active duty U.S. Army officer. During that time, he was both a Blackhawk pilot and an Assistant Professor at West Point.

As many of our audience members know, FDD is a research institute, exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. We are non-partisan and accept no funds from foreign governments – never have, never will. Today's program is one of many we host throughout the year. For more information on all of our work and our areas of focus, we encourage you to visit our website, it's FDD.org. We also encourage you to follow us on Twitter, it's @FDD. Now I'm pleased to turn the floor over to my colleague, Brad Bowman, to introduce Admiral Davidson and begin the discussion.

**BOWMAN:** Thank you, Cliff. I want to thank everyone who is watching. I hope you and your families are safe and well. And I especially want to thank Admiral Phil Davidson for joining me for this discussion.

Admiral Davidson is the 25th Commander of the United States Indo-Pacific Command, America's oldest and largest military combatant command based in Hawaii. USINDOPACOM includes 380,000 soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, coast guardsman, and Department of Defense civilians. He is responsible for all us military activities in the Indo-Pacific, covering 14 time zones, more than 50% of the world's population, and 36 nations. And for purposes of our discussion today, that includes the People's Republic of China.

A native of St. Louis Missouri, Admiral Davidson is a 1982 graduate of the United States Naval Academy, that other academy in Annapolis. He has commanded at all levels, and is a surface warfare officer who's deployed across the globe in frigates, destroyers, cruisers, and aircraft carriers. Admiral, welcome, thank you for your decades of service to our country. And thank you for making time to join me for this important discussion.

**DAVIDSON:** Thank you, Brad. Indeed, a pleasure. Look forward to the discussion.

**BOWMAN:** Absolutely. There's a lot we can discuss. We have a little less than an hour. So, with your permission, let's get started.

**DAVIDSON:** All right.

**BOWMAN:** All right. Admiral like many, it's my view that the People's Republic of China represents the preeminent international threat to the United States. China falls within your area of responsibility and you understand the China challenge, arguably as well as anyone in the Department of Defense. So, what are China's security objectives in the Indo-Pacific, in your view, and how do those contrast with the security objectives of the United States and our partners in the region?

**DAVIDSON:** Thank you, Brad, for that. I appreciate your articulation of the threat. Indeed. I believe China is the strategic threat of the century when it comes to the United States, but really, to certainly, the free world. I think it's important first though to articulate what we are for. And when I say "we," I mean the United States. And the United States is for a free and open Indo-Pacific. That has been well articulated by the president, the vice-president, secretary of state, numerous secretaries of defense.

And I'm noting a strategic convergence around the U.S. government and certainly across our network of allies and partners, because you've seen Japan, Australia, New Zealand, India, put forth similar visions, indeed ASEAN, under Indonesia's leadership, put forth what they call a free, open, and inclusive Pacific vision. What do we mean by that?

By free, we mean in terms of traditional security and in terms of our values and political systems. Free societies respect individual rights and liberties, the promotion of good governance, and adherence to the shared values of the UN Charter and the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Free also means nations fundamentally do not have to choose who they partner with, who they trade with, especially out of fear or coercion. They are free to exercise their sovereignty.

When we say open, to me, it goes all the way back to the agreement between President Roosevelt and Churchill at the Atlantic Charter. That open means open seas and airways, so that all nations have rights to markets, to resources, and to trade with others. And according to the free and open Indo-Pacific vision, nations are able to have open investment environments, the security and intellectual property rights, and fair and reciprocal trade. And it also means free access to all the commons, so I would put cyberspace, and space, in that as well. Because that access brings mutual benefit and mutual understanding to all nations.

China has a much different vision, and in the shortest words, it's a closed and authoritarian vision. They have a very pernicious, whole of nation approach, to the region. And that includes an immense propaganda machine that is meant to undermine allies and partners. It includes wolf warrior and mask diplomacy, where they seek agreements not to challenge Chinese equities in order to benefit from those things. And of course, it includes a very pernicious economic approach where they use the corruption of business elites and governmental elites, and undermine other nation sovereignty with projects and funding vehicles that threaten the security of nations. Whether it's free economic zones and other areas in which China wants to control the security and access to, or whether it's the very poor-quality kind of developmental projects that they've been pushing under the Belt and Road Initiative.

