

The Guard and Growing Threats: A Conversation with the Chief of the National Guard Bureau

*Featuring Bradley Bowman and General Daniel R. Hokanson
Introductory remarks by RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery*

MONTGOMERY: Good afternoon and a warm welcome to all of you who have joined us today for this event hosted by FDD's Center on Military and Political Power. I'm retired Rear Admiral Mark Montgomery. I serve as a Senior Fellow here at FDD and a Senior Director of our Center on Cyber Technology Innovation.

But today, we're here to talk about the National Guard, an important force that provides strategic depth to our nation's Army and Air Force. With more than 453,000 men and women in uniform, the Army and Air Guards play an important role in the security and welfare of our nation and the emergency response capability of our states. We're delighted to have with us here the 29th Chief of the National Guard Bureau, General Daniel R. Hokanson. His job is to ensure our guardsmen are accessible, capable, and ready to protect the homeland and provide combat ready forces to the Army and the Air Force.

General Hokanson's also a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff where he serves as a military advisor to the President and the Secretary of Defense. And he is the Department of Defense's official channel of communication to the governors and state adjutant generals on all matters pertaining to the Guard. Dan previously served as the Director of the Army National Guard and earlier as 11th Vice Chief of the National Guard Bureau. But probably most enjoyably, he was the Adjutant General or TAG of the Oregon Military Department and National Guard from 2013 to 2015.

On a more personal level, I'm thrilled to be here with Dan. He and I served alongside each other many moons ago. He was the senior joint war fighter at NORTHCOM, he at the J-5 and I was his counterpart at US European Command. And he was again the Deputy Commander at NORTHCOM while I was J-3 at US Pacific Command. We fought each other for four years for deployable forces. I still get along with Dan. He really is one of the most experienced joint officers the Guard has ever produced, and that gives him special attributes as he serves as a member of the Joint Chiefs. General Hokanson, we're truly grateful for your service and that you would take time out of your busy schedule to spend some time with us here today.

Today's conversation will be moderated by my colleague, Brad Bowman. Brad serves as Senior Director at the FDD's Center on Military and Political Power, CMPP, where he focuses on defense policy and strategy. He [served as] a longtime senate staffer and army officer, a helo pilot and assistant professor at West Point.

A few quick words about FDD before we get started, FDD is a nonpartisan research institute exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. In addition to CMPP and the Cyber Center I run, we also house a Center on Economic and Financial Power. Together, the three centers promote the use of all instruments of American power and produce actionable research and develop policy options to strengthen US national security. We proudly accept no funds from foreign governments. For more information, you can go to our website at FDD.org or follow us on Twitter @FDD. By way of format, Brad and General Hokanson will engage in discussion for about 40 minutes, then we'll turn the questions over to our audience here for the remainder of the event. I'll note that the entirety of today's event is on the record and being recorded. Brad, over to you.

BOWMAN: Great. All right. Thank you, Mark, so much for that introduction. And, General, thank you so much for joining me for this conversation. I can only imagine everything you have in your inbox and on your to-do list, and I'm grateful that you'd make time.

HOKANSON: Well, thank you for letting me be here.

BOWMAN: Absolutely. Well, thank you. Well, I thought maybe we could start with just kind of a general question to set the scene and maybe I'll start with an opinion statement on my part and then you can take it however you like.

It seems to me that as I survey the national security horizon that we confront, that the challenges we confront really are as dynamic and daunting as I can remember. And when I look at kind of the five big threats or the five threats that were listed in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, for example, China, Russia, Iran, North Korea and terrorism, China's undertaking the most ambitious and comprehensive military modernization effort arguably in the history of the People's Republic of China. Seems to me the more capable their military becomes, the more aggressive they're behaving in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea.

Russia's undertaking the largest invasion we've seen in Europe since World War II, and we're all following that closely hour by hour on the news. Iran continues to inch toward a nuclear weapons capability, building its ballistic missile capability and exporting terrorism. North Korea continues to build missiles, to threaten both South Korea, Japan, and our homeland. And terrorism, Islamist terrorism, unfortunately is as problematic as it's been as well and has, unfortunately, not gone away.

So given that, and I welcome you pushing back on any of those assertions, I'm curious, how do you see the threat environment that we're confronting as Americans, and what role do you believe the National Guard can and should play going forward in helping to secure our country in light of those threats I just described?

HOKANSON: Well, thank you, Brad, first of all for having me here today and really a chance to discuss and kind of share a lot about the National Guard. But when you look at what you just discussed, and the way I kind of look back is in 1945, we established a rules-based order after World War II to really respect the sovereignty of nations and their, basically, free will to destine what their future would be. And when we look at what's going on today, particularly the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by Russia, we see players that are taking actions that would threaten that, what we've really based the world order on.

And so when I look at the role of the National Guard and how we fit into that, it's almost worth taking a step back to the Cold War, prior to 9/11. And really the National Guard at that time was large and it was really meant to be, if there's a world war, we would activate our National Guard. And as a result, we were manned, trained, and equipped not only with first generation equipment, but maybe not utilized as much as we are overseas today. But we did get involved a lot with hurricanes, natural disasters within our state, which was part of the intent of the National Guard.

But after 9/11, things really kind of changed not only for our nation, but also for the National Guard. And what we saw is really a transformation from a strategic reserve to an operational reserve. And our nation made a significant investment in the National Guard in terms of manning, training, and equipping. And what you saw is the National Guard start to fill rotational forces both in Iraq and Afghanistan and really around the globe because of the OPTEMPO on the active component we just had to do that, had to utilize the National Guard, and that level of experience, training, and modernizing our equipment really made the Guard interchangeable on the battlefield.

