



Extraordinary Threats and Opportunities: A Conversation with LTG (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and The Hon. Elaine Luria

Featuring LTG H.R. McMaster and the Honorable Elaine Luria

Moderated by Bradley Bowman

Introductory remarks by Cliff May

MAY: Welcome, and thank you for joining us for today's event hosted by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. For the record, it's Wednesday, September 20th, and we are joined by Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster and the Honorable Elaine Luria to discuss today's greatest threats and opportunities for U.S. national security. I'm Cliff May. I'm FDD's founder and president, and we're pleased to have you here either in person or online.

Thank you especially to our in-person audience, which includes members of FDD's National Security Network. Now what is that? The FDD's National Security Network is a distinguished group of nearly 600 bipartisan midcareer national security practitioners who have completed FDD's fellowships or national security trips. I've gotten to know many in this group through the years, and my interactions with them give me confidence that the future of our country is in good hands.

For those tuning in online, I encourage you to take a look into our midcareer programs and if you're young and if you're in the national security business, you might consider applying for FDD's National Security Network programming. Information's available – [FDD.org](https://www.fdd.org).

A few words of background: The Chinese Communist Party is sprinting to field a military might that could conceivably deter, or even defeat U.S. forces as they decide, as they may, to conquer Taiwan. Putin continues to wage his brutal, his barbarian, his illegal war against Ukraine. Nuclear-armed North Korea is strengthening its missile arsenal, and the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to oppress the Iranian people, export terrorism, expand its empire, and inch toward a nuclear weapons capability. While this list of threats and challenges is formidable, the US does enjoy advantages, including a large and innovative economy, a powerful military and a strong network of allies and partners.

We're pleased to have two individuals joining us today who have deep experience and knowledge, having both served our country in uniform and having held important leadership positions in the executive and legislative branches of Con – the executive branch and Congress, respectively.

First, we have Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, who served as a U.S. Army officer for 34 years, including deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. He served as the 26th assistant to the president for national security affairs, and most importantly, for us at least who are proud to call him a colleague, as the chairman of the Board of Advisors for FDD's Center on Military and Political Power.

We're also very glad to have with us Congressman – Congresswoman Elaine Luria, who served for two decades as an officer in the U.S. Navy. She served on six ships as a nuclear-trained surface warfare officer with deployments to the Middle East and Western Pacific. She represented Virginia's Second Congressional District from 2019 to 2023, bringing her military experience to Capitol Hill as vice chair of the House Armed Services Committee, among other assignments.

And today's conversation will be moderated by Bradley Bowman, who serves as senior director of FDD's Center on Military and Political Power. Brad previously served as a national security advisor to members of the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committee, as well as an active-duty U.S. Army officer, Black Hawk pilot, and assistant professor at West Point. We're grateful to him for his terrific leadership of CMPP, and we look forward to him guiding today's discussion.

So, before we dive in, last word – a few words about FDD, just so everyone knows. For more than 20 years now, to my amazement, FDD has operated as a staunchly-independent, nonpartisan research institute exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. As a point of pride and principle, we've never taken and never will accept any foreign government funding. For more on our work, visit our FDD website at [FDD.org](https://www.fdd.org) and follow us on Twitter @FDD.

And that's it for me. Brad, over to you. Thank you.

BOWMAN: And thank you, Cliff, so much for the introduction. Thank you, everyone, for joining here in the room. It's great to have folks here. And thanks to both of you, General McMaster and Ms. Luria, for being here. I'm really excited about this discussion, given all your deep knowledge and experience on these topics.

If it sounds OK to you both, I'd love to focus on Taiwan, Ukraine, the Middle East, and the Department of Defense, if we can squeeze all that into our allotted time. I always have more questions than we have time, but we'll give it a go. So, with your permission, I'll jump right in.

I thought we could start with Taiwan. U.S.-China tensions are acute right now. They're perhaps most acute in the seas and skies around Taiwan. Beijing seeks to control that island and has refused to take military force off the table. The essence of U.S. policy for decades, codified in the Taiwan Relations Act, is that we think the dispute should be resolved peacefully – and without a resort to force.

Regardless of that, many worry that we could see Beijing launch aggression in the coming years, and the PRC is sprinting to build the military capability to do that, as DOD reports and other facts testify.

So, General McMaster, if I can start with you and I often like to start with this question. It's kind of a who cares question. You know, why do you believe Americans should care about deterring aggression against Taiwan? Why does this matter?