One only need to look to Western China to understand what is happening to the Uighurs, to understand what's happening in Hong Kong, to what's happening in the South China Sea, what's happening in Tibet, to what's happening along the line of actual control. To understand that China's vision for the future is not about a free and open Indo-Pacific.

It's about creating an environment in which Asia would be subjected to Chinese determination and Chinese law, and a Chinese belief and authoritarianism.

**BOWMAN:** Admiral, I think that's a really effective lay down of what we and our allies, and partners, stand for and what Beijing stands for. And I'm so glad you made the point that – my words, not yours – that if we want to understand what kind of international community we would have with Beijing calling the shots, we need to simply look how Beijing treats their own people. Why would they treat foreigners any better than they treat minorities in their own country? And I think you said that very nicely.

I would note that the recent Quad meeting, the free and open Indo-Pacific values, priorities, rule of law that you emphasized, was echoed not only by our Secretary of State, but also by his counterparts from Australia, Japan, and India. And what a powerful statement that is.

**DAVIDSON:** Indeed, I agree. Quite encouraged by a ministerial level meeting of India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. That's fabulous trajectory.

**BOWMAN:** As you know, better than me, Beijing is pursuing the most aggressive, in my view, military modernization in the history of the People's Republic of China. As the top U.S. military officer closest to that rivalry, if we're being generous, threat, if we're being more realistic, in my view. Can you provide an overview of China's military modernization effort and why it matters? Why does this matter for the average American?

**DAVIDSON:** Yeah, I think it's important to talk about what that development is. And thank you for the question, Brad. There's four elements in which they're greatly advancing their military and security apparatus. First is in modernization, they are developing fourth and fifth generation fighters, modern warships, modern submarines. They continue to develop and carry a profound advantage when it comes to ballistic missiles and cruise missiles launched from the air, from their own territory, and from the sea.

And the numbers of those things have changed dramatically. The Navy has been moving from a 316 – Our Navy, from a 316 ship Navy down to about 295, with ambition to be larger. China's been absolutely going in the other direction since the turn of the century. And in the last eight years, has greatly advanced their numbers. I would also say they have very modern capability, and again, are developing and advancing space and cyber capability to a great degree.

Second thing they're doing is training. They have a very protracted exercise program. They're in the middle of a national level exercise right now. You saw the demonstrations of ballistic missile use. We're seeing joint capability being employed, preparation of amphibious forces, and preparations for amphibious exercises, and things like that. It's bringing together all these elements of modernization things that I just articulated.

Third is they've advanced into a joint structure for their command and control. They have five theater commands now, and they're starting to replicate the kind of joint structures that the United States has demonstrated as so powerful around the world. And they are exercising it profoundly. And then lastly, they're putting together the combat systems and support that's required to do all this.

This is sensing, this is an overseas intelligence apparatus. This is logistics. This is a sustainment, this is munitions support, and those kinds of things. Those four represent how they are advancing that capability, and the challenge it's presenting, not to the United States alone, but indeed to the international community.

**BOWMAN:** That's great. Thank you. I have a question on behalf of Tom Bowman at NPR that fits in nicely here. Here's the question from Tom. In terms of the regional activities of the People's Liberation Army – he's interested in what is new – “Are we just seeing more ships and aircraft patrolling farther afield? Or are you seeing something more than that? What is new in the South China Sea and elsewhere?” Or more directly asks, “What keeps you up at night in terms of the PLA's activity?”

**DAVIDSON:** Well, it's certainly what we're seeing is more Chinese operations, farther afield. It's reflective of deployment state of the Gulf of Aden. The 35th Naval Task Force that was out there is returning to China right now. And the 36th is in place. And that's an element of it. But what you're actually seeing is much more intensive operations within the first Island chain and in and around Taiwan, the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and our first island chain allies, as well as Taiwan.

Again, that is representative of joint, all domain, and more intensive operations. That includes more bomber flights from their H6's. It includes deployments of fighter and airborne early warning aircraft, and other intelligence gathering aircraft to South China Sea militarized features. It includes violations of the Taiwan, excuse me, Taiwan ADIZ, the Air Defense Identification Zone of PLA aircraft.

And it includes harassment of other nation fishing vessels, oil, exploration vessels, territories like the Senkakus and on, and on like that. So, you're seeing an increase, globally, outside the first Island chain, but the focus of their effort and where it's become much more intense in the quickest amount of time is within the first island chain.