I mean, our uniforms said US Army or US Air Force, and we did our job just like everybody else did. And in a course of those 20 years, we had about a million guardsmen deployed overseas. And so you take that as the last 20 years, but then if you move it forward to the last two years when we had the COVID pandemic, we had civil disturbance, and then also the continuation of those deployment requirements. And what we saw here is the National Guard once again stepped up

to the plate. And in that time, we never missed a single mission within the state, within our communities, or overseas in support of the combatant commanders.

And in fact, if you go back to June of 2020, at that point, we had 120,000 guardsmen mobilized in June. We reached a peak of about 46,000 guardsmen on any one day helping with COVID response. We got up to 43,000 with civil disturbance operations, and we stayed pretty steady about 30,000 deployed overseas. And now to even bring in closer, as you look in the last 53, 54 days with Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. And what we saw there was what many may not be aware of is the California National Guard has had a state partnership with Ukraine for over 28 years. And if you go back to the beginnings of the state partnership program, my predecessors years ago saw value in establishing partnerships between former Soviet countries and US states. In many cases, their militaries were about the same size. And we established these training and working relationships, which today when we see what's happening in Ukraine, you see the value in that.

And I mean, just one highlight is if you look at the current Adjutant General for California, Major General Dave Baldwin, so he has been friends with a lot of the senior military leaders in Ukraine for eight to 10 years. And when the invasion started, they started receiving phone calls, "Hey, we're getting attacked," followed up by phone calls shortly later that said, "Hey, here's what we need." And because we had these long-term relationships and training relationships, it showed that not only was the National Guard working here at home also supporting our combatant commanders, but we've been working very closely with our allies and partners, and now we're seeing the fruits of all that work.

BOWMAN: Now, thank you for that overview. And I'm eager to talk more about the state partnership program because I do think it's an important asset for our country and we're really seeing that manifest itself, I think, in Ukraine and you would know better than me on that. But before we do that, I just wanted to, if I may, kind of follow up on your comment about how the Guard has transitioned from a strategic reserve to an operational reserve. And you talk about, I mean, that took effort, time, and money to build that. And for my part looking now on the outside back in, that's something that we as a country want to maintain because it brings great value to our country and our security and helps spread the security burden across the force.

I'm curious, so maybe if just a little bit more detail on what it means for the Guard to be an operational reserve and kind of in layman's terms, and then what specific budgetary capability, capacity, and readiness implications there are to maintain the Guard as an operational reserve.

HOKANSON: Okay. Oh, thank you, Brad. So when we look at the strategic reserve as I mentioned earlier, it required long mobilization timelines to get where we needed to go. But where we see in today's modern world, time is really everything. And so when we look at the investments in the National Guard, I look at really the primary things I try and focus on is making sure that all of our equipment is deployable, sustainable, it's got to be interoperable on the battlefield, and frankly, it's got to be ready. And when you look at the size of the National Guard, as Mark mentioned earlier, about 453,000, the only formation that's larger than the National Guard in the US military is the US Army. And not to throw statistics out there, but we have eight full divisions in the Army National Guard, about 1,400 aircraft, the two special forces groups are within the National Guard, and that's really just touching the surface of the 336,000 Army guardsmen we have.

And then you look at the Air National Guard. About 108,000, we have 90 wings, over 1,000 aircraft. We have everything from F-35s to F-22s, F-16s, F-15s, C-17s, a lot of KC-46 and KC-135 tankers, as well as various other aircraft. But the reason I say this is when you look at the size of the US military and the global reach and the global projection that we have to have, we have to utilize every aspect of our total force. And a lot of folks talk about the value proposition

of the National Guard, because we're a part-time force, we're inherently a little bit less expensive. And when mobilized, we cost the same.

And that kind of gets into the second part of your question is the thing that we need most of all is really consistent, stable funding. The Army Guard composes about 39% of the Army's operational forces, the Air Guard about 30% of the Air Force's operational forces. And so within our priorities, people are always first. Readiness, we've got to be able to do our job. We've got to be modernized so that we can do our job no matter where we go. And last, reform, and reform is one of those things that doesn't necessarily have a cost component to it. There's just processes and procedures that we need to continue to look at to make ourselves more accessible, more readily accessible. And then also just streamline the way we do the things we do so that when we ask our guardsmen to balance their civilian career, their military career, and their family, we're kind of doing everything to facilitate that so they don't have to choose between the three.

BOWMAN: That's great. Thank you. So, I mean, the Guard, so many Americans see firsthand in their states and their communities what the Guard can do to support the governor. And we've seen the incredible work of fighting wildfires in the west and the incredible work of the Guard on fighting this pandemic. But your point is well taken that the Guard is also our nation's combat reserve. And that brings me to the idea of strategic depth.

And a lot of the reporting in Washington, DC, and a lot of the conversations focus around modernization, right? Hey, we want to replace our old equipment with new equipment and you know well that's a core part of readiness, right? We never want to confront adversaries fielding better weapons than what our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are fielding. But there's also this idea of strategic depth. And for me, as I understand it, there's a capacity element to that. Do you have enough? Right? And that's why your percentages, rather than being tangential, I think are fundamental, right?

HOKANSON: Right.

