



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

MAY:

H.R. McMaster wears many hats. Most important for me, he's chairman of the Board of Advisors at FDD's Center on Military and Political Power. He served as a commissioned officer in the US Army for 34 years. He holds a doctorate in military history. And he was the 26th Assistant to the President of the United States for National Security Affairs.

I keep up with him mostly by reading what he writes, listening to his Battlegrounds podcasts, as well as the GoodFellows podcast he does along with historian Niall Ferguson and economist John Cochrane from their base at the Hoover Institution out on the Left Coast. But when he is here in town, the town I'm talking about is your nation's capital, Spin City, Cloud Cuckoo Land, Baghdad on the Potomac, I like to sit down and pummel him with questions.

Brad Bowman, senior director of FDD'S Military Center is here to help me do that. I'm Cliff May and I thought you might like to participate too at no extra charge here on Foreign Policy.

Well, welcome, General. And good to see you.

MCMASTER:

Hey, Cliff, great to be with you and Brad.

MAY:

Let's start with Ukraine, how goes the war? What's your reading on the counter-offense that has been begun?

MCMASTER:

This is what we do in the cavalry I think now is you develop situational understanding, close contact with the enemy. And what you've seen are a series of offensive operations that are to gauge the degree to which the Russian defenses in those areas are strong or relatively weak. And I think-

MAY:

This is still probing. You were saying-

MCMASTER:

I think so. I think so. It's hard to tell from this distance.

MAY:

Yeah.

MCMASTER:

But I think that it's really ... combat power, the ability to defend depends on some things that are easy to understand like how many obstacles they have, how many minefields, how many forces are in the area or how can reserves be employed, what are their fires plans, what artillery can they bring to bear.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

But it also has a lot to do with the psychological and moral dimension of combat. How well are these forces prepared psychologically, morally to defend? And you only find that out once you deliver a blow. So if you think about it, this is a boxing match. You're delivering a series of jabs and once the jab lands you're going to see, I think Ukrainians follow up with a right.

And then really what's the most difficult phase is the penetration of those defenses because that's where everything's lined up for the defender. They've got the obstacles. They have the artillery fire. They have the direct fire weapon systems. Sometimes it forces you to attack in a column where you don't have a lot of combat power forward because you have to penetrate on that narrow front. But once you're through, you can deploy into line formation. You can get more guns in the fight. You can operate on multiple axes simultaneously and then displace the enemy out of those prepared positions.

Now they've got to respond to you. The reserves have to move. That makes them vulnerable to fires. And then you can place at risk their trains or the logistics and their command posts and their artillery. So I'm hoping to see it. I know that all of us here, you and I, Brad, want to see that penetration. And then the Ukrainians be able to sustain that effort and to do what they've set out to do from an operational perspective which is cut that land bridge to Crimea and then isolate the Crimean positions there and place them within range at their longer range fires capabilities.

MAY: And Brad let me bring you in on this. So if you disagree or if you agree, I'd like to know that. Do the Ukrainians have the material, the weapons, the ammunition they need for this offensive? Have they been given that by the US and by our NATO allies?

BOWMAN: It's a great question. I think the United States has provided an extraordinary quantity of arms to Kyiv. I've supported that.

MAY: Yeah, I know.

BOWMAN: Because I believe they're pursuing common interest with us. I believe it's a smart investment and not charity. Roughly speaking the Biden administration has provided \$40 billion in security assistance. Many of our European allies have come alongside and provided important assistance as well particularly United Kingdom and others have been impressive.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

Others have been a little slower and not so much. But generally speaking, I'd say Ukraine has extraordinary combined arms combat capability that H.R. understands much better than I do now and including many brigades that they didn't have before.

And as we watch this counteroffensive going forward and I can't improve on what H.R. just said, but just looking at size, in terms of how big are the units that are maneuvering, are these battalion brigade elements or something smaller? What kind of activity are they probing? Are they trying to penetrate as H.R. said?

And then composition, are they really employing some of these new brigades that include the combined arms capabilities, artillery, infantry, cavalry forces, all combined working together, synchronizing, coordinating to try to identify weaknesses in the line as H.R. just said and then exploit them?

So the combination of Ukrainian determination to defend their homes frankly against this unprovoked invasion with American primarily western arms is a formidable combination. But as the Russians and many places are dug in and they have minefields in front of them and sometimes flanking maneuvers are hard.

So as H.R. knows firsthand, that's often as about as hard as it gets in warfare. And so, there have been losses, there will be losses. It will probably unfortunately take a lot longer than we would hope. Equipment will be damaged, it needs to be repaired. Equipment will be destroyed, it needs to be replaced. But again, this is not charity. This is a smart investment for the West. And I think we need to stick with Ukraine for the long term.

MCMASTER:

Yeah.

MAY:

And let's stick on this for one second because you've essentially and in a very pithy manner made the values argument for what they support because here are people defending their homeland, defending their independence, defending a fledgling democracy, defending their sovereignty, defending an international system that if it doesn't have a prohibition against using force to take over a neighboring country really means nothing, all of that.

But maybe if that's the values argument there's also a national interest argument. And maybe I'll ask you, H.R., to make that as ... I mean we can go on with that. Marc Thiessen did some very good work in the Washington Post on this at length saying if you're a conservative and you believe in the national interest, this is in the national interest. But talk about that for a minute.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

MCMASTER:

Putin is allied with China and they announced just before the invasions, just before the Beijing Olympics that we're finished. "United States, you're over. Europe, you're over. The west broadly including Japan, other democracies. Now, we're in charge. Get ready for the new era of international relations."

And you've seen that kind of arrogance still, less from Putin now, but from Xi Jinping in particular. And I think this is a test case of our will. The hope that Putin has is that our will were fractured, ours being mainly the Transatlantic will, the US and Europe. I don't see that happening. You just saw Olaf Scholz with Macron, with Prime Minister Duda of Poland all saying, "Hey, we're going to stick with Ukraine."

I think that was positive because one of the wedges they tried to drive was between Eastern Europe and Western Europe, between Poland and the Baltic States and other Eastern and Southeast European states were quite concerned about Russian aggression because they think that gun will turn on them next. And others who have been making these sort of overtures toward negotiations or some kind of a ceasefire.