**BOWMAN:** That's really helpful. And again, with deference to you, it seems like almost any direction we look from China, whether it's on the border with India, whether it's in the South China Sea, whether it is in the first island chain and near Taiwan. In almost in every direction, it seems to me, we see incredibly aggressive behavior on the part of Beijing and the PLA.

Speaking of that, in a report to Congress, earlier this year known as the Section 1253 Assessment, Indo-Pacific Command, your command, wrote the following, and I think it's worth quoting it because to me, I think every American needs to hear this, “The greatest danger for the United States is the erosion of conventional deterrence. Without a valid and convincing conventional deterrent, China and Russia will be emboldened to take action in the region to supplant U.S. interests.”

In the report, your command made clear that is exactly what is happening. INDOPACOM assesses that the military balance of power with China continues to become, “more unfavorable” and warns the United States is accumulating, “additional risks that may embolden our adversaries to attempt to unilaterally change the status quo before the U.S. could muster an effective response.”

Admiral, what do you believe, rather, why do you believe the military balance of power with China is becoming more unfavorable? And what are the consequences of that if unaddressed? I mean, you've spoken to their modernization program. You've spoken a bit to their activities. But when we tie that all together, can you just speak to this shifting balance of power and what the consequences of that might be if it's unaddressed?

**DAVIDSON:** Yeah, I would say the pace of that change, and especially in the last eight years during President Xi's tenure. The pace of that change is what's led to the statement that you articulated in the 1253 Report. And it also has

to do with the capability change that's happening. They are developing and fielding fifth generation fighters. They are developing and fielding hypersonic, developing hypersonic weapons and testing, hypersonic weapons.

They are developing and fielding, maneuvering, ballistic missiles. They are developing and fielding more advanced command and control systems. The pace of that change, with a higher amount of capability, is changing the equation for us and for our allies and partners in the region. We have to be sensitive to the pace of that change, and adjust accordingly.

**BOWMAN:** No, that's great. And a little unsolicited commentary from me, for the viewers, and no need to respond, Admiral, unless you want to. I hope Americans are listening because if you're old enough to remember the Gulf War, where the United States took months to basically send all the equipment that we needed into the Gulf region and create a mountain of steel. And then have that be unchallenged by our adversaries, no serious missile threat to that.

And then to commence the operation on a timeline of our choosing, those days are over. Those days are over, and we face an adversary now that has capabilities that is really forcing us to re-look how we fight. And here we have our top commander in the region sounding the alarm. And I hope Americans are listening. You don't have to respond to that unless you want to, Admiral. I felt compelled to say that.

**DAVIDSON:** Please, go ahead.

**BOWMAN:** Okay. In response to some of the issues you've raised, Congress appears poised to establish an Indo-Pacific, or Pacific Deterrence Initiative in the forthcoming National Defense Authorization Act. That's the annual defense bill that they've passed for 55 plus years.

In the meantime, Dave Brown at *Politico*, another question from the media, is interested in what steps you are already taking. So, we all hope, I hope, that Congress actually does pass this deterrence initiative. I think it's absolutely needed. But in the meantime, Dave Brown at *Politico* wants to know what steps you're taking to address these unfavorable trends. And I would add to that if I may, without loading you up too much, what do you believe is specifically required to reverse this unfavorable trend to defend our interests and values in the Indo-Pacific, from a military perspective?

**DAVIDSON:** Yeah. We have to demonstrate the capability, the capacity, and the will to defend U.S. homeland. And that includes the continental United States, certainly us here in Hawaii and Alaska, and the U.S. territories across the Western Pacific and the Southern Pacific. And we have a strategy to do that in the Indo-Pacific, and it has four elements. The first is to take advantage of our joint lethality, continue to develop that lethality.

That includes advancing the interoperability of the fifth-generation fighters we're bringing in, advancing our integrated air and missile defense, and getting into the long-range precision fires game with a networks, excuse me, with the sensors and networks that help support them.

Secondly, we have to enhance our design and posture. We rely heavily on a relatively small cadre of permanently deployed forward base forces, but we also use forward rotation forces. We have to improve their ability to inter-operate those joint forces and in multi-domain structures. I'm quite encouraged by all of the service visions for advancing their forces. And we need to take advantage of that. But it also means taking advantage of our posture forward. You've seen some of the advocacy we put in place for Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands.