MCMASTER: Well, I mean, there are a number of reasons. First of all is to protect the sovereignty of the Taiwanese people who have a very successful democracy. And I think one of the obsessions that the Chinese Communist Party has is with Taiwan because Taiwan, you know, gives – you know, demonstrates the lie that the Chinese people, you know, are somehow culturally-predisposed toward not wanting a say in how they're governed.

And then, of course, there are many other reasons that are just kind of hard reasons in terms of the global economy: the reliance on Taiwan for the microprocessor and chips supply that is really one of the key drivers to the global economy.

But then to – also to recognize the designs of the Chinese Communist Party. I think when you look at Taiwan, it's useful at times to pivot the map 90 degrees counter-clockwise and look at Taiwan from that perspective and its geostrategic importance associated with China's desire – explicit desire – to create exclusionary areas of primacy across the Indo-Pacific region.

You see that obviously with their designs on Taiwan but also on the South China Sea, where they're trying to lay claim to the ocean and a part of the ocean through which one-third of the world's surface trade flows.

So it's in all of – all of our interests to ensure that the – Taiwan be able to you know, determine its own destiny, and this is – you know, the pressure on Taiwan is part of a grander ambition to not only create this exclusionary area of primacy across the Indo-Pacific but to tear down the existing global order and rules and rewrite the rules in a way that favors their authoritarian, you know, statist, mercantilist model.

BOWMAN: I'm glad you mentioned the global nature. Sometimes it feels like people are – think it's just a Taiwan problem, but it's actually – it's a global competition. And my colleague Craig Singleton, who helps lead our China Program here, just in the last week or two published a very detailed, I think, unprecedented analysis about China's efforts to establish additional overseas military bases.

MCMASTER: Yeah.

BOWMAN: And so to me, that kind of demonstrates the truth of what you just said that this is not a regional ambition, these are – these are global ambitions and it's a – really a clash of two world views and they're trying to bring the military muscle to back it up.

Ms. Luria, I'd love to come to you next. China's military sent 103 war planes toward Taiwan in the 24-hour period on Sunday and Monday, just a few days ago, in what the island's Defense Ministry called a recent new high. The Defense Minister said 40 of those planes crossed the median line.

And so for me, you know, my characterization, this is part of an increasingly aggressive and deeply irresponsible and destabilizing pattern of activity by Beijing. How do you assess the PRC's threat to Taiwan? And what is your assessment of how the Biden administration is doing in terms of arming Taiwan and increasing our defense capability, capacity, posture, readiness in the Indo-Pacific?

LURIA: So we have one hour here?

BOWMAN: Yeah, I know...

(LAUGHTER)

LURIA: ... we want to cover all these topics...

(CROSSTALK)

BOWMAN: ... 60 seconds.

LURIA: ... a lot of questions in there.

But, you know, you're exactly right. I mean, the level of activity surrounding Taiwan by Chinese military forces, both aircraft, ships, and, you know, other activity within the region, not just around Taiwan but also look at the recent activity around the Philippines, I feel like they're testing, they're probing, they're continuously going out there to see what the reaction will be by Taiwan, by the Philippines, by Japan.

I mean, there's dozens of these unresolved maritime claims, and China is progressively testing those. We know in

the past they've gone in and essentially taken these features, which were not islands, were not land, built them up and, you know, created bases for themselves and for their use, and then extended their unrecognized maritime claims beyond that.

I think that, you know, the administration recognizes that this is a top priority in foreign policy. We've seen numerous Cabinet secretaries traveling to China and engaging on many levels. As was mentioned already, this is not just a military issue, it's economic, it's human rights, it's, you know, a whole range of things. And I think the administration recognizes that that engagement is crucial.

And when we talk back to the question before about how – why is this important, I mean, it really is going to determine essentially whose values rule the remainder of the 21st century. Is it the United States, our allies and partners, or is it some new world order that China has designs to create?

I think the administration – and I – you know, I pushed in Congress we need to spend more on defense, essentially working with my colleagues in a very bipartisan way to plus up what the administration had submitted for the defense budget last year and the preceding year, and addition – and collectively in that two years – the first two years of the Biden administration, adding about \$62 billion to the request and really focusing on those capabilities and platforms that are necessary within the Pacific.

I think there's been a big challenge from the administration with this idea of divest to invest. It's great to think about new technologies, new things that we can implement in the future, but when they're not mature and we're talking about a problem today that we might need to address with today's capabilities, today's troops, today's platforms, we can't divest of all of those for a capability that we might have in the future, once it's mature.