BOWMAN: Because if we have that much combat capability in the reserve component, we've got to have to make sure it's ready. Because unfortunately as I think Putin has reminded us, we don't always get to pick our fights and we don't pick their nature and their timing. And as I've tried to focus on a little bit in my research here is, heaven forbid, but we could confront simultaneous contingencies in Eastern Europe or the Taiwan Strait or on the Korean peninsula or in the Middle East, and we have to be able to ready to support both of those at the same time. And to me, that gets to strategic depth. How do you, if I may kind of get a little bit more on strategic depth, and a little bit more, if you wouldn't mind, on how the Guard provides our nation, the President, that strategic depth?

HOKANSON: So a great point that you brought up there is, we go back to really when the National Guard was founded, well before the country became a nation, in 1636. And it was based on the fact that always ready, always there. And a lot of times what I do is remind folks that the reason we have a National Guard is because of our federal war-fighting mission. The National Guard exists to fight is because of our federal war-fighting mission, the National Guard exists to fight and win our nation's wars, but because we're manned, trained and equipped to do that, we can respond to just about anything that occurs in our country, as you mentioned hurricanes, wildfires, and we've become actually very good at that through learning from process and working from our interagency partners.

But when we talk about the strategic depth the best thing you can do is be a deterrent force. Because obviously we don't want to fight wars, but if we have a force that projects enough deterrence, then maybe we can avoid fighting a war. And unfortunately deterrence is expensive, but deterrence is a lot less expensive than fighting a war.

And so one of the examples I use is the importance of, is the investments that we have made in the past, because at one point in the Middle East we had a need for armor forces. Well the only forces there were guard forces on a rotation in Kuwait, and how this is important is, the reason why we want all of our forces to look as close as possible is we don't always pick the time and place, but whoever's closest has got to answer that call.

And in this case, fortunately, that guard unit had the latest equipment and they were able to move in there and perform the mission right away. And for the combatant commander, it didn't matter if they were active, guard, or reserve, that was the force they had available. And when you look at man, train, and equip, just like every other formation in the Army, they were able to do their job and do it really well.

BOWMAN: Years ago I worked as a humble major in Army G-3/5/7, and I remember seeing the patch chart, the patch chart that you'll know well, but for the viewers is this chart that listed who was currently deployed, who was next deployed, who was in training cycle and that sort of thing. And I remember as someone who up to that point had spent my entire career as an active-duty officer, who knew frankly very little about the Guard, I remember thinking, "What is that patch? I don't recognize that patch, and oh wow, that's a Guard unit."

And I learned more later when I worked in the Senate is that we just could not have done what we did in Iraq and Afghanistan if it weren't for the incredible service of the Guard, getting, again, to this point that they're a real operational force that our nation needs, absolutely.

I noticed, General, in your 2022 posture statement, you said that you believe the DOD is going to increase its reliance in the future on the Guard. And you talked about the missions of fighting America's war, securing the homeland, and building enduring partnerships. As you survey those threats that we've discussed, those three missions, and kind of the health of the Army and Air Guard, what are your top readiness concerns? Or what keeps you up at night?

HOKANSON: So it kind of, for lack of a better term, kind of falls out to my priorities. We couldn't do anything without our people. And as I mentioned, because we're inherently a part-time force, it's helping at the national level, everything we can do to help them balance their civilian careers, their military careers, and their families.

And then as you mentioned, the patch chart, having been on there multiple times, the one thing that does is the patch chart gives predictability for them. And anytime we can give them predictability for them, their families, and their employers, that really benefits how we take care of our people.

The next thing is readiness and forces are only as good, and equipment is only as good as you use it. And so on the Army Guard for us to do, to combat training center rotations out in California, and then also in Louisiana, it's really important that our leaders at every level and our soldiers and airmen get that chance to really be tested in that environment.

And on the air side, the same with Red Flag and Green Flag, where our fighter squadrons and airlift units are always being utilized around the globe. So that's really important.

We touched on modernization, the need to have equipment that is capable and interoperable on the battlefield. And we know we can't just go down to the street and buy 50 new F-35s. Production times, and I know allies and partners are seeing those as well. So, if we have fleets that are a little bit aging, it's the ability to maintain them and continue to upgrade them so they're interoperable, so they actually add value on the battlefield and we don't have to keep them separate.

BOWMAN: That's great. You mentioned training, you mentioned the national training centers, as you know well from firsthand experience, but some of the viewers may not, we have the National Training Center/Fort Irwin. We have the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, and anyone who served in the military knows you do a lot of training in your unit, in your platoon, your company, your battalion, or whatever the formation is.

But having these places where you deploy and you do larger unit exercise, you're actually opposing an opposition force in a place that you're less familiar with really builds readiness at the higher unit level and facilitates those combined arms, frankly, that we've seen the Russians struggle with a little bit in Ukraine, which makes the American military so effective.

Are you happy with the number of NTC and JRTC rotations that the Guard is programmed for in the coming years? Do you think you have enough of those rotations?

HOKANSON: We're working very closely with the Army on that. I think we're growing to where we need to be. Because of COVID we had a bunch defer, we did actually five last year, this year we've got one armor and one infantry, one will be going to NTC and the other in JRTC, but the Army is programmatically working to build us to one armor and two infantry every year, which I think will be good.

And it's interesting that you highlight that, kind of bringing it forward to today as well. So, if you go back to 2016, that's when The National Guard started working in Ukraine with a joint multinational training group and set up a NTC-similar type environment to help train the Ukrainian army. And as you mentioned, the small unit tactics and stuff that was trained there, when all this happened in Ukraine, some of the people that were not surprised were the national guardsmen that had been over there training them.