But it also means where are the bases and places that take our orientation away from a Northeast Asia focus and really give it an Indo-Pacific focus over the next few years, and take advantage of those things? I'm not looking to build little Americas all over the Western Pacific. But there are critical places in which we need to improve our access, our intelligence sharing, our information sharing with others in order to enhance our posture in a region and put forth a better deterrent.

The third thing I would say is we have to strengthen our allies and partners. I'm quite encouraged by the Quad meeting that you mentioned earlier. There are other elements that are being exercised in a whole-of-government posture that include meetings of like-minded partners. Those who are interested in the development within Oceania, the Pacific Island Chain, Southeast Asia, for example, not just in the military sphere, but in the developmental whole-of-government things, as well as helping ensure that our allies and partners purchase the kind of equipment that drive together our interoperability and compatibility.

I've been quite encouraged. We've been a long partner with Japan and Korea, for example, on ballistic missile defense. We're partnered with those nations and Australia, for example, on fifth-gen fighters, and other elements that integrated air missile defense. I'm encouraged by the kind of things that India is starting to buy when it comes to U.S. elements as well.

But if we can strengthen our alliances and partnerships, I would say more than any other, the four things I'm describing to you, our alliance and partnership network is something that China can't really count. And then the last element, which I think is so important that really brings life to the other three is enhancing our exercises out here, our innovation and our experimentation. So major agenda for me this year, first we have to be able to leverage the joint service exercises we have.

There really isn't capacity for more in terms of dollars, or time. So, as we've been adapting and evolving our systems, we have to make sure that these exercises adapt and evolve as well. Secondly, we have to get after what is really an exquisite range network out here, not just U.S., but the JPARC in Alaska, the extraordinary Ranges we have at Nellis, and in Fallon in Nevada, the Southern California OP-areas. Right here at PMRF off Hawaii, the Pohakuloa Training Area, the PTA in the Big Island. Kwajalein, Guam, the CJMT that we're going to build and CNMI, and then Japan.

And then what Australia has in Northwest Australia. These are really exquisite training ranges that bring size and the potential for capacity. Unfortunately, they've been developed by training, or excuse me, by service training regimes, or by testing regimes, and don't really bring, weren't really designed to bring forth the joint force and demonstrate joint capability.

Further, they were really baseline back third generation, fourth generation aircraft area pre-missile defense and things like that. We've got to build in a live virtual constructive network, and we've been partnering with an FFRDC to help us to think through what is the most efficient, cost-effective, but effective methodology to do that so we can bring together, not only the U.S. Joint Force and exercise an Indo-Pacific war-fighting concept, but bring together our allies and partners and help advance their capability, and their interoperability with us so that we truly have a deterrent posture out here in the region.

**BOWMAN:** Well, that's a great way to highlight that, the kind of readiness that's so important. And to give you – to enable you to do your job depends not just on fielding, the most modern weapons systems, but making sure that we have the right units that they're properly trained and integrated. And that depends on the exercises and the infrastructure.

And that's one reason why I think the Pacific Deterrence Initiative is so important because the weapons, as someone who worked a bit in the Senate, the weapons systems are going to often have the political support they need, but we also need that oversight and attention on the things that are a little less glamorous, like the infrastructure, and the exercises, and the training ranges that allow you to put it all together as you just described.

**DAVIDSON:** Absolutely.

**BOWMAN:** So, I'd like to, if I could, Admiral, dig into what something that may seem quite specific to some of the viewers. But the more that I study it, and the more that I learn, the more pivotal and even strategic or grand strategic it becomes. And that is the issue of Guam. There's been a lot of discussion in the media about this. I've written a bit on it. You've talked about it more importantly. What is, for the average American who's never been to Guam and might struggle to find it on a map. What is the strategic importance of Guam to you as the top combatant commander in the region?

**DAVIDSON:** First, it's U.S. homeland. Guam are U.S. citizens, and they disproportionately serve at a greater per capita rate than almost all of our states in the union in the United States military, which I think is very critical to have. We have very important strategic facilities in Guam as well from the U.S. viewpoint. There is an extraordinary harbor there at Apra Harbor, where we have U.S. attack submarines home-ported, and the maintenance, sustainment, munition structure that supports it. We also have just, the most profound airfields in the region capable of employing everything from our smallest fighter planes, all the way through to logistics lift, tankers, all the way up through our entire bomber suite of capability. That's important to have there, and there hasn't been a lot of thought put into defending that apparatus. So, having the right defensive posture for Guam to protect U.S. citizens, to enable their protection also of the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, and to facilitate nearly all of our multi-domain operations across the Western Pacific is critically important to me.