So anyway, I think I'm optimistic about our will but I think we have to maintain it. Because Putin, there's no off-ramp for Putin. Or if there's an off-ramp, it's just a chance to look for the next on-ramp. And those who argue for that I think are arguing really for giving him a way out and that he will use to continue to subvert our security as well as security of Europe.

MAY:

People ask me this. They say, "Well, Cliff, if people like you and H.R. say there's no off-ramp for Putin, that gets really dangerous because if he can't get off the road, he's going to crash and he's got nukes. And so, we can't just say ... Guys, what's your end game here?"

MCMASTER:

Yeah. Well, that's what he does is he threatens this kind of vertical escalation to nuclear weapons but he can't do it. I mean, I think he could do it obviously if it's physically possible. But of course, tactical nuclear weapon is not usable in Ukraine. Would Ukrainians stop fighting? Hell no, they wouldn't stop fighting.

The winds blow east. And I think he knows that he would become a true pariah internationally. You've already seen, for example, with a recent visit of African leaders into Ukraine at the same time when he fired six or so of these hypersonic missiles, the backlash against that. Now imagine ... And they're on their way to Moscow, these African leaders.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

So I think he's his own worst enemy in this and the threatening of nuclear force. But also he's tried to hold the world hostage from an energy security perspective but also from a food security perspective. "What else could he do," I guess we could ask. And well, he could maybe cut undersea cables. He could attack energy infrastructure. He can conduct massive cyberattacks maybe. But I really think that we could withstand all that and the cost imposed on him would be far greater than any payoff he would get.

MAY:

So people also say, "Okay. What you got to do here then is the US needs to push him to negotiate." I don't know how the US pushes him to do anything at all whatsoever.

Now, one thing I heard is that Germany is now saying that it's open to removing some hurdles for Ukraine's NATO membership at the Vilnius summit coming up next month. I'm not sure what's going on here. Maybe this is a chip that they're throwing out say, "Okay. We're going to say we want Ukraine and NATO." Now, Putin understands we'll bargain that chip away so he looks like he wins something if he comes to the table and really compromises. What a compromise mean? It has to mean he leaves.

The other possibility and I leave to you guys answer is, is it possible the Russian army really does collapse under this pressure? I think we do know the morale of the Russian forces in Ukraine are very bad. Maybe you guys saw the Russian infantry soldiers surrendering to the drone. If people should look at and call that up on Google, it's an amazing thing. He clearly, I mean he just doesn't want to die and doesn't want to be there. And there's been like 17,000 calls to a hotline how you can surrender if you're a Russian soldier in Ukraine.

MCMASTER:

Right.

MAY:

I don't know. What do you think about it?

MCMASTER:

Brad, why don't you go first on this one?

BOWMAN:

All right. Well, I'm eager to hear from H.R., but just the whole let's push Ukraine to negotiate angle of your questionnaire, Cliff. I get animated about that because just to use a metaphor, if I may, this metaphor doesn't feel like a stretch to me.

That would be a bit like seeing your neighbor enduring an unprovoked massive home invasion where the criminal is invading your neighbor's home, destroying their house and killing their family. And you're going to be yelling over the fence, "You really should negotiate with that home invader. You really should." He just killed your wife. He's



FOREIGN PODICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

killing your kids. He's doing other horrible things. He's ruining their home and you're yelling over the yard.

MAY: And you're yelling at the home invader, "Don't you want to-

BOWMAN: One, you're yelling at the home invader. And let's not provoke him too much. Well, he's already invading the home, one.

MAY: Right, right.

BOWMAN: Two and hey, family, your wife was just killed. Your home is being burned. You really should negotiate now. I mean I think that's almost, correct me if I'm wrong, that's about what we're looking at here.

And what are we doing? Over the fence, we're throwing like, "Here's a baseball bat, neighbor, so you can defend your home." And as long as someone is willing to defend their home, who are we on the other side of the fence just tell them they should stop defending their home?

And that goes right back to your conservative argument whether wherever someone sits on the political ideological spectrum, as I understand. And there's different types of conservatism. At the heart of conservatism is a respect for the local, the home. That's why a lot of conservatives believe strongly in border security.

A conservative would support legal immigration because I'm inviting you into my home. But if your first act is to come into my home and violate the law uninvited, that makes a lot of conservatives upset. That's essentially what we're seeing in Ukraine. We saw Putin in a naked act of aggression trying to use military force to redraw international borders. And we're going to sit in safety in the United States and condescendingly tell Ukraine they need to negotiate? It's not unlike that metaphor. And I think it really should be called out for what it is.

MAY: And there's a difference between helping somebody defend their home and actually going over and doing it for them.

BOWMAN: And they're not asking Americans to come and fight and die. And we could talk about the nuance of Iraq and Afghanistan and H.R. served honorably there for many, many years and has so much more.

MAY: We're going to talk about all that.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

BOWMAN:

And a lot of them fought hard to the final days, for sure. But in Ukraine we have a capable, determined partner willing to fight to the death to defend their homes. They're asking nothing more for than the means to defend their home just like that neighbor.

MCMASTER:

I think it's also important to keep in mind, what do Ukrainians want? They want to survive. And so what they need is a viable state. I think it's really important to look at the map. Look at the map and look at the territories seized in 2014 especially the Crimean Peninsula.

Russia in control the Crimean Peninsula allows Russia to continue to try to choke Ukraine out, to make sure that it's not economically viable, to retard or impede its ability to rebuild and to grow its economy, return to normalcy at the end of this war.

So, what is it going to take? I think it's going to take Ukraine taking back the territory that was taken since 2014. And then I think that means convincing Putin that he's been defeated. I think that is what will convince Russian leaders that they've been defeated.

Then what's a viable approach after that? It's to harden Ukraine, to give them defensive capabilities analogous to those that South Korea has had with US forces there or Israel has had without US forces there. I mean this is going to be a country that exists in a hostile region because of Russia and they have to be able to defend themselves.

And this is why I've opposed and I know you have, too, this incremental approach to providing Ukraine with defensive capabilities. You asked earlier, "Okay. What's missing from the offensive?" What's missing from the offensive is air capabilities. You have to be able to attack in three dimensions. You have to conduct what's called defensive counter-air to protect your forces that are maneuvering. And then you also want to be able to conduct close air support in support of those forces.

MAY:

They can't do close air support right now?