So I think there's a big challenge there. And then you pile on top of that kind of what we're seeing right now as we approach the end of the fiscal year, in needing to fund the government moving forward. You know, can Congress even get a CR [continuing resolution] across the line? And we might talk later about CRs have implications but that's better than a shutdown. And there's really a lot looming, and you have to look at that and say, you know, what is the rest of the world saying and how is that making us vulnerable when we see that happen, to not be able to reliably and on time fund the Department of Defense and our government as a whole?

BOWMAN: You know, it's a sad state of affairs when you're wishing for a Continuing Resolution...

(LAUGHTER)

... right? Yeah.

Unfortunately, as you both know well, China's aggressive behavior is not relegated to the seas and skies around Taiwan. We've seen China's Coast Guard and China's maritime militia ships, for example, trying to prevent the Philippines – you and I were discussing this the other day – from resupplying its outpost in the Second Thomas Shoal, which is inside the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone.

So I know this has been an area of interest for you, and obviously with your experience in the Navy, I'm particularly interested to hear from you what is China up to – you know, for people busy with paying the mortgage or raising the kids, what the heck is China up to in the South China Sea? And again, why should we care and are we taking the

necessary steps?

LURIA: Well, as I said a minute ago, I think China is testing and probing.

BOWMAN: Yeah.

LURIA: There are many of these land features – some of them are coral reefs, some may only be visible at low tide – that are claimed by multiple countries, some of them by China and another country, some by multiple parties.

And I think that their activities, either building on those features or preventing other countries who lay claim to them from having access to them – there was an agreement made essentially to maintain the status quo with a group of ASEAN nations, and they're [China] testing that because when that was made, the Philippines had already put this ship aground on this reef and had continued to man it as an outpost, but now they're testing that.

And then things have happened where the Philippines has reaffirmed its, you know, security agreement and mutual defense commitment with the United States...

(CROSSTALK)

BOWMAN: A treaty ally.

LURIA: ... and so they're [China] finding ways to test that with some of our closest allies. You know, the Philippines has reconfirmed that, Japan has been a longstanding ally, South Korea, and then you move into Southeast Asia, you know, there's countries who are kind of caught in the middle – Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia – where do they stand in these alliances and that pressure, both military and/or economic, from China?

So, this is, I think, just one example of many places where they're trying to test those alliances.

BOWMAN: Yeah, that's great. General McMaster, this month, as I'm sure you know, marks the two year anniversary of the establishment of the Trilateral Security Agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States known as AUKUS, the coolest acronym in D.C. I love that. Kudos to whoever thought of that. Pillar 1 focuses on the delivery of a – nuclear-powered, conventionally-armed attack submarines to Australia, and Pillar 2 focuses on developing and fielding advanced capabilities to the three countries.

What is your assessment of AUKUS? Is it – was this a good idea? What do you think of the rollout? And do you have any concerns about its implementation so far?

MCMASTER: Well, I first just want to say [to Luria] thanks for your leadership in the Navy and on the Hill. And you're so right about it. I think the investments we need in defense now – you know, I just want to mention George Marshall's observation that, you know, when you have the time, you don't have the money, and then when you get the money, you don't have the time. And I think that's the situation we're – you know, we're in right now.

In terms of AUKUS, I think this is a really great initiative, as well as the efforts to invigorate, kind of a failing effort, sadly, in connection with India, the Quad format in a defense – in relations to defense, but also the reinvigoration, as well, of the U.S.-Japan and South Korean relationship, across all three, instead of just the hub and spoke between Washington and Tokyo, Washington and Seoul.

And I think what you're seeing, as we watch, kind of, the limitations of the United Nations, and especially, you know, the other ineffectiveness of the Security Council, what you're going to need are these sort of bespoke partnerships and alliances that are purpose-built to solve real problems. And in this case, AUKUS is designed to contribute to security across Indo-Pacific and deterring what would be a disastrous war with China, and to do so by denial, by convincing the PLA and the Chinese Communist Party they couldn't accomplish their objectives through the use of force, in the South China Sea, vis-a-vis Taiwan, and so forth.

So, I think that the Biden administration has done a very good job at invigorating some of these, kind of, bespoke partnerships. But now, obviously, there's a lot more work to do to implement and to – and to develop the hard capabilities.