And they said, "We knew they were good because we trained them." And I think what we learned from our training centers, we were able to bring over to help train the Ukrainians, and sadly they're having to put that to use every single day.

BOWMAN: I'm so glad you've mentioned the state partnership program, because again, I knew very little about it as an active-duty officer, but when I went and started working in the Senate and I got to know the New Hampshire National Guard, and then later the Indiana National Guard and observed their state partnership programs they have, I really became a fan of the program.

And sometimes it's maybe hard to explain to the uninitiated the value of these programs, but I think in Ukraine right now we're really seeing it. And I'm eager for your thoughts, but my sense from afar is that the primary reason for the success of Ukraine is their bravery and determination to defend their homes against this unprovoked invasion you've discussed. But it seems to me that this state partnership program that Ukraine has had with the California National Guard, really like you suggested, built those long-term relationships where there's trust among leaders. I mean, people that meet when they're captains, and are now colonels or generals, and there's just no substitute for the trust of that.

And then also, as I understand it, we were helpful in building their non-commissioned officer corps and things like that. So if you wouldn't mind, would you do talk a little bit more detail on how, from your perch, you've seen the California National Guard work with Ukraine over time, and how we're seeing those benefits manifest themselves in the headlines right now.

HOKANSON: Yeah, so if you go back to really the origination of the State Partnership Program, as I mentioned earlier, former Soviet Bloc countries, that became democracies. And by establishing these early partnerships, we initially worked on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to help them to respond to their communities, to help take care of their countries.

And over the course of, in the case of California and Ukraine, 27 years, that ends up being about 1,000 engagements, either training events or subject matter expert exchanges, them coming to the US, us going to Ukraine. And over time, you continue to build on what you learn.

And in many cases, it's a mutually beneficial relationship. We learn from them, they learn from us. They ask us, "Hey, we'd like some work in this area."

Or we may ask them, "Hey, what did you guys learn here that you can share with us?"

And one of the key things that they identified was the lack of really a non-commissioned officer corps, which you could argue is the core of the US military, the folks that really make it happen. And by helping work with them to establish leaders at the lowest level, really at the small unit action level, so that they can seize the initiative, see an opportunity and take advantage of it. And frankly, we're seeing that every day over there right now.

BOWMAN: It sure seems to be the case from my perspective, when I look at some of the problems that have been surprising for many with the Russians, logistics, sustainment, difficulty with combined arms. Just from my background, a lot of that comes down to NCOs, right? That it's NCOs who make it happen. And one of the first things they teach as platoon leader is listen to your platoon sergeant, but you've got to have someone there who's trained and knows what they're doing.

And it seems like the State Partnership Program the California National Guard really has helped Ukraine build that NCO corps, and may explain some of the impressive success we're seeing there.

In light of that, in the National Defense Strategy, which I understand a classified portion was just submitted to Congress a few weeks back, and there was an unclassified cover letter that some of us saw, it's my sense that, as you know, over time we've spread the SPP, it's grown globally. And we've seen a lot of relationships established in South America, Africa, and in the Asia-Pacific. How do you believe we can or should reform the State Partnership Program going forward to make sure that it's supporting the National Defense Strategy as effectively as it can?

HOKANSON: So, when I look at the National Defense Strategy and where we are today, so we have 93 nations that are a member of the State Partnership Program. And right now we believe we could probably grow an additional 30 partnerships and still maintain that capability.

And so the thing that's critical to that is really stable funding so that we can continue to plan like we did with Ukraine, multiple events every year over time, to build not only those relationships, but also to work closely with each other.

And so we work very closely with the State Department and the combatant commanders. And it's not like we like this country, so we're going to do that, have the partnership, we look at the combatant commanders to identify key countries in their area of responsibility that the State Department also sees incredible value in. And then we work through that process to identify those, and then we try and add between two and three every year.

And so what I've asked our team to do, since I became the chief, is to try and look out the next 10, 15 years, what are those 30 partnerships? And we know that they'll change every year slightly, but we'll know there's a core set of areas that our nation values significantly. And we'll focus on those, and then try and really match the best state for there.

But then the other thing that we do is in many cases, even though you're partnered with a specific state, if there's a capability that doesn't exist in that state, you can pull from all the other 54 National Guards to work through that, or gain the training or experiences that they want to learn from.

BOWMAN: Yeah, absolutely. And Americans, some often will ask, "Why do we have to go there and do this for... Why can't they do more of it themselves?" Well, one of my responses to that is, "That's what we're trying to do with programs like the State Partnership Program, is we're helping them to build their capability so that they can deter the aggression," like you talked about earlier, and then should the aggression occur, carry more of the burden once it happens. And so I'm just a big fan of what you're doing there.

If I can go to, this will sound a little wonky at first, but I think it's an important issue, is the issue of inflation, and the Guards' budget. I don't pretend to be an economist, but I can read. And I saw that the Labor Department on April 12 was cited in a CNBC story saying the year-over-year percent change in the Consumer Price Index, or inflation, was 8.5% in March. And if you strip out the more volatile food and energy was 6.5%, some of the highest numbers we've seen in decades. I'm curious what, if any concerns you have about the impact of inflation on the Guards' budget?

HOKANSON: One thing really coming out from, we've been very fortunate, an additional, well, frankly, adds to the DOD budget to help us with that.