MCMASTER:

No, they don't have sufficient aircraft to provide that bubble. Now what they can do is they can roll forward air defense systems and they can protect the forces that are attacking by really trying to achieve air parity with the Russians from the ground. But by not providing them with the F-16 aircraft or the additional MiG-29 aircraft, they can't really conduct responsive close air support.

And of course, what that is, that's essentially flying artillery. And when you break through the lines it's a fluid situation. What that does is it allows you to have fixed-wing aircraft, sometimes rotary aircraft for the US military who can help you provide eyes



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

forward of your force, to guide you forward, but then also to deliver fires in support of your maneuver. And that's what helps you maintain the momentum and depth against a defending enemy.

The Ukrainians don't have that because with so many other areas, we didn't give them anything but a few more javelins and stinger systems in the beginning. And then we said, "Okay. We'll give you this but not that, and some artillery but not long-range fires. Okay. Long-range fires but not long, long-range fires. And so, we will give you protected mobility, Bradelys and so forth, but not tanks. Okay. Now we'll give you tanks."

Yeah, I mean it's been frustrating to see. And of course all these capabilities, you just don't give them to somebody. You have to be trained on them. They have to be integrated into these brigades that Brad mentioned which have been detached from the fight to train on these systems to develop combined arms capabilities which is mobile-protected firepower or tanks, protected mobility, infantry, engineer capabilities which is very important because the Ukraine's going to have to cross some rivers and water obstacles and trenches and so forth.

And then to integrate that with fires, the artillery and the long-range systems. But also aviation and that's what they're missing is the aviation component.

MAY:

And last point I'll make before we go on though, you feel free to add to it if you want to, is those who say, "What we have to do is let Putin have a little territory and then he'll be satisfied." Did we not run that experiment 2014? We said, "Oh, okay." So, Crimea, I understand he's got to have it. Donbas, but I'm sure."

And if you think we've run that experiment we know the answer, then you have to think if he should succeed, will he not go on? And people say, "Well, he won't be able to because he won't know." He can resupply and reorganize, you can tell me if I'm wrong, fairly quickly. And by the way, he can impress how many millions of Ukrainians into his military with a bayonet at their back and say, "Head to Moldova. Head to Lithuania. Head to Kaliningrad." That's impossible to do? Tell me if I'm wrong.

MCMASTER:

Well, this is how he's been using the Chechens for example. But also, he formed this Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic militias. So what you've seen fighting is kind of this hodgepodge. You've had Chechens. You've had that combined with the Wagner mercenaries and the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic.



FOREIGN PODICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

What the Ukrainians have done in some of these initial probing attacks is they've attacked on the boundaries of these forces and they're starting to split them up. But here, what's really important I think is that if there's something left on Putin's plate, he'll be encouraged to continue to subvert and to attack other countries.

So for example, you already have him stoking up an old dispute in Moldova in the Transnistria region.

MAY: Right.

MCMASTER: You already –

MAY: He has a strip on the very eastern side of Moldova next, right.

MCMASTER: Exactly. So, you also have him undermining other elections like in the Georgia election which has been a disaster nobody's really reported on. Russia's been able to really influence or really throw that election toward a pro-Russian leader. He's actually de facto annexed Belarus and he's moving tactical nuclear weapons into Belarus. He's going to destabilize the Bulgarian election potentially. He's already got fifth column activities operating there. So-

MAY: Armenia, possibly, he has his ... right.

MCMASTER: Absolutely.

MAY: Central Asia, they're worried about what he might do. That's an easy way to go. Would we really defend Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan if he wanted to go in?

BOWMAN: The suggestion that you referenced, Cliff, that we just need to give Putin a little bit more of Ukraine beyond what he already had taken illicitly in Crimea, in portions of the Donbas reminds me of yet another Churchill quote. He said, "An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile hoping it will eat him last." That is essentially a policy proposal of appeasement. And as Winston Churchill's wisdom reminds us, that's generally a bad policy.

MAY: Right. All right, let's talk about China a little bit. It's modernizing its military at breakneck speed. Brad has been talking to a number of generals on this podcast about what they're doing, what we need to do to keep up. Is the Biden administration responding adequately to the threat posed by the Chinese military buildup?



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

MCMASTER: No.

MAY: Okay. We can move on. Thank you very much.

MCMASTER: And what's really important to notice is the scale of this buildup. So since the 2000s, China has increased its defense spending 44-fold. That's in large measure been financed by their unfair trade and economic practices especially after entry to the World Trade Organization in 2001. So in many ways, we're underwriting our own demise with huge capital transfers to China. And they've been able to weaponize their mercantile, status model against us.

But also, I think what's really important to note is that they've increased their defense spending in real terms by 7%. Our increase and we've already been behind in a bow wave of deferred modernization to develop countermeasures to China's countermeasures is really only after the plus up by the Senate, a real gain of 3%. It was going to be actually a loss in terms of percentage of the defense budget based on after adjusted for inflation.

And then, I think what's also important to note is that China is increasing its nuclear arsenal by 400% by some estimates. And why are they doing that? They're developing a range of capabilities that are aimed at being able to have their way in the Indo-Pacific region to create an exclusionary area of primacy in which they subjugate Taiwan by force and then they own the ocean in their view in the South China Sea.

But also, what they want to do is challenge us broadly across the globe and then also to threaten us with nuclear force. So, the capabilities are developing. Hypersonic weapons, for example, are designed to keep us at bay so they can have their way and essentially dominate the world island of the Eurasian landmass along with their Russian partner.

So anyway, I think it is important to understand kind of the geostrategic dynamics of play and how China is building up the military capability to do what Mackinder and Spykman, the old geostrategic thinkers of the early 20th century warned against which is not to allow a hostile power to dominate the world island.

MAY: And Brad, a point you've been making and you made it an analysis that you recently did but you've made actually for years. We want to be able to defeat China if it should come to war. We don't want it to come to war. The way it doesn't come to war is if China believes we could defeat them in a war. That's called deterrence.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman

Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May

Deterrence means, as you often put it, the Chinese should say it wouldn't be a fair fight. As long as we make it a fair fight they have every reason to say, "Hey, we got a lot more people than they do. And by the way, we can stomach more losses than they can." What was it that Saddam Hussein said America is a nation that can't withstand 10,000 casualties in a single battle? He had a point.

BOWMAN:

Yeah, no, exactly. Deterrence at risk of oversimplifying is political will. The adversary's perception of our political will plus their perception of our military capability. And you need both to effectively deter an adversary.