I mean, hey, if we learned anything from Ukraine, hard power matters, right? And this idea of integrated deterrence, which is like, I think, pixie dust, that you just sprinkle on problems and hope that they go away, that's not sufficient.

So, I think it – I think what we have to really do is make the investments across AUKUS, to have those real defense capabilities. If you look at the UK, I mean, they're not doing really anything to invigorate their defense. Japan has stepped up considerably, in terms of doubling its defense budget.

So I – so I think, you know, I think our allies and partners, and us, we ourselves, have to recognize that this situation, the threat, requires greater investments.

BOWMAN: Interested in your thoughts on AUKUS, particularly Pillar I, the attack submarine angle, as I'm sure you probably have memorized. If my number's right, our requirement for attack submarines is 66. I think we're seeing around 49 or so and going south. So we don't have the attack submarines we need. We're struggling to build two per year, as we're trying to bring on the Columbia class.

So, you know, do you think we're going to be able to pull off Pillar I? Do we have the industrial capacity, both production and maintenance, to make this happen?

LURIA: So, I think that's a big challenge.

BOWMAN: Yeah.

LURIA: And, kind of, stepping back a little bit, you know, I'm up here on the stage with a couple Army guys...

(LAUGHTER)

... but as the Navy person...

MCMMASTER: I mean, we couldn't even get there without the Navy.

(LAUGHTER)

We love the Navy.

(LAUGHTER)

How could you not like the Navy, right?

LURIA: Good. But, you know...

(LAUGHTER)

... it's – obviously, it's a maritime theater. So, I mean, investments in maritime platforms and capabilities and aviation platforms, capabilities, those that can cover, you know, the range in geography in the Pacific, are really important.

And the place where I think we maintain our strategic advantage against China, at this point, is our nuclear submarine fleet, understanding that we need to grow that fleet and that capability. It's probably a whole another discussion, you know, some limitations about the defense industrial base...

BOWMAN: Yeah.

LURIA: ... and our ability to build submarines. A lot of it can be, you know, taken back to, you know, dependable, reliable demand, i.e. what Congress says we're going to buy over what time period, the industrial base, sort of, having that reliability to invest and increasing their capacity.

And as you said, we're struggling to get to two Virginia class submarines a year; we'd like to get to three. And then bringing on board a plan to increase the output of that industrial base in partnership with the British and Australians is challenging.

I think we haven't necessarily yet seen what the challenges within Australia might be. If you think about a country that has no civilian nuclear power industry other than perhaps, you know, research reactor at a university, going from that to the extreme of having nuclear-powered submarines, you know, even nonproliferation advocates within the United States balk at the way we use highly enriched uranium to – for our submarines.

So there are perhaps potential hurdles within Australia that we'll have to watch and see how that happens. But, you know, our industrial base is going to need big investments to move forward and ramp up production. And, you know, I like to reflect back on, you know, John Lehman as the secretary of the Navy, you know, under the Reagan administration, the effort to build a 600-ship Navy, one of the things that former Secretary Lehman says frequently is that, you know, "Ninety percent of the benefit out of that plan came in the first two or three years."

It was showing the commitment to the Soviet Union that we were going to make this investment; we were going to build these ships; we were going to be the predominant maritime power, maintaining world order as it stood at the time.

So, I think one of the biggest risks we have is in not pulling this off. If we can't make our three combined industrial bases work to build these submarines and give that capability to Australia, that also sends a message.

BOWMAN: Exactly.

LURIA: So it's pretty high-risk.

BOWMAN: Unfortunately, our adversaries don't give us the luxury of dealing with one problem at a time. It would be nice of them if they'd do that, but, unfortunately, as we're dealing with these challenges in the Indo-Pacific, we're also witnessing the largest invasion in Europe since World War II. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy obviously is in the United States this week. He spoke at the UN General Assembly yesterday. He's traveling to DC. He's going to be meeting with folks at the White House and with congressional leaders.

It comes at a significant moment, I think, I'd say, as we see debates within among the Republican presidential candidates about whether it's in our interests to support Ukraine. And we see Congress considering whether to appropriate additional funding for security assistance and other support for Kyiv.

So I'm eager, really eager, to ask both of you, again, not to be a one-trick pony here, but why should Americans care about the outcome in Ukraine? Why does this matter to us?

General McMaster, if – start with you?

MCMASTER: Well, I think, first of all, we have to recognize our investments have been significant in terms of helping – you know, helping the Ukrainians with – you know, with lethal capabilities and other support capabilities, but it's only been about, I think, 2 to 3 percent equivalent of the U.S. defense budget.