But the National Guard, we're in every single community across the country and we feel it like everybody else does. And the biggest concern we have, or one of the many concerns, is the buying power. And when you look at flying hours, as I mentioned earlier, we have over 1,400 aircraft in the Army, over 1,000 in the Air National Guard. And so fuel prices, maintenance, spare parts, as that increases it really reduces just how many flying hours we can get.

So we try and work very closely with the Army and the Air Force to really leverage every single resource we have. And frankly, it's accountability to the American public. They invest a lot of money, we want to make sure that they get every dime back out of it. And this goes back to our reform efforts, how do we operate more efficiently? How do we do things better? How do we take the amount of training and utilize every innovative capability we have to get as much done in the limited time we have, to buy that readiness?

BOWMAN: That's great. And you'll know this General, but for the viewers, in 2018 Congress established a bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission, and this was chaired by a bunch of leading luminaries from both parties. And they published a final report that you can find online. And I cite this a lot just because I think they did good work. And one of their findings was a recommendation that we increase the defense budget by 3% to 5% above inflation for the foreseeable future.

And as I look at the Department of Defense, where you have to go service by service, but generally speaking, conducting what I would argue is the most important military modernization effort, generally speaking in three to four decades, right?

HOKANSON: Yeah.

BOWMAN: While simultaneously [confronting] these five different categories of threats, that I think are only worse than they were 2018. So it seems to me that this is an important time to be giving the Guard, generally both active and reserve components, the budget to complete this military modernization effort, because if we get this right, our children or grandchildren are going to be using these systems. We're still flying Black Hawks and those were, what, designed in the '70s, fielded in the '80s, and so it's not just next year or next month. If we get this right, these are going to be the equipment and weapon systems and capabilities that people will be using for a long time to keep our country safe. And so, that's why I wanted to ask that inflation question and give you a chance to respond. In the congressional hill budget category, continuing with that, if I may, for one more question, the idea of an unfunded requirement. So obviously, you had an opportunity to weigh on the budget, that process went through, and you'll testify and talk about the budget. If Congress said, "Okay, hey, I see the budget, thank you very much. But we want to give the Guard a little bit more money." If you were asked that question, which of course you have to get asked, where would you spend the next dollar for the Army and Air Guard? Where would you want to spend the next dollar?

HOKANSON: It really goes back to the priorities. Obviously, we need to take care of our people. And one of the things that I've become really aware of over the past couple of years is we've got about 60,000 guardsmen with no healthcare. And so that's an issue that we're working with folks on the hill to try and resolve what's the best solution for that. So that's a personnel piece. Readiness, obviously, as we talked earlier about the combat training center rotations, we've got to continue to practice and utilize the equipment we have so that we can utilize it very effectively on the battlefield.

And then modernization, as you touched on, we do need to do a lot of work within the National Guard, and particularly if you look at our tactical aircraft. As I mentioned, we have some F35s, we have some F22s, but I flew in an F15 the other day that was 40 years old. And some of those aircraft, they're still capable today, but they're really at the end of their service life and our nation needs that capability. And we need to work very closely with the Air Force to modernize that fleet of aircraft, like you said, for the next couple of generations. And if I could give a shout out to people that are often overlooked is the maintainers of our aircraft. And the Guard were fortunate, some of our folks have been working on these aircraft for 10, 15, 20 years. And when you look at the age of the aircraft fleet, they really put a lot into it so that we can continue to fly those so that they remain interoperable. And like you said, we buy new stuff, it's going to last a long time, and we just take personal ownership and care of it.

BOWMAN: It reminds me, and I don't have nearly as many flight hours as you have, but back in 2000, 2001, I was flying UH-1s out of Fort Belvoir, and we went back and looked at the historicals on those things, and some of them had flown in Vietnam and actually taken combat damage. So we were flying our one and two star generals around in Vietnam [era] UH-1s. And you got to admire the maintainers. I'm so glad you gave a shout out to them as I'm sitting here because those people did their jobs well, but their job gets harder the older the aircraft gets, of course, and it also just becomes more costly. As these aircraft get older, it's more costly to maintain them and you reach a point where it actually makes financial sense to go ahead and procure the new system. You agree with that?

HOKANSON: Absolutely. Yeah.

BOWMAN: One other thing that I learned working on the hill about the Guard is the importance of authorities. Does the guard have the authorities it needs to fulfill the missions that we give it? And so this is always a question whenever I'm talking to someone in leadership of the Guard I always like to ask is, what authorities do you need that you don't have, and what's the cost of not having those authorities?

HOKANSON: So when you look at where we are, and for me as the chief of the National Guard bureau, I do have the authorities I need. When you look how we work with the National Defense Strategy, one of the things is we want to make sure that our National Guard forces are involved in every aspect of that, from deterrence to competition. And so, the authority, we call it 12304, the authority to utilize National Guard units, really to support the National Defense Strategy, I think is really important, and I think all the services are aware of that. When you look at the number of forces that we have in EUCOM right now, if there's a need for guard and reserve forces, we'll just need, really, the authorities to mobilize them, to fill a requirement that they have over there. And not just there, but anywhere around the globe that they need guard and reserve forces.

And I think you talked earlier about how much money our nation has invested in the active and the guard and reserve. And in many cases, if they're not needed all the time, sometimes it makes more sense to put in the reserve component. And obviously, if there's somebody that needs to fight tonight, it's more important to keep those in the active forces so they're ready instantly. And the difference is in the Air National Guard, we have a little bit more full-time manning, so they do meet the same readiness requirements as their active-duty counterparts. On the Army, it's a little bit different. Our formations are often spread across the states, so it takes a little bit longer, but if those forces don't need to be there immediately, sometimes that's a great investment for our nation.