And depending on what nature our conflict took in the Taiwan Strait, there could be massive American casualties in that conflict. So it would be far better to make the investments now like we didn't do with Ukraine going back to the Obama administration and through several administrations of both parties to prevent that from happening in the first place.

And it's pretty darn clear based on war gaming and my friend and our colleague Rear admiral Mark Montgomery has really been a leader on this. And General McMaster knows a ton, too. It's pretty clear from war gaming, what we need to be doing to have that military capability that would really establish deterrence and persuade Beijing that today is not the day to try to extinguish freedom of 25 million people in Taiwan.

And it really quickly is five categories. It's enhancing our ability to strike Chinese forces, largely but not exclusively the ability to hit Chinese ships coming across the Strait, and having sufficient numbers of things like the Long-Range Anti-Ship Missile, strengthening Taiwan's ability to defend itself. Taiwan will not be able to hold on forever. There's no question about that. We need them to hold on long enough so American forces can arrive quickly enough and prevent a fait accompli attack.

So American's strength, Taiwan's ability to hold on long enough so we can get there, bolstering the survivability of forward positioned US forces in the first and second island chains. By the way, a lot of our bases we can expect would get pummeled by missiles and drones. We have not done what we need to do on air and missile defense and other sort of resilience measures.

And improving our ability to operate with our partners in combined arms operations in particularly Taiwan, Japan, and Australia. If you don't do that we'll be less effective. And unfortunately there'll be a lot of fratricide side killing of friendly forces accidentally. And then finally, an area where our center and cyber and technology innovation is obviously



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

particularly strong is building the cyber-resilience of US infrastructure to support military operations.

In a podcast, Cliff, that you graciously allowed me to guess host that we published last week, I was talking with some US Air Force officials and I specifically asked them. I phrased it something like, "Would it be crazy to think that if we ever had a conflict at Taiwan Strait that we would have Chinese cyberattacks against bases in the United States that were generating forces to send forward to that fight?" And paraphrasing, he said, "Not only would it be crazy, we're already seeing those cyberattacks now," which really underscores for me this idea that we're in a form of conflict now.

And as H.R. has been speaking about more eloquently longer than I have, we view conflict as a binary light switch. Either we're in conflict or we're not. They view it more as a dial. The conflict is already happening. They push back on that word conflict and then they proceeded to describe the essence of a conflict, so all respect to them.

MAY:

Yeah, yeah.

BOWMAN:

But if you listen to the wording closely. So, yeah, I'm a little bit more at liberty to speak what I see as the truth. And we're in a conflict now. It's diplomatic, informational, cyber. And this is not unrelated to a military conflict in the Taiwan Strait. They're setting the groundwork now that will help them should that deterrence fails as it did in Ukraine.

MAY:

I got to say and I really want your thoughts on this. What you're saying, I think so exposes the faux sophisticates who say, "We talk about forever wars." Because the whole concept of these false sophisticates is that there is war and there is peace as opposed to, "No, that's not the way the real world works anymore, hasn't in a very long time." There's often what the Israelis call war between the wars, what some call hybrid wars, what the Chinese may be doing in terms of the cyber domain, space domain. That is not the reality that there's war or peace.

And what's more? We can just go and sit down with the Chinese and say, "Can we shake hands because we all really want good 401(k)s and the best darn health care system we can possibly have?" That's our priority, it's not their priority. Am I wrong on this?

BOWMAN:

The best thing a predator could ever have is a prey not knowing that they're being preyed upon.

MAY:

Very good point. Very well said. Very well said.



FOREIGN PODICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

BOWMAN: I mean, if you're going to attack, kill, undermine someone you want them to know they're not currently under attack.

MAY: That's right.

BOWMAN: And unfortunately, that's where we've been for a decade.

MCMASTER: And this was the big lie, the big lie that the Chinese Communist Party perpetrated and perpetuated and persuaded us to continue to believe is that China was going to play by the rules. Having been welcomed to the international community as it prospered, it would liberalize its economy, would liberalizes its form of governance.

There's a great book by Alex Joske called Spies and Lies on this topic. And he lays it out in a very convincing detail that this was a very deliberate effort to keep us really duped so, as Brad said, that we'd be unaware that we were under assault. And so, it is really important to kind of reject what you might call kind of soft-headed cosmopolitanism that, hey, everybody wants what we want.

And of course what this is profoundly arrogant because it mirror images the other and it neglects the degree to which they have aspirations. They being the Chinese Communist Party of leadership that go far beyond anything in reaction to what we do. And so, what they do is they talk this game of cooperation. Win-win. You know what win-win means? The Chinese Communist Party wins twice and at your expense. The other is the Community of Common Destiny of Mankind.

MAY: Yeah, that's their freedom.

MCMASTER: I mean, do you really want to sign up for that program with Xi Jinping at the head of it?

MAY: And he's talking about this, Matt Pottinger has written about this because what this means is a socialist collectivist mankind run from Beijing. That's what he's talking. This is so Orwellian, "Common Destiny". It's a common destiny that Xi Jinping writes.

BOWMAN: I literally was doing an interview the other day where the moderator asked me, "So, how do we think this Chinese policy of non-interference, win-win cooperation and non-conflict, how's that going to play out in the Middle East?" I said, "Well, before we accept that premise, why don't we ask the people of Taiwan about that non-interference, non-conflict policy? Maybe we should talk to the Japanese. Maybe we talk to the Filipinos and the Vietnamese. They might have something to say about that."



FOREIGN PODICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

And if that's not enough, you can go-

MAY: How about the Indians?

BOWMAN: Maybe we go check with the Indians who've had their soldiers bludgeoned to death on the border. Maybe we should ask the Uyghurs. We're so critical of American politicians, why don't we bring half of that cynicism toward the authoritarian tyrants in Beijing.

MAY: Here's a question that just occurred to me. So, it may be a very stupid question. And that is, you were talking about the Ukrainians want the means to defend their independence and defend their homeland. They're not asking for us to send soldiers and send troops. The Israelis say, "Help us but we're going to fight common enemies. We're going to fight jihadists. We're going to fight those who want to destroy us. We're not asking you to put any troops or the boots on the ground."