And what the Ukrainians have done is they have blunted, you know, just a brazen Russian aggression that – that really began, you could say, in 2003 with poisoning a Ukrainian presidential candidate, but then continuing through various subversive activities across Europe, denial service attacks on Estonia in 2007 and inciting riots there and so forth; the invasion of Georgia in 2008; various other acts of aggression, including the invasion of Ukraine initially, years ago, so – in 2014.

So, Russia's not going to stop unless Russia is stopped. The Ukrainians are the ones who are stopping Russia from not only continuing their – the invasion of Ukraine and subsuming that country but also in a broader effort to really make the Black Sea a Russian lake, and then to use that coercive position to advance their geostrategic objectives in a way that disadvantages the United States, that breaks apart NATO.

They're very active in political subversion now across Europe. Obviously, they've been in Transnistria for – you know, for years, and subverting the Moldovan government. Belarus has been de facto annexed by Russia. And nobody's really been talking about that. There's tremendous pressure on Bulgaria, who has an election coming up next year. So Russia's shown no sign of diminishing their efforts to create problems elsewhere, continuing the serial episodes of mass homicide, for example, in Syria, as well as the destabilization of West Africa, with these coups and so forth.

So, Ukraine is on the front line of a much broader conflict. And we were talking initially about – about the threat to Taiwan. And I think that the outcome of Ukraine is directly related to what the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army concludes about whether or not they could succeed in Taiwan.

And so I think it's immensely important to restore peace through assisting the Ukrainians in winning. And, of course,

then the question is, what is winning?

Winning is, you know, that Ukraine gets back their sovereignty, right? They're a country that is whole, that is independent, that is secure and is economically-viable and defensible in the long term. And I think clarity on that end state and then evaluating the degree to which our assistance is adequate or inadequate.

I mean, one of the things that's frustrating to me is that we have not evaluated the assistance we're providing based on adequacy to accomplish that objective, and the fact that objective has been kept, I think, deliberately ambiguous by the administration – and that's not helpful, to say "as long as it takes". I think we have to ask the question, OK, what is "it", right? And then – and then how do we help the Ukrainians get to "it"?

BOWMAN: Yeah. That's – thank you for that. You mentioned the amount of spending. It's – you know, is roughly \$44 billion in security assistance, and according to our research here at our Center on Military and Political Power, that is 3.5 percent of what we've spent on the Pentagon during this same time period. So, a lot of people have thrown out the five percent number, but they're comparing 12 months with 19 months. So, if you're going to compare apples to apples, it's 3.5 percent, give or take.

What are we getting for that? Well, I would argue – and eager for you to push back or agree or disagree if you want to, Ms. Luria, is that we're dealing body blows to the second-leading conventional military threat the United States confronts without putting a single uniformed member of our military in harm's way while sending the message that we're not neutral to unprovoked aggression that tries to redraw borders with military force. To me, that feels like a bargain, and we have a partner that's willing to fight to defend their homes, and – and it feels like we would pull that back at our own peril. Do you agree, disagree? Is that overstated? A little too – too much hyperbole there, or what do you think?

LURIA: No, I don't think there's hyperbole there, and you said, you know, a partner who's willing to fight. I mean, this is a country and a people who have shown an incredible amount of bravery, sacrifice, and are under the direct assault from an unprovoked invasion.

BOWMAN: Yeah.

LURIA: I think that we need to give them every tool that we have in our toolbox to help them get to an end state that they can define as a sovereign nation. But we should be there with them as partners. I think this has brought NATO closer together. It has brought several NATO nations to make more significant commitments. It has actually brought more partners and allies within the defense industrial base to supporting worldwide, especially with the NATO. I was just looking at, you know, the numbers of howitzers, for example, that are now being produced in Korea that are going to NATO countries.

And you know, when we talk about the need for the defense industrial base not just within our country or with our NATO allies, but you know, more far-expanded broadly with those who share our values, I think it's bringing more people to the table to take more action, and we have to stay on the side of Ukraine.

And you know, they had the recent summit, the NATO Summit, which, you know, we confirmed support to Ukraine; maybe wasn't as explicit it could be about future NATO member – or NATO membership for Ukraine, but certainly lays out the path that, you know, once this situation is stabilized, once the conflict is – is terminated, that NATO

wants to welcome Ukraine, – that we are with them.