BOWMAN: That makes sense. One of the issues that has run through, in my experience, discussions related to the Guard, and you've referenced it a little bit here, is the deploy-to-dwell discussion. For the viewers, how much time do you spend at home recovering or training, and how much time do you spend deployed? And as you just implied, that has different meanings for the Air Force versus the Army, what type of unit you're talking about. If you deploy people too frequently, then it starts to wear and tear on morale and training and overall readiness and strategic depth. But if you don't deploy people enough, then some of these key skills start to become perishable, and so there's a sweet spot there. Understanding that you're overseeing both the Army and the Air Guard, these very different entities and each one of those has very different units, do you have any general thoughts on the right ratio of deploy to dwell for the forces you oversee?

HOKANSON: Generally, we try and use about a one to five model. And when you look at the National Guard today, everyone in the National Guard today has been in since 9/11. So they have either come in after 9/11, or they have voluntarily stayed or reenlisted since 9/11. And frankly, that's the expectation today. Our guardsmen come in expecting to go somewhere and many want to do that. They look forward to those opportunities to serve their nation, not just within their communities or training, drill weekends, and annual training, but they also look forward to the opportunity to go overseas and serve under a combatant commander. We have found that that's very doable for an indefinite period of time, and we also have the ability if we need to surge. And we saw this during, really, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. For instance, I was in Afghanistan in 2006 and 2007, I was in Iraq in 2009 and 2010, but that was the expectation, and we never [missed] a single mission.

BOWMAN: That's great. Thank you. This will be the last question from me, and then I'm eager to hear from the audience. We have some smart people in the audience. I'm eager to hear your questions, but just one last one from me. I was in Israel earlier this month for about a week and a half or so, and I understand from your staff that you were there a few months back. We've talked a lot about threats and it's very easy to get pessimistic, given the threats we confront. But when I look at the positive side of the ledger for our country and our assets, I put allies and partners as one of the great grand strategic advantages for the United States. And it's not some American birthright, that we'd have these amazing allies and partners. We have to nurture and maintain those alliances and partnerships. I put Israel on the short list as one of those countries. I'd just be interested to hear about your trip to Israel, what you learned, what the main takeaways from that and how that informs what you're doing now.

HOKANSON: So, as you mentioned, we do have a great relationship with Israel and actually, four of our states have training exchanges that they do with Israel. Having had a chance to visit there and visit their homefront command, which really helps defend their country, a lot of civil response, similar to what our National Guard does here in the United States on the state side and community side. But what we do is we learn a lot from each other, and then we also share what we learn. Two great examples are when we had the condominium collapse in Miami, Israel sent a team over of folks that worked with collapsed buildings, and their ability to work with our first responders and our National Guardsmen to share things that they had learned was extremely valuable. Just a different way of looking at the same, really horrible disaster, but how they can help identify potentially causes or the impacts or accountability.

And then the same, and folks may not realize, they have forest fires in Israel as well. And so they have come out to California to share what they have learned, and also obviously we fight them every year in California, so we're able to share with them tactics, techniques, ways of fighting forest fires that we can share for them, really all in the sense of sharing information to better take care of our citizens.

BOWMAN: That's great. With the state partnership program, we have relationships between a specific guard from a specific state and a specific country with Israel, as you said, there's multiple guards, including the Indiana National Guard I know, and others that have a really a multifaceted relationship with them that's kind of a two-way benefit street, which is great. Well, great. With that, I would be happy to hear any questions from the audience. We have a microphone here, so if you just raise your hand and wouldn't mind identifying yourself, where you work, and ask your question. Meghann?

MYERS: Meghann Meyers from Military Times, I want to circle back to when you were talking about going to the hill to talk about getting health insurance for Guard members. How much money does that look like? What are those discussions like? Do you get pushback? Are they very supportive? What statuses and what conditions would you think you'd be able to offer that kind of insurance?

HOKANSON: So when we look at this problem set, Meghann, I'm not a healthcare expert, I just know that we've got 60,000 guardsmen, as best as we can tell, that don't have health insurance. And when I look at what we ask them to do, to be always ready, always there, we look at the investment our nation has made in recruiting them, training them, getting them ready to do whatever our nation asks them or their community asks them to do, we need to make sure that they're medically ready to do that. And so I don't know what the right answer is, but what we've asked for is to help identify the issue and really asking for Congress's help and maybe the level of expertise to say, "Here's some potential options that may be able to address that." We know that it's expensive, depending on how it looks, so we're working with them to try and find out what the best solution is.

BOWMAN: Carla, Carla Babb, VOA.

BABB: Carla Babb, Voice of America. First question, and then a quick follow, if I may. You briefly mentioned Red Flag exercises. Can you talk a little bit more about the greatest benefits of those and what would happen if you lost that ability to have those exercises?

HOKANSON: So, Carla, the great thing is we always want to train like we fight, and similar on the Army side, we have a national training center. It's one of the best training exercises against a near peer competitor. And so we look at the same on the Air Force side, these level of exercises where they get to learn the latest tactics, techniques, and procedures. There's a very well-developed opposition force in these exercises. And you learn so much by doing, and we also learn so much by integrating active Guard and Reserve in the same airspace so that when they, if heaven forbid, they meet on a

battlefield one day, they know each other, they've worked together. They know how to work together. And it just makes us a lot better at what we do.