**BOWMAN:** No, that's great. And I'm glad you started, Admiral, with they're American citizens. That's the first and most important reason. We defend our own, and we have tens of thousands of American citizens civilians living there. And we also have other Americans deployed there as well. So, I'm so glad you started with that key point. You've repeatedly emphasized in congressional testimony and elsewhere that to do that, to do what you just described, to defend Guam and all that it means to us, requires 360 degree persistent and integrated air defense capability. And you've even said that that is, and your command has said, that's your number one priority. The answer starts to come out from what we've said already based on what the PLA is doing, but just to really drive it home, why is air and missile defense in Guam your top priority?

**DAVIDSON:** Well, I mean, we started to talk about it earlier. In terms of the threat, we're seeing PLA forces move farther afield. I focused the beginning on first island chain, but we are indeed seeing deployments of surface ships, bombers, submarines well out beyond the first island chain. So, that's an important factor to keep in mind. Secondly, we have all this important U.S. military security capability in the form of our own submarines and the Air Force assets here. And I neglected to mention earlier that the Marine Corps just established Camp Blaz, the first new Marine Corps camp base established in the Pacific since 1952. And they have a great ambition to station U.S. Marines there that are going to be critically important to our posture and our war-fighting capability within the first, second island chains, indeed across the whole of the Indo-Pacific as well.

So, it's important to note that the threat now has moved. The threat and our own capability, but threat has moved to kind of a 360-degree posture. And we are putting a larger amount of our capability set there as well. Persistence is

very, very important here. And when you think about the ballistic missile defense that's been put in place in Guam so far, it was really designed to handle a rogue ballistic missile threat from North Korea, a single, maybe two shots, and a threat vector of only about 120 degrees. As I articulated, if you have Chinese deployments around it, bombers coming from China, surface ships and PLA submarines capable of shooting cruise missiles, you're going to have to come up with a 360-degree defense in order to defend it.

**BOWMAN:** And that's great. I think that's worth, just for the lay person listening, that it's 360-degree threat and needed defense. Because, like you said, we have vessels that can be sailing all around and firing from any direction, and bombers as well. So, it's not just ground-launched missiles that we have to worry about, and that's why it needs to be 360 presumably. Admiral, Reuters recently released a story describing a two-minute video that was intriguing from the People's Liberation Army's Air Force depicting a simulated attack, which appears to be on Anderson Air Force Base in Guam. Just from an American perspective, this video seems to me to be a quite belligerent and provocative threat against our country, our citizens as you've emphasized and service members, and specifically Guam. What do you take from that video?

**DAVIDSON:** Well, it's just another example of Beijing's very pernicious use of propaganda to try to coerce or threaten others. It's demonstrative, I think, certainly to the needs of the United States, but I would say absolutely every other nation in the region takes pause from such propaganda.

**BOWMAN:** Yeah. So, it really to me adds a kind of real-world underscore of what you're saying. This is not a notional or hyped or theoretical threat. A threat, as you know, is capability and intent. They've developed a capability and they're even putting out videos suggesting what their intent is. So, we don't have to be super sleuths here to realize that we've got a real problem on our hands. You've been very specific in calling for a particular system to provide the air missile defense capability in Guam, specifically saying that you believe the Aegis Ashore System is what our citizens and warfighters need there. For viewers who may not be familiar with Aegis Ashore, if you wouldn't mind, what is it and why do you believe you need that specific system?

**DAVIDSON:** Yeah. Thank you for that, Brad. Yeah, it's been an interesting discussion on this. First, the most important thing is Aegis, that system, we have nearly 40 years of experience within the field. And it has demonstrated itself to be extraordinarily adaptive. For those who don't know, as Aegis was originally developed, it was meant to intercept long-range Soviet bombers before they could launch their anti-ship cruise missiles and nuclear weapons against our carrier strike groups. And as the eras have moved from the Soviet era to the Post-Desert Storm era, that system was adapted to be able to detect and intercept cruise missiles, so small and breaking just barely over the horizon at just single digit numbers of feet above the water.