And if I can just go off a...

BOWMAN: Please, yeah, yeah.

LURIA: ... a little bit on a discussion, you know, how this has become a partisan issue...

BOWMAN: Yeah, OK.

LURIA: ... you know, both kind of with the speaker, you know, needing to hold onto, you know, some – some support within the far-right part of the caucus and a presidential election on the horizon, is that, you know, being in the room behind closed doors in a bipartisan fashion with the Armed Services Committee before the invasion happened, it was absolutely unanimous that everyone in that room was actually balking at the administration. "Why are you still making plans? Why are you still trying to decide what we could send or we might want to give?" It was like, we need to do more. We need to do more on a faster pace, and why are you holding back so many things? And I think progressively, we've obviously given more capabilities with more range, and now we're looking at F-16s.

But the truth is, is that, like, we need to give them the tools to get to an end state that we can accept, that they can accept, and I just feel like we need to stop – stop holding back. And you know, so the internal domestic politics of making this an issue, it's kind of always one of those things that might come up in this type of political cycle. You know, "we have so many problems here at home."

BOWMAN: Right.

LURIA: "Why are we sending money over there?"

BOWMAN: Right.

LURIA: Well, we're protecting our values and our world economy and kind of what we value as a country and a nation by supporting those who are on the front lines fighting to preserve the world order. So it's a little hard to walk that all the way back, sometimes, to a kitchen-table issue.

BOWMAN: Yeah.

LURIA: But it – it truly is an investment that we need to keep making.

BOWMAN: Thank you for that. I mean, we saw two world wars start in Europe in a 30-year period that ultimately took the lives of more than 500,000 Americans. So you know, what matters in Europe matters here at home, I would say.

General McMaster, based on your deep combat experience in ground warfare, I would be remiss if I didn't elicit your thoughts on how you think the battle what the battlefield's looking like and how the Ukrainian counteroffensive is going.

MCMASTER: Yeah. Well, there's been a lot of discussion, obviously, with people predicting, you know, the speed of the offensive and so forth. But I think it's just important to recognize that what the Ukrainians are trying to do is the hardest task to accomplish in land combat, which is to penetrate a prepared defense in depth, especially in difficult terrain, difficult terrain that involves the crossing of multiple natural obstacles, as well as man-made obstacles and mine fields and trenches, but also in terrain that doesn't have a whole – a lot of degree of trafficability so that you're predictable in terms of use – road use. And then it is also relatively open, so your forces have only a limited ability to conceal an offensive operation, for example. And then, of course, after you reveal your offensive operation it's easy to move reinforcements to where they're trying to penetrate, and then to attack those forces with the massive artillery that the Russians have, as well as what's, I think, been underappreciated, which is some of their aviation capabilities, but especially their electronic warfare capabilities.

So it – it's a very complex mission to penetrate that defense and drive to the Sea of Azov and isolate the Crimea Peninsula and the Russian defenses in the south. But I still think it is feasible for a number of reasons. It's unclear, you know, obviously, how many casualties that the Ukrainians have suffered. It's significant, though. But I think what they're trying to do now is to reconstitute forces, trained forces at the collective level where you can operate together with infantry and mobile protected firepower and engineers and fires and air defense. And it's extremely – it's like an orchestra of capabilities that you have to bring together.

It's hard to conduct that level of collective training, you know, to prepare for this kind of an offensive. I know they're racing to do that as they integrate these bits of equipment that are flowing in, you know, in small packages. I mean, like, 30 tanks? I mean, how about 300 tanks? I mean, are you kidding me?

MCMASTER: But it's...

BOWMAN: How many did you command in – in Iraq?

(LAUGHTER)

MCMASTER: I just – I just think it's...

BOWMAN: Yeah.

MCMASTER: It's silly, the way that it's – these capabilities are being dribbled in.

BOWMAN: Yeah.

MCMASTER: And there's been some training, but not at this kind of collective orchestra level of training that you really need to conduct.

So the Ukrainians are racing to develop that capability. I think the support we can give them now are two areas: everything that they need to prevent continued attacks on the civilian population and on civilian infrastructure and positions in depth. And of course, that's you know, tiered missile defense and air defense, but it's really the long-range precision fires, the longer-range ATACMS systems. That's a no-brainer from my perspective, and what that does is it also lends itself to counter battery fire so you can protect attacking forces from artillery.