BABB: Thank you for that. And then, I want to follow up on the Space Force, because there's still not a Space Force Guard, and that was one of the things that when the media and when the American public was pitched on the Space Force, it was supposed to integrate and unify all of the space capabilities that America has to offer. And with a huge portion, I think some people say up to 70%, in an Air Force National Guard, as opposed to being under the Space Force, can you talk a little bit about how that is affecting you with budgetary and readiness issues and integration issues?

HOKANSON: Well, thank you, Carla. And so when I look in the National Guard, we have National Guard airmen performing space missions, it's over 1,000. We've got 17 units in seven states and one territory, and we've been doing this for over 25 years. And so, as the future of the Space Force is developed, I advocate for our people, and if there's a future for them, wherever that is, we're going to support that 100%. And if they're going to remain in the Air Guard, we're going to find those mission sets for them. And those decisions will be made soon, but at the end of the day, we take care of our people and we're going to take care of those people.

BABB: Has it made it hard for you to be somebody who is overseeing an Air Force Guard that is associated not with the Air Force, but I guess it's technically under the Air Force, but is working on a space mission now?

HOKANSON: It hasn't been difficult yet, and that falls on the professionalism of our guardsmen. They have a mission. Those units were designed for a reason and they're performing that mission every single day. All of them are, and I'm just really proud of the work they do, and they provide a great capability to our nation.

BOWMAN: Great, thank you. Mike Glenn, I think, back here, Washington Times has a question.

GLENN: Thank you, General. Mike Glenn with the Washington Times. I was wondering if you could talk specifically more about some of the missions that the California Guard has done in Ukraine that's allowed Ukraine to perform so admirably well on the battlefield thus far.

HOKANSON: Well, thank you, Mike. And as I mentioned earlier, having that long-term relationship of over 27 years, and working very closely with them, and helping identify areas where they felt that they could use improvement and then also areas that we wanted to learn from them. And when you look at the Yavoriv Training Center, where they had the Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine, we had Guard personnel since 2016 working on small unit tactics, development of the NCO corps, lower-level leadership, and then also how to conduct joint operations. And as Brad mentioned, ultimately, it's their personal sacrifice and dedication to stand up and fight for their country. That makes all the difference in the world. But I think what you're seeing as well is, to the California Guard, they've said, "Hey, we're not surprised they're doing that well. We've trained with them. We knew how good they were." And you're seeing that every single day right now.

GLENN: Do you think other countries might be looking at Ukraine's success having worked with the California Guard as maybe almost a selling point? Are you using it as a selling point for other countries to want this close, longitudinal relationship?

HOKANSON: I think we'll probably see that, Mike. And when you look at the 93 partnerships that we currently have today, a lot of the stuff you see there is ongoing there and different levels depending on what the country is really good

at, what they want help with and, frankly, what they want to teach us. And so we find that balance with the 93 that we have now. But obviously, I think a lot of people are looking at what's happening. And what are they learning from that? And I think if we look at the combatant commanders, we'll maintain a very close conversation with them on where they see potential opportunities for future state partners.

BOWMAN: When I look, General, at the horrible circumstances that have transpired in Ukraine and asked myself, what can we learn from this in terms of making some sort of educated guess about what future conflicts will look like, one of the takeaways for me is just a reminder - You can't just focus on weapons, what kind of weapons they have and how many they have. You have to look at the operational concepts that may or may not be in place and how they stitch all that together to achieve combined arms effects. And that seems to me to be at this early stage, one of the key differences we're seeing between the Ukrainians and the Russians, is the agile operational concepts. And I would suspect and assume that some of that came from their interactions with the California National Guard.

HOKANSON: It did. And one thing that we did not touch on earlier is we talk about the mil-to-mil relationships, but we also have civilian-to-civilian relationships. So the state of California with Ukraine and many other state partners, the governors will actually go over and visit. And so what you see is also, aside from the military aspect, an incredible outpouring of support from the civilian communities, not just in California, but from throughout the country and, frankly, throughout the region over there, where they've got that connection. They've developed not only the military relationships but also the civilian leadership relationships. And so that's one of those other things that really can benefit both partners.

BOWMAN: Absolutely. Other questions? Yes. Right here.

HENSCH: Mark Hensch, National Guard Magazine. And on that note, what are we learning from the situation in Ukraine in terms of urban organization and planning and war fighting that you hope the Guard would pick up?

HOKANSON: So obviously, Mark, we still maintain close communications. And our state partnership with Ukraine continues despite the fact they were invaded by Russia. And so as we work with them, obviously, not only US European Command and US Army Europe, but as they communicate with at the California National Guard is to help in any way we can but then also really capture what's being learned so that we can learn and hopefully help others but also help them in any way that we can.

BOWMAN: Yes. Mark Montgomery.

MONTGOMERY: General Hokanson, one quick question on missile defense. The Guard is generally seen as a principal player in domestic missile defense, either here in the national capital region with NASAMS or the ground based interceptor systems. As we start to talk a lot more about the defense of Guam, have you taken a look at Guam? And what kind of role do you think the Guard could play there?

HOKANSON: I did get a chance to visit Guam recently and visit the Guam National Guard. I had a chance to visit some of the active units over there. And so we're working very closely with the Navy and the Army to look to see what that future is going to be and look for a potential role, like we have in Alaska and California, with potentially utilizing the National Guard. But that'll be a long-term process. Obviously, we'd have to develop the capabilities and determine what role the Guard would play, what makes sense for the National Guard to do. And we'll stay in close touch with the Army and the Navy on that and see what role we can do.