Someone might ask, "Shouldn't the Taiwanese say the same?" Shouldn't we say we're going to help the Taiwanese in every way to defend their round to make it so that Xi Jinping says, "I can't digest it. I have to find another way. I'm going to offer them free trade agreement. I'm going to ask them for this but I'm not going to stop their elections and make them be ruled by the Chinese Communist Party when they don't be."

And maybe he thinks, "Who knows if the Americans will get involved and I don't want them to because they look awful strong to me, stronger than I am." So, I'm not saying we shouldn't build up our forces to deter him. But is there an argument to be made that, hey, like the Ukrainians, like the Israelis, the Taiwanese, they should defend themselves. They shouldn't say, "Well, the Americans are going to do it for us or help us not on the ground but in aircraft carriers."

MCMASTER: I think there's a lot to that Cliff, I mean that argument. You want the Taiwanese to demonstrate the will to defend themselves. And I don't know Taiwan well. I've never visited there. I've only been there on my Peloton. But I do want to go, I do want to go.

But the indicators and because I've been trying to follow closely, I do talk to a lot of Taiwanese leaders, is that their will is stronger and stronger. And the reason is they're learning vicariously through the fate of others, Chinese aggression more broadly in the region and against them. But also how about the subjugation of Hong Kong and the extinguishment of human freedom there and the jailing of Jimmy Lai, our friend and others who have just been arbitrarily detained and tossed into prison.



FOREIGN PODICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

So, I think that their will has been bolstered. They've taken some concrete steps. Obviously with the armed purchases, we do need to expedite those \$19 billion of arm sales that are backlogged. But also they've increased conscription. I mean not enough. Brad, was it four to eight months or from four to eight months? But they probably need to increase that more.

And the polls are encouraging. Young Taiwanese are saying, "Hey, I don't want any part of the PRC and we are willing to defend ourselves." I think they have learned to some degree vicariously through the example of the Ukrainians who have demonstrated tremendous valor and courage.

MAY: And they support the Ukrainians for the most part.

MCMASTER: Absolutely. So, I don't know. I mean, the answer to this question is, yes, it's important. We can't want to defend Taiwan more than Taiwan wants to defend itself, but I don't think that's the case. And so, I think we've seen others in the region come to this conclusion. Hey, Japan doubled their defense budget, doubled it, right?

MAY: Yeah, no, that's impressive.

MCMASTER: So, I think that when you look at burden sharing across the alliances, the AUKUS alliance, the investment of the Australians in nuclear submarines, for example, to improve, to turn capability in the region. The Philippines has moved back, I think, into really demonstrating more resolve with now allowing these, they're not US bases but kind of hot bases where you move in and out of four different bases in the Philippines which gives us a much better power projection capability.

But also the Filipino leadership now with President Marcos saying, "Hey, listen, China, you don't own the ocean," and backing off of Duterte's accommodation with the CCP. So, I think the trends are in the right direction.

You know what I want say to our friends across the region? You often hear this because China talks about win-win and everything else. Brad was talking about what is the other phrase like no conflict, no whatever. But their actions speak louder than those words and are in contrast to them. So I think what we say to people in the region is the choice isn't between Washington and Beijing, it's between sovereignty and servitude. And China wants to create servile relationships. We're on the side of many belts, many roads, the free and open Pacific and Indo-Pacific.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

MAY:

All right, I want to talk about Afghanistan a little bit because in April, the Biden administration issued a 12-page report on the 2021 withdrawal. The National Security Council's John Kirby, not Blinken, not Biden, not Sullivan, that's interesting because they're pushing it down the food chain. What did he tell reporters? He said, "Well, first and most critically, the president's decision to end the war in Afghanistan was the right one. The United States had long ago accomplished its mission to remove from the battlefield of the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11."

Well, that's not entirely true. There's a new UN Security Council report that says Afghanistan's Taliban rulers have now appointed Al-Qaeda commanders to government positions and are providing them with monthly salaries and training camps. Now, maybe they're focusing on replacing gas stoves with electric stoves to save the planet. But count me dubious about this.

BOWMAN:

No, your question there, Cliff, lays out a lot of the key things I think people would want to know. You referenced the report to the UN Security Council and I just want to foot stomp what you said because it really kind of underscores the mistruths of the premise of the Biden administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan.

H.R. McMaster and I published two pieces in the Wall Street Journal. One suggesting how the administration could prevent disaster. They ignored our advice, disaster ensued. And I don't say that with glee. I say that with great sadness.

And just a week or two after Biden made his announcement in April 21, I published a piece in the Washington Post and I pointed to the president's comment that Al-Qaeda was gone, that the mission's accomplished. And just saying that Al-Qaeda's not gone, it wasn't true then, it's not true now as this report to the UN Security Council highlights a. And as our friend and colleague Bill Roggio just highlighted a piece in the last week or so in the Long War Journal.

So I mean, let's hear what ... These aren't fire-breathing hawks. This is a UN report to the UN Security Council and they're talking about Al-Qaeda training camps. They're talking about Al-Qaeda officials in the Taliban government. No surprise there for anyone who's been half awake or reading FDD or Long War Journal the last few years because we know that they've always been attached at the hip, going back to September 10, 2001 throughout the 20-year experience. And now, we now have sadly an Al-Qaeda-Taliban terrorist syndicate ruling that country once again because of the Biden administration's withdrawal set up for failure by the Trump administration's decisions, if we're being fair, just like we did on September 10, 2001.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

And by the way I'll end with this, General Kurilla the CENTCOM commander testified to the Armed Service Committee just a couple months ago that ISIS-Khorasan, the ISIS affiliate in Afghanistan would have the means, I believe he said, within six months to conduct attacks against American interest. And so this is a hot mess in Afghanistan. We know less what's going on because we're not there and we're less agile in responding just as many of us warned in 2020, 2021 when they were contemplating these decisions.

MAY:

And the number of troops. And if we had left a residual for force, it could have been as few I think and military people have said this, it's not coming out of my head, 2,500 US troops. There'd be other NATO troops there as well. At least they have many maybe 5,000. And you could at least frustrate the ambitions of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda to take over Kabul and the other urban areas that they didn't have. They were living out in the countryside living off the peasants.

MCMASTER:

Well I'll tell you, I think it might be more like 10,000 but what does that matter?

MAY:

We've had 20,000 in Korea since I was in diapers.