I used to talk about all the time, we are so capable with that system that we can detect essentially what amounts to the radar reflection of a flying soda can as it breaks over the horizon and interdict them. Then we adapted that to be able to interdict short-range, medium-range, ballistic missiles. And if you're tracking what the Missile Defense Agency is about to test here, they're going to essentially test the SM3 missile, the latest iteration of the missile in the Aegis Weapon System, against an intercontinental representative threat. So, the Aegis System has proven itself to be extraordinarily adaptive. Sensing is there. The command and decision-making, the weapons control is there. And then of course, the magazines and the interceptors are there as well. But it's very important to think about Aegis Ashore not as a platform or a thing or a single point solution, but really as the key element of what would be a distributed architecture.

And one doesn't need to look any farther than the Aegis missile defense test site that's right over here in Hawaii to understand that you can dis-aggregate weapons and the magazines from the sensing and the command and control. That is going to prove itself extraordinarily powerful because already in ballistic missile defense, we rely on space-sensing, we rely on a broad range of other sensing and networks, terrestrial radars, and things like that. We're able, and we have demonstrated that we can exchange information with important platforms like F-35s, fifth generation aircraft, and we'll be able to leverage this capability, which exists now. We've fielded it in Romania, we're building it in Poland. We have long demonstrated it at sea in order to put in place a 360-degree, multi-threat ballistic missile, the potential for hypersonic weapon threats, certainly cruise missile threats that would threaten Guam, and the combination of solid-state radar, the Baseline 10, again command and decision-making and weapons control, and the ability to dis-aggregate it into other defensive fires, and potentially adapt offensive fires to it like we already do at sea with Tomahawk, makes it an extraordinarily capable system.

Too many people, again, it was kind of interesting when we started this discussion, we talked about Homeland Defense System Guam. And people said, "I don't like that term because it implies that it's new." Now we're saying Aegis Ashore. People say, "Well, we got that. And now I want something that is not fieldable just yet, but might be deliverable by 2035." That's really not acceptable to me. The threat is manifest now. We need to beat that threat by 2026. And Aegis Ashore delivers that to us.

**BOWMAN:** No, that's a great overview. Thank you. So, some would push back and say Aegis – well for the viewers, it's persistent. And because right now, as I understand, I'm not asking you to divulge any OPSEC here, but we have at times Aegis vessels that are providing the protection, but these ships are needed and can be used elsewhere, as you know better than me. But Aegis Ashore takes that same capability, puts it on land, frees up those vessels and provides that kind of capability you've just described. But a critic or someone respectfully pushing back would say, "But it's stationary. And by being stationary, that's a problem. And so therefore we should cobble together this or that other thing," almost suggesting that Aegis Ashore is intended to be the final answer or a panacea. But that's not what I hear you saying. I hear you saying this is an important step that can meet the threat timeline. And then we're going to build on that to do what else we need. Is that a good summary of what I hear you saying?

**DAVIDSON:** Yeah, I think that's acceptable, Brad. I mean, people so often in this business think there's a silver bullet that are going to solve all your problems. But it's actually the integration and the training and the joint force, kind of my four-legged strategy there, that makes it all so important. Aegis capability at sea is a critical part of our maneuver force that is going to be needed to protect those maneuver and long-range fire assets, carrier strike groups, long-range Air Force assets, and things like that. And forward in the expeditionary bases, that we don't know where they're going to be just yet. And we need to preserve that capability going forward. And very importantly, a persistent site is a long-term demonstration to the region that we are a Western Pacific nation. We are one of the many nations that are concerned about the security in those regions. And we are putting forth the kind of deterrent capability that will prevent an easy, quick strike by an adversary. That's what that brings.

**BOWMAN:** Excellent. We've talked a bit about it already, but zooming back out from Guam, Dave Brown from *Politico* is also interested in, if you're willing, Admiral, in talking about the Post-INF Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. We know that Russia cheated on that treaty for a long, long time. As a result, that treaty came to an end. And we have Beijing that has developed a lot of these same intermediate-range capabilities, because they were never bound by that treaty. And so, I'm interested, if you're willing, obviously not going to press you on locations or anything like that, of course. But what do you see as your needs and potential opportunities in terms of our intermediate-range capabilities to really meet that key tenant of the National Defense Strategy, and that is lethality?