And then the second group of capability is just that: what it takes to penetrate those defenses. I think we – the amount of adequate engineering capabilities, right? Common engineers. I mean, they're some of my favorite people next to Army mechanics, you know, because they just get everything done and they usually do it with, like, pretty old equipment and everything, but I mean – but you – that – it's valuable equipment – line chargers to breach minefields, you know, plows and plow tanks integrated with them.

It's hard stuff, it's dangerous, it's difficult, but I think that, you know, there are certain capabilities that we need to really focus on with the Ukrainians, obviously based on their demand, to help them integrate into the force to get that kind of a penetration.

And then of course once they get it, once they are able to gain control of more territory, then they place Russia's logistics facilities and their military facilities on the Crimean Peninsula at risk and could maybe even neuter the Crimean Peninsula as a way for the Russians to continue to project power in – into Ukraine and to do what they're trying to do now, is to choke Ukraine out.

I mean, you know, Putin isn't going to be satisfied with not having Ukraine, right? So what he's going to do is make sure that nobody can have Ukraine, even the Ukrainians. And so that's why, you know, the good, old fashioned convincing your enemy that your enemy's been defeated is what's, I think, important to end the war.

BOWMAN: That's great. Secretary of Defense Austin and General Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were in Ramstein, Germany yesterday to host the latest meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, the 15th such meeting, and he emphasized, as you just did, the importance of our European allies helping with air defense, right?

And people are talking about what is or isn't going to happen this winter, in terms of a slackening of operations. We'll see, but we – it seems safe to assume that we're going to continue to see Russia targeting civilian infrastructure and civilians with missiles and drones and that sort of thing.

How would you – what grade would you give the Biden administration's support for Ukraine since February 24th? We – like, what have they done well and where would you be critical?

LURIA: So a letter grade? I mean, I would say that, you know, I think we're at an A-

BOWMAN: OK.

LURIA: And I say that because of the speed. Like, the size of the thing – packages we send, like, was discussed sort of the trickling in without sort of a reliable commitment with a quicker lead time to get it there, to integrate it into the operations and training. It felt in Congress like we were just pounding on the table, "why can't we send more? Why can't we send this – other capabilities?" You know, "why limit sort of the range of their counter-attack capability and different things?"

But, you know, the Ukrainians, like, they've soldiered on, they've been very innovative in a difficult time, you know, using some of the capabilities that they've been provided and that they've developed internally, to have really major gains and accomplishments.

And maybe we'll have a chance to talk on the naval side. I mean...

BOWMAN: Yeah.

LURIA: Yeah, you said a minute ago, like, you know, "I think that Putin wants to see the Black Sea as sort of like a Russian lake," but the truth is the tides have really turned on that.

The use of unmanned surface vessels, drones to attack key targets, attacking a Kilo submarine, attacking some troop landing ships, other things that have taken away their capabilities have really given Ukraine, without a Navy of their own – I mean, they scuttled their main frigate at the beginning of this conflict – but have given them the opportunity to really have access to the Black Sea again.

We are seeing more commercial vessels, you know, coming in. They're sort of inviting them with open arms, saying "we will protect you, we'll guide you through to our ports." And we understand, on a broader scale, the importance that has, you know, for the grain market in, you know, providing, you know, food and resources to the broader world.

So, you know, I think that as well, you know, an A- on the speed of delivery and probably, you know, an – a solid A on strengthening the NATO alliance and really making sure that that is emphasized.

And, you know, kind of going back to the previous administration, you know, although not in line with many policies, I would say that, you know, it was a correct statement by the former President that, you know, our NATO partners need to do more to help pay for and support their own mutual defense and our mutual defense.

And, you know, these series of events have led to that and have proven that to be true, and we've seen it...

BOWMAN: Why do we see so – and you referenced this a little bit – why have we seen so often kind of this – what I and others have described as kind of this "no, maybe, yes" dynamic from the Biden administration, where Ukraine asks for something, the initial response is 'no' or 'maybe' or that's long-term, like we can't work on the short, medium, and long-term all at the same time, and then the 'yes' finally comes months later? Meanwhile, the Ukrainians are fighting and dying.

Why aren't ATACMS in Ukraine right now? I mean, what – is it a fear of provoking Putin? I mean, what is the core concern?

LURIA: ... I mean, at the very beginning, I mean, I think that was certainly the key driver – and you [McMaster] might want to weigh in too – I mean, the key driver is here we have a nuclear-armed adversary. We give Ukraine different capabilities. If we had immediately given them what – the long-range strike capability to strike into Russian territory, like, what would the reaction have been? I mean, very...