MCMASTER:

And more than that. We've had many more troops in Japan and many troops in Europe. And what was important to remember is that in this period of time during which we surrendered to a terrorist organization and conducted a humiliating retreat is that there were more NATO troops there than there were American troops. That was a sustainable model for sure.

They played a bait and switch here with this 12-page report. The objective in Afghanistan was also to ensure that Afghanistan never again became a safe haven and support base for terrorist organizations who want to murder our children.

And it was also important to have an Afghan government in power that was fundamentally hostile to the Taliban and other terrorist organizations because it was important to be in Afghanistan to go after terrorist organizations across the border in Pakistan as well.

And so now, what you have is a terrorist ecosystem that is growing terrorists in a way that it has not been the case since before 9/11. And I think that we have a situation that is analogous to ISIS after we left Iraq in December of 2010. And we're going to have to go back at some point, sadly.

Now, the other thing that I think is worth pointing out is what did we hear about the Taliban for many years? Except for the excellent publication Long War Journal and the



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

great work that Bill Roggio and Tom Joscelyn did. I mean, those guys were the best analysts. And what they showed is the Taliban's not this kind of rural movement that just emerged from the mountains. I mean, this was a transnational terrorist organization that was built and sustained by Pakistan's ISI and Al-Qaeda and funded by Gulf donors.

It was a transnational terrorist organization from the beginning. Remember when the Taliban took over the Kabul Airport and you saw all those Taliban terrorists kitted out with the latest body armor and night vision goggles? That was the Badr Brigade which is an Al-Qaeda brigade inside of the Taliban. Siraj Haqqani, Minister of Interior. I mean, there's so much evidence. It's crazy that we continue with the self-delusion.

And the other thing you kept hearing about the Taliban and about Afghanistan, there's no military solution for Afghanistan. Well, the Taliban came up with one, didn't they? And then also these same people are crying crocodile tears about women's rights and women in Afghanistan. And they consigned - what? How many people in Afghanistan now? 23 million, more than that? - to hell and thought nothing of it.

MAY:

And we left them billions of dollars' worth of the military equipment that we could have had. And by the way Bagram Airbase, you've talked about this Brad. That was essentially, you want to talk about the US national interest, that was quite a useful asset for the US to have in that part of the world. It just happens by the way that one of Afghanistan's neighbors is the People's Republic of China. Wouldn't it be good to have planes that can land and refuel and be repaired in Bagram?

BOWMAN:

Absolutely. And there's such fundamental national security interest here at stake. And there are also I would say principles at stake. And there's also I would call moral issues at stake. And it does respectfully annoy me a little bit when I see folks, good-intention, patriotic people on Capitol Hill wringing their hands about women rights in Afghanistan. And when I go back and look, these were the very same people that were most vociferously calling for a withdrawal. It's like, "What did you expect?"

MAY:

What did you expect?

BOWMAN:

You were warned that if we withdrew that eventually the Afghan government could fall. Many of us, to be fair, were surprised how quickly it happened. But there was no doubt that sooner or later was very likely to happen. When the Taliban took over, what did you think would happen to women's rights? And you say, "Okay. Well, this is Monday morning quarterbacking, you're making part ." No, I'm really not because I see implications for this for Taiwan.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

So, I don't want to hear anyone in 2028 wringing their hands on Capitol Hill about 25 million people losing their freedom when these same folks right now are arguing against modest defense investments that can prevent that from happening. It's the exact same principle. Will we please learn the lesson?

MAY:

I pointed out to you previously we had this conversation that the amount we're spending in say Ukraine is much less than the amount of COVID funds that were stolen by criminals according to the US government itself. Stolen by criminals, that's just so you understand when people say billions of dollars.

And another shout out to Bill Roggio Long War Journal because John Kirby, and listen, he's a smart guy. I like him, another retired admiral. But he also said, "No Biden administration agency predicted a Taliban takeover in nine days." Shame on them because Bill Roggio did and he was writing this in Long War Journal. Nor did the US anticipate that Ashraf Ghani, the country's president would flee.

Actually, I went to a dinner for Ghani the night before he met with Biden. You did too, right? The two of us did. And we knew that he was packing his bags unless he heard from Biden that he was going to get full support in their efforts to stop the Taliban and Al Qaeda. I kind of knew that he was ready to go.

MCMASTER:

Yeah. Well, what option did he have really? Well, I mean-

MAY:

Well, he could have been like Zelensky but that's ...

MCMASTER:

Well, I mean, what happened is we actually partnered with the Taliban against the Afghan government. And you're going to say, "Okay. That's crazy. What do you mean?" Well, just consider what we did. We negotiated with the Taliban without the participation of the Afghan government, blow number one.

Then we withheld a lot of our support from them. We stopped actively targeting the Taliban. Hey, if you guys don't bother us, you can kill as many Afghans as you want. We're not going to actively target you anymore. We withdrew a great amount of our intelligence and our air support. We cut off our logistics support. We forced them to release 5,000 and some of the most heinous people on Earth. And then we announced we're leaving by this date.

And then you know what that did? That inspired the Taliban to go around to all Afghan leaders and say, "Okay. Here's how it's going to go. Either you accommodate with us or we kill you and we kill your whole family. What's it going to be?" And so actually, what



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

the hell are we doing negotiating with the Taliban to begin with? When the Obama administration left Iraq, they didn't negotiate with Al-Qaeda to leave Iraq. If we were going to leave, why the hell didn't we just leave?

MAY: And then by the way, to fair, that's on Trump as well.

MCMASTER: This is February 2020, surrender or die.

MAY: Not getting your advice at that point, unfortunately.

MCMASTER: Surrender or die.

MAY: Absolutely. Yeah. No, I mean –

MCMASTER: This goes across both administrations, yeah.

MAY: Right.

MCMASTER: But then also, okay, if we go back to the 12-page document we started talking about, one of Kirby's and these other people's arguments. Well, we couldn't really change the Trump administration policy. Okay. Now, they changed quite a few Trump administration policies.

MAY: I think so.

MCMASTER: They opened the border essentially. They reversed the border policy. They got back into the Paris Climate Accords. They rejoined the Human Rights Council although it's still taken over by hostile people. They went back in the World Health Organization even though that guy Tedros is still there. So, I mean they did a lot of things that were reversal of the Trump.

MAY: Mostly.