BOWMAN: I'm actually really glad Mark asked that question. This has been a bit of an area of research for us here at FDD. And you know this well, but just for the viewers, Guam is home to tens of thousands of American citizens. And I believe the former INDOPACOM commander called it our most important operating base in the Western Pacific, an airfield there, a naval base, and so an important to place to protect. And we know that the missile threat to Guam is growing. And so there are decisions being made about what the air missile defense solution should be there. But Mark raises the point it's not just about the hardware, it's who's going to man it? And what should that look like? Absolutely. Carla, did you have another question?

BABB: Always.

BOWMAN: Okay. All right. We'll give you one more. One more, Meghann, too. Excellent. All right. That's good.

BABB: I wanted to follow up on the SPP, actually, because you're talking about what they do. It's been a great program. It's had results that you can see, tangible results. But I was trying to go embed on a SPP in 2020 and couldn't do it because everything stopped. And I'm just wondering how you guys have been able to pick up the partnerships now that we're seeing less effects from COVID. And how did that work for you, managing budgetary? Are you able to use some of the funds that come from exercises that didn't happen over the past couple years? Are you able to project those forward? Talk a little bit about that, please, sir.

HOKANSON: Well, thank you, Carla. And you're right. When we look at during COVID, it really restricted our ability to do that. And much like we learned here in the United States to do things virtually, we did as much as we could virtually with our state partners to maintain that level of communication. And unfortunately, one of the things that we work really hard on is, because our budget cycle is 1 October to 30 September, sometimes we just don't have enough time if the funding comes in late to execute it. So we're looking and trying to identify solutions to that so that we can stabilize the funding because many countries are on a different fiscal cycle. But we want to make sure that when we plan events that we can actually get there and perform those events because, in many cases, it does take over a year to plan with other militaries based on their schedule and our schedule. And so we're working really hard to find a solution to that so that we can meet the intent of the congressional funding and actually execute all of it.

BOWMAN: General, a couple times you've mentioned the term stable and predictable funding, and I never want to miss an opportunity myself to foot stomp that because following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a lot of Americans are newly awake to the fact that, gosh, darn it, we thought a lot of these threats were relegated to the black and white newsreel past. And here they are in the 21st century. And what do we need to do to help the Department of Defense? And sometimes my answer from my humble perch is just basic blocking and tackling. And in our constitutional republic, that basic blocking and tackling is passing the appropriations and authorization bills on time. And when we rely on these long-term continuing resolutions, it really makes your job more difficult, doesn't it, when you have to wait months and months and months to get those new authorities to start new weapons programs or to provide the new level of funding?

HOKANSON: Yeah. Continuing resolutions, they do have a significant impact on us.

BOWMAN: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Okay. Others? Yes, Meghann.

MYERS: Just to update, what's the lay down of Guard troops in Europe right now? And are you having any serious discussions as this war is slated to continue? Then these active units are going to need to start rotating out. Is there a discussion about sending Guard units in to backfill and keep that presence going?

HOKANSON: Yeah. So, Meghann, we actually have over 2,000 over there right now. Many of those were previously scheduled before all this. But we are working very closely with the Army and the Air Force to identify, if there's going to be rotational plans, where the Guard will fit in so that we can identify those units as soon as possible. And like we always have, we'll fill whatever missions they give us, but the best thing we can ask for is heads up so we can let the units notify. And they'll be ready to go when they're asked to go.

MYERS: And that's something you're talking with TAGs about, about maybe preparing to start messaging to them that maybe you're going to go?

HOKANSON: Right. And so we last week had a chance to visit with all the adjutant generals. And we don't have any information right now, but as always, we never want to surprise anybody. And so we always try and think ahead what are those potential possibilities because we can always plan. But if we don't plan, we can't adjust from there. And I think the message I got from every adjutant general when they looked at this is we are all in. The National Guard is all in to help in any way we can, just like we have been, really, for the last 20 years.

BOWMAN: Well, General, unfortunately, we're nearing the end of our time together. I feel like you and I could talk for a long time. I have enjoyed this. I hope you have as well. I've learned a lot. Before I move to conclude, I just want to give you a chance for any concluding remarks you'd like to make.

HOKANSON: Well, Brad, for everybody here to come here, thank you for the opportunity to really help tell the Guard's story. It's a wonderful story. But if I could leave you with one thing, I get a chance to go out and visit a lot of these folks on their weekend drills and even during the week. I meet with recruiters. I talk to soldiers. I meet with the senior leaders. We meet with the spouses to learn what's important to them. And across the force, I cannot tell you... If I could summarize it in two words, they're all in. They know what's being asked of them, and they want to serve their country. They want to serve their community. And really, I've got to thank them for that. I've got to thank their families for supporting them, to allow them to do this. And then also we have to thank their employers for being patient and understanding, that there are many things that they do, not only in their communities, but also for their nation overseas.

BOWMAN: Well, General, thank you sincerely for your decades of service. From one Oregonian to another, thank you for your decades of service to our country. I mean that sincerely. And for your continued leadership, I feel safe knowing that you're in the position you're in. And sincerely, also on behalf of all of us at FDD, thanks to the men and women that you lead and their families who sacrifice so much to keep us safe and free. And we wish you the very best. And thanks to those of you who have joined us here in person. Thanks to you who are watching online. And for more information on the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, our Center on Military and Political Power, please feel free to visit us at fdd.org. Thank you very much.

HOKANSON: Thank you.

BOWMAN: Thank you. All right. Appreciate it. Thank you so much.