(CROSSTALK)

BOWMAN: ... whenever we've asked them...

LURIA: ... not trying to provoke, you know, some sort of nuclear response from Russia. I mean, time has gone on. It's still a possible reaction. As, you know, Putin gets more desperate and, you know, kind of continues to lose more

ground and more forces, that could still happen, but I think that sort of stomaching the provision of capabilities to Ukrainians to give them longer-range and more firepower has – it's progressed over time.

BOWMAN: Yeah.

LURIA: But again, it seems like we could do more in a more concerted, rapid fashion to, like, let them make the push that they need to make to finish it in a way that, as Ukraine – you know, they're happy with – that – they can't be happy with the result but, you know, satisfied with an outcome to gain – regain their territory, their sovereignty, and drive Russians out of their country.

BOWMAN: General McMaster, the Iranians have provided hundreds of these drones to Russia – Shahed 136 and others that Russians have used to pummel and kill Ukrainians. I'm interested in your thoughts on the evolving relationship between Russia and Iran.

MCMASTER: Yeah, this is really an important question I think because, you know, think, well, what does the Middle East have to do with this? Well, it has everything to do with – I think the competition with Russia and with China as well.

And whereas, you know, I did say hey, I think the Biden administration deserves credit for AUKUS and new arrangement for invigorating the trilateral relationship now, with Seoul, Tokyo and Washington–. But I think if we are going to grade anybody, give them an F for the Middle East, and for the failure to recognize the interconnected nature of these competitions – with China, Russia, and hostile regimes with North Korea and especially Iran, which is playing a very important role to bringing Russia and China into the Middle East in a way that disadvantages our interests.

So it's the – it's the sale of drones, it's the selling of more Iranian oil and energy to China, in a way that has alleviated a lot of the economic pressure on Iran. But I think what has happened to empower Iran and Russia and China across the region is just an unwise approach of supplicating to the Iranians, I don't know how else to put it. I don't understand this unnatural desire to think that suddenly the theocratic dictatorship there is going to change if we can bring them back into this – into the international community. We suffered the humiliation of not even being able to talk to the Iranians as we are trying to revive a dead nuclear deal. And now we've seen, you know, a \$6 billion payoff for the release of hostages, all of which portrays weakness and also a deep ambivalence at best to our other, you know, partners in the region who now are incentivized to hedge, you know, with the Russians. To hedge – with the Chinese. So I think that the administration has done quite a bit to diminish its influence across the Middle East because of an unwise – mainly because of an unwise approach to Iran.

BOWMAN: It was good to see the Americans arrive back home that were held unjustly in Iran but, you know, \$6 billion in money was unfrozen, and one wonders, you know, given the fungible nature of money, how that's going to be used.

What do you make of this deal by which the administration agreed to unfreeze \$6 billion dollars in Iranian oil revenue and to dismiss federal charges against five Iranians in return for the release? Are we going to get more hostage-taking from Iran? And how's that money going to be spent?

LURIA: Well, I mean, I certainly agree that the nature of negotiations, whether it was a futile attempt to reenter the

JCPOA, and just stating my position is I was never in favor of the JCPOA from the beginning. I obviously wasn't in Congress at that time but wouldn't have supported that. And I think, you know, this recent deal, things related to the JCPOA and anything that allowed the Iranians to freely have the ability to fund their proxy groups, you know, which have destabilized the region and continue to, is not something that should be within our policy.

And you can kind of always take it back to the Navy. I mean, we haven't had a 1.0 carrier presence in the Gulf for quite a while. And having seen multiple times through the Strait of Hormuz, seeing exactly what the Iranians do, how they, you know, harass shipping – we've seen it with commercial shipping, we've seen it in encounters with our – our military vessels going through – that if we're not there, they're going to take advantage of that.

And we've obviously had, you know, additional commitments in the EUCOM AOR, relative to supporting NATO and Ukraine. And, you know, back to the defense industrial base question, I mean, we just aren't kind of keeping up with the – being able to generate the forces on the deployment, you know, timeline and then the numbers that we need.

All of that to go to say – is when you have a carrier in the Gulf, it makes a difference, and when you don't, you see more of this activity from the Iranians, which, just coupled with these types of negotiations, extra cash to go in the pockets of all of their – their proxies around the region makes it a less safe place.

And it's all tied together. I mean