**DAVIDSON:** I appreciate the way you articulated it, Brad. And Russia's been cheating on this for decades, and China's never been a party to it. And in China's case, they have a profound advantage when it comes to conventional ballistic missiles of all ranges and types. We have to get into the long-range fires game. I'm not going to speak for any of my allies or partners in the region, but you see some of the things that they're talking about in the open source press. I've been quite encouraged by the United States developmental trajectory, but the important periods of risk are during transition times. We have to take advantage right now of the kind of capabilities we've already demonstrated in the sea, in the maritime and with our Air Force, improve our capacity there, and then help deliver that kind of capability to our ground forces. To present the kind of strategic dilemmas to potential adversaries in the region that are presenting those dilemmas to us. And times of transition are the very important times, and we have to get after this now.

**BOWMAN:** I'm so glad you said that, frankly, because as someone who watches defense policy issues closely on Capitol Hill, one of my concerns, and I won't ask you to respond to this, unless you want to, of all the services that are pursuing these very important research and development programs to modernize our force, something that we postponed for far too long as a nation. And now we're finally getting after it with a lot of these key modernization programs, programs that you clearly need and want. If we were to see a significant reduction in defense spending that prevented us from taking these research and development programs and fielding them to the war fighters that you help lead. In my view, that just couldn't come at a worse moment. So, we really, in the next two to five years range, strikes me as a pivotal one to get right. And decision makers in Washington need to understand that if we get it right, if we give sufficient defense funding in the next two to five-year timeframe, and we can fill these capabilities, it's going to have decades long benefits for the U.S. and our allies in the region. No need to respond unless you want to on that.

**DAVIDSON:** If you don't mind, I will.

**BOWMAN:** Please. Go ahead, please.

**DAVIDSON:** I'm sorry. If you don't mind, I will, Brad. Two other important elements to it are the sensing that's going to be required in order to be able to deliver those fires, and the networks to command and control it, and the advances that are going to be really involved in the, again, I'll just go back to, this is an Aegis term, but command and decision-making when it comes to big data analysis and potentially artificial intelligence. We're going to want a person in the loop to deal with the fog of war issues, especially in the nearest terms, and the near term. But it can't all be about what we call effectors. It's about sensing, it's about networks, and it's about the command and decision making that has to go into that. And it's going to take judicious investment in the next few years, no matter what the defense budget environment is like, in order to fully leverage the joint force capability and create the advantage for us in the field.

**BOWMAN:** Yeah, well said. And as others have said more eloquently than me, it's really *detect*, can we see what the adversary is doing? Can we *determine* how we need to respond, and can we *deliver* those effects? And so that's much more than a missile. That's a whole network that you're describing that we're going to need to field, and field quickly. Had a discussion recently with Assistant Secretary Cooper. And I would just highlight for the viewers, that the Assistant Secretary of State is responsible of for the Political Military Bureau at the department of state, which has important role in all this, of course. He's saying that the belligerence and provocation that we're seeing from Beijing is encouraging allies and partners to come to us, wanting to do more with us. It's not like us going around hat in hand, like you said, creating little Americas, "Please, please work with us to help us protect our narrow interests."

They see our interests as aligned and they're coming to us in many instances, when it comes to basing and access and these sorts of things. That was a point that Assistant Secretary Cooper emphasized that I found very encouraging.

I hope Beijing realizes that by pursuing this aggressive foreign policy, they're really providing the best talking points necessary for why these steps are necessary. We want peace, and the best way to have that as to be ready. They're the ones that are creating this need and interest in the community to work more closely with us. If I may, Admiral, follow up real quickly on cruise missile defense, would you be willing to speak just briefly to the importance of, on the first island chain in particular, making sure that we have sufficient cruise missile defense?

**DAVIDSON:** Yeah. That's absolutely a requirement. This is why we have this long partnership with Japan and Korea, as just an example. They know the capability set that Aegis brings to them, and the ability to employ it is going to be critically important, not only to defend our maritime assets, but I think over time, you're going to see more and more cruise missile defense capability be a requirement for all nations, including ours, which is why I'm such a key advocate for Aegis ashore in Guam, and the full slate of capability it can bring to you.