BOWMAN: As evidence of that, in the agreement that the Trump administration negotiated with the Taliban, there was a withdrawal date that the Biden administration blew off and extended. So you can change that but you're forced to comply with everything else in that. When you're in a two-party agreement and the other party is not honoring their commitments with respect to Al-Qaeda, give me a break.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

MAY: Transparently and true. Okay. Two more subjects I want to squeeze in before I let you go. The US forward deployment in Syria and Iraq and the mission there is to keep ISIS suppressed. ISIS doesn't have the territory it once had. It's not a dead organization. I remember when they were saying Al-Qaeda was. Anyhow, it's under threat from Iran and from Moscow. It's been attacked by Wagner mercenaries. The US did pretty well wiping them out but it's under threat right now.

MCMASTER: This is February of 2018 you're talking about?

MAY: Yeah.

MCMASTER: Yeah.

MAY: Do you want to talk ... I mean I think this is important-

MCMASTER: There are two locations, Northeastern Syria and the Al-Tanf area. Both of these are important for two reasons. One is to continue as you mentioned the campaign against jihadist terrorists who want to attack our country and our interests abroad. This is ISIS, remember. And it's important to remember that they're Al-Qaeda 2.0 essentially.

After we left Iraq in December 2010, Al-Qaeda and Iraq morphed into ISIS. Same people, many of them. Al-Baghdadi for example, he was detained and imprisoned in Iraq until he was released. And they became the most deadly terrorist organization in history.

They conducted of course horrible, inflicted horrible pain and suffering and brutality on the people of Iraq and Syria. But they conducted 95 to 100 attacks internationally. Remember all the attacks in Europe, in Brussels and Paris and Marseilles. And they shot down a Russian airliner. Yemen. They inspired the attack in San Bernardino. They were extremely active and destructive.

And so, what do you think happens if we leave again? Wars don't leave when one side disengages. But also, what's important to understand about that territory is it gives us and others leverage in the political process. This accommodation with Assad I think is a huge disaster.

But that area, Northeastern Syria sits on top of about 60% of Syria's oil infrastructure which gives the Syrian democratic forces that are there leverage, gives us leverage. And also it's important to interrupt the land bridge be for Iran, that where Iran wants to place a proxy army on the border of Israel to threaten Israel with destruction. And if we



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

were to vacate that area, it would allow Iran to move unimpeded supplies and so forth for the proxy army that they're forming in Syria.

BOWMAN:

I think that's so well said. I would just ... You have a lot of folks in DC pushing the endless war argument. We got to withdraw from the Middle East, withdraw from the Middle East. Let's be clear. We're not talking about here 170,000 American troops in Iraq. That was the peak number. And we're not talking about 100,000 troops in Afghanistan. We're talking about 900, 900. We had 26,000 on Capitol Hill after January 6. 900 and General McMaster just detailed what we're getting for that.

In the military, we call that an economy of forced missions, small input, big gains to prevent a small thing from getting worse thereby requiring increased investment of men and material in the future. So, I just would highlight that we have a fundamental American interest to prevent a resurgence to the ISIS caliphate as we discussed a few months back in an event with Michael Gordon and some previous commanders there.

And we have partners in Syria that are carrying a vast majority of the security burden. And we're there to help them and to keep those ISIS detainees detained. Because if they're not detained, they're coming to Europe, they're coming to the United States to kill us. So do we have 900 troops and a small investment to keep them detained and keep the caliphate defeated or do we stupidly withdraw, take the Afghanistan playbook and have a small problem get bigger forcing us to come back in a very big way siphoning resources away from the Indo-Pacific? That would be a mistake.

MAY:

The 900 troops we have there, do they have the force protection they need given the threats if they face them?

BOWMAN:

Well Secretary of Defense Austin testified a few months back and had a very interesting exchange with Senator Cotton where it came out that from the Biden administration's beginning up to that point, a few months back, there had been 83 attacks on US forces in Iraq, in Syria.

MAY:

83.

BOWMAN:

With 83, if I get that and I think I'm get them right.

MCMASTER:

Yeah, I think that's right.

BOWMAN:

With four responses.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

MAY: Wow.

BOWMAN: So to anyone who's been on a playground, that's a formula for more attacks.

MAY: You want to say anything about the force protection that they have needed-

MCMASTER: Well, I think we have the capability to respond quickly if we have the will to do it. And you mentioned the attack on our forces in the Conoco oil facility on the Euphrates River in February of 2018. That was a Russian mercenary Wagner. And we responded with everything, attack helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, artillery, rocket fire and that unit. That unit fired all their 50 cal. ammunition. I mean, it was a heck of a fight.

We took no casualties. We killed, I mean, some estimates are 300 or so Wagner mercenaries. And what they didn't understand is if you mess with the United States, if you mess with one bean, you mess with the whole burrito when you mess with the US military. But you've got to be able to have the guts to commit that force.

On Iran, if we're talking about reestablishing deterrence for Iran, I think we have to act in a way that the communication we understand what the return address is. The return address for these attacks is Tehran.

MAY: Right.

MCMASTER: And so what we allow them to do is use these cutouts and proxies. So I would say next time you attack Americans, nice IRGC headquarters you have there. How about your entire Navy? I mean, fill in the blank. I don't know what the right answer is. How about all of your missile facilities? So, I would just say Iran gets away with it because we allow them to get away with it.

MAY: So, two points and this will go into our last subject of this discussion. One is my one fear here is a certain complacency. We beat the Wagner force there and we show ... So, they learned their lesson and they won't do that again. As opposed to they said, "Okay. Next time, we have to do a better job." And that also what you just said brings us to Tehran, because instead of saying to Tehran, "If you are thinking of attacking us anywhere again," and they've been doing this in Iran, "you're going to pay a very steep price. And trust me, we mean it this time."

Instead as we are recording this, we have reports that the US and Iran are close to reaching an informal unwritten agreement. And as you know my take on this is an informal unwritten agreement is not worth the paper it's not written on.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

And a part of that agreement I think is going to be, as I understand it. That they will promise if we give them billions of dollars to spend on missile development and allow our enrichment to 60% which you don't need for any civilian purpose, that they won't attack our troops in Syria and Iraq for now. They'll leave off. I don't even think they're saying, "We won't attack members of the Trump administration who killed Soleimani as we promised to do or members of think tanks we don't like FDD." I don't think they're even saying that.

Again, we don't have all the details. Congress doesn't have all the details. Congress should have the details because under legislation, I know, Congress is supposed to have the details of any agreement there they plan to make with the Tehran. I've gone on too long but I'll let you comment on that and then I'll let you all go home.

MCMASTER: No, but they're also using hostages, right?

MAY: Hostages, you're right.

MCMASTER: So this is, remember the arms-for-hostages agreement under the Reagan administration which didn't work out. What they did is they did release hostages but then they just took more hostages. And so we do know as you already alluded to, Cliff, where money's going to go. It's going to go into their four-decade plus long proxy war against us, into their missile program, into the nuclear program.

So I think this is a huge mistake. I mean, we want to see these hostages returned obviously, but not in a way that's going to incentivize more hostage taking and more aggression. I think what provokes the Iranians is a perception of weakness just as we were talking about earlier with China and Russia. And I think they have concluded that we're weak in terms of our will. We're not in terms of our ability but in terms of our will.

BOWMAN: I was on working in the Senate at the time of the original Iran Deal. And one of the key criticisms of it that I think were valid and that time has proven prescient was that it focused so narrowly on the nuclear program and ignored Tehran's support for terrorism. And it lowered the bar on ballistic missiles, the means by which a nuclear weapon would be delivered.

It was too narrow and it sounds like they're about to repeat that exact same mistake again which again using a metaphor is we consistently focus on the puppets, the terror proxy puppets of Tehran and ignore the puppet master. And that's again, go back to the prey and predator, use whatever analogy you like, that's perfect for the puppet master. If you're focusing on the puppet, spending all your time on that and those darn puppets



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

are going to keep attacking you until you follow the strings where they lead to the puppet master.

And we all know who ... The Saudis know it... we know it, the Israelis knows who the puppet master is and they are often, too often getting a free ride. This new deal, if the reports are accurate, is essentially blackmail. What is blackmail? Pay me or I'm going to do something you don't want me to do. That's the essence of what Iran is saying, "Pay me or I'm going to do something you don't want me to do. You world don't want me to do." And what are they going to do with that money? General McMaster just said it. They're going to try to kill us and our partners with that money.

And so this last thing I'll say, this is the long-term pattern we've seen repeatedly from the Islamic Republic of Iran. They advanced toward a nuclear weapon. Then they show up in Europe with smiles and friendly handshake speaking beautiful English and say, "Hey, we're ready to talk." We give them all kinds of concessions. They pause for a while, lock in those concessions. Wait a few months or weeks and then start again all the while inching toward the fact that the world's worst state sponsor of terrorism getting closer and closer to the world's most dangerous weapon.

MAY:

And Putin, Xi Jinping, Kim Jong-Un, they all go to school on this.

BOWMAN:

Exactly. And I don't mean to be too negative here but it's worse now, because now, Tehran is creating IOUs in Moscow that's going to make the Iranian military challenge more difficult as Russian weapons start to flow in. And they're immunized against Western sanctions pressure because Chinese money is flowing into Iran.

So, a regime that is more insulated from our sanctions pressure that's more military capable because we see this alignment of, you said in your columns for a long time now, Cliff, that we're seeing an axis between China, Russia, and Iran.

MCMASTER:

And so what we've done is we've given up our economic influence by not maintaining the sanctions over Iran. And then we've given up really any kind of influence associated with the potential use of military force because we've demonstrated we're not going to use military force.

And so, what happened is the Saudis said, "Who's got our backs? Not America." Emiratis, same thing. And then they've begun to accommodate with ... Actually, using China and Russia with Iran. They're trying accommodation with Iran. I think that's going to fail. But what we did is we actually allowed China and Russia back into the region in a way, as we talked about earlier, that hasn't been the case since the 1970s.



FOREIGN POLICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

*Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman
Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May*

MAY: Any final thoughts you want to get in? Anyone you want to say, "Happy birthday," to out there? I know you've got a daughter's wedding coming up. Congratulations to you. I know what a meaningful thing it is. Last thoughts?

MCMASTER: No. Hey, I know we're talking about a lot of negative things, but we can get it back. It being our influence, it being our confidence. I mean, I do think that we are strong, we being the United States. And these authoritarian regimes are actually brittle. China's got a lot to worry about right now. Russia has a lot to worry about.

So I just think that sometimes we have to act like Americans and regain the confidence we have, not to swagger and not to use force or anything capriciously, but to demonstrate our resolve. And then what that does is it bolsters our friends around the world. And I think the momentum will shift back in the favor of the United States.

If we begin to lead again instead of supplicating to what I would call as this emerging axis of authoritarians, the Chinese and the Iranians, the Russians, I mean I think it's important for us to demonstrate our resolve at this moment.

BOWMAN: As General McMaster has said so many times for years, there's no other country that I would want to trade places with. So, it might sound like that we're pessimists here. I don't call seeing the world for what it is and developing prescriptions based on sober eye diagnosis pessimism. I consider that shrewd and smart.

So you can see the world for the way it is and adapt accordingly based on the reality, not what the way you wish it would be. That's smart. But also understanding that there's no country that has our advantages. If we can get our domestic house in order and not view fellow citizens of good faith as our adversaries and reiterate our support for the rule law and constitutional government, then there is no country that can compete with us, particularly when you add in the amazing allies that we have around.

MAY: Good points. Brad Bowman, H.R. McMaster, it's my great honor to be working with both of you. Thank you for being here today and thank you for all the work you do.

MCMASTER: Hey thanks Cliff. Thanks Brad. It's always a pleasure to be with you, guys.

MAY: And thanks to all of you who joined us today. Glad to have you here on Foreign Policy.

Thank you for listening to this episode of Foreign Policy. If you enjoyed the show, please rate us preferably with five stars. Ratings and reviews help give us visibility and the



FOREIGN PODICY

The World According to McMaster

June 16, 2023

Featuring LTG. (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and Bradley Bowman

Hosted by FDD Founder and President Cliff May

opportunity to reach more people who seek to understand the most critical national security foreign policy issues.

Also make sure to subscribe so you never miss an episode. Follow FDD on social media and visit our website at fdd.org. There you can find research by FDD experts. You can subscribe to all FDD's products. You can catch up on any past episodes you may have missed.

Finally, we'd love your feedback, your ideas, your questions, your criticisms. Send us an email at foreignpodicy@fdd.org. Until next time, I'm Cliff May and you've been listening to Foreign Podicy.