**BOWMAN:** No, that's great. We've hit on the Quad a little bit already, but interested in any additional comments you have on how we can take this really important diplomatic grouping that is quickly becoming much more than that between the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India, and really take that to the next level in terms of building effective defense capability and deterrent. Anything you can share on specific next steps for the Quad in terms of military deterrence?

**DAVIDSON:** Well, as I mentioned earlier, quite pleased to see Secretary Pompeo meeting with his counterparts this week to talk quad issues. What I want to really tell you about the Quad is, it must be, and frankly, all the other elements that it can be, are more important than making a security relationship out of it. What those four countries can bring to bear in diplomacy, in economic power, in the sharing of values that underline all the free and open Indo-Pacific visions that each nation has put forward, which are well overlapping, as I mentioned earlier, that's a great convergence. That'll actually be the most powerful aspect of it.

**BOWMAN:** Admiral, I think that's a great way to emphasize something I agree with, and that is that our foreign policy is much more than just defense. It's defense of what? Defense of our values, principles, and interests. And that's why we need a fully resourced and empowered diplomacy and development, all the other tools of national power. I'm glad you emphasized that. With Japan, India, and Australia, we have those alignment on democratic values, but we're also seeing alignment on security interests with Vietnam, as you know well, and a lot of encouraging developments in terms of security cooperation with Vietnam. Tom Bowman at *NPR* is interested in any thoughts you would have on what more we could be doing with Vietnam to secure shared interests, particularly in the South China Sea.

**DAVIDSON:** Vietnam has been really the most vocal public supporter of the idea of a free and open Indo-Pacific, and have been very supportive of our very specific freedom of navigation operations within the South China Sea, but more importantly, very supportive of the International Community's Freedom of the Seas Operations, right, their unquestioned commercial and military access throughout the South China Sea. And, in fact, all of the South China Sea claimant nations, in their own ways, either privately or publicly, have been very supportive of the, again, commercial and military access within there. The different levels of support you see in the public domain, really as a result of the extreme pernicious approach China takes in the region, and the economic and diplomatic threats that they give others and their ability to speak out there. I've been quite encouraged by the international community coming together, multiple nations operating military forces independently within the South China Sea, or in collaboration with one another, and with us, co-deployments, that we call them.

The United States has obviously been operating in there, but Australia, Japan, India, others have all been operating in the South China Sea as well. Vietnam and Southeast Asia are, in many respects, the key to the free and open Indo-

Pacific future. When you think about how we are trying to, and we, the United States, but all those Quad nations as well, how they're trying to engage that region of the world, at the center of it is ASEAN, and those nations and their ability to stand up for themselves. The economic potential that's with all of them, the demography of that whole region is going to be critically important to the globe over the years to come. Right now, we're in full support of Vietnam's work on the South China Sea, the code of conduct negotiation. They've been very influential within that, were very helpful in medical, in the remediation of UXO and toxins in the region, and we'll continue to move forward with Vietnam at a pace that they can work, and to the security of its nation and to the value it brings to the international community there across ASEAN and across Southeast Asia.

**BOWMAN:** Well said, it really gets to what kind of Indo-Pacific we all want. We want one ruled by the rule of law, where big and small, powerful, and slightly less powerful are treated equally, or is it might makes right? I hear you saying that we're unambiguous and that we stand with the rule of law, and we have a lot of partners and allies in the region that agree with that. Admiral, you've been generous with your time. I've asked a lot of questions. I don't want this to feel like the Spanish Inquisition. I wanted to give you a chance to close with anything else that you'd like to say, what Americans should know about the men and women that you lead there, a message to the troops, anything you'd like to conclude with.

**DAVIDSON:** Well, thank you, Brad, for the time today. I appreciate the opportunity to engage on this. Very much appreciate the questions of your peers there across the United States, across the area there. I wish you the best of health. Everybody stay safe back there in Washington. I look forward to seeing you all in person, as soon as we all can. Thank you.

**BOWMAN:** Admiral, same to you and the men and women you lead. Thank you so much for standing between us and those who wish us ill. Thanks for your service and your bravery. Thank you, personally, for your decades of service to our country and your continued leadership in the Indo-Pacific. I wish you the best. Thank you again.

**DAVIDSON:** Thank you, Brad.

**BOWMAN:** For our audience, this concludes our discussion. Thanks for watching. For more from FDD's Center on Military and Political Power and our China Program, please visit us at [fdd.org](http://fdd.org). Thank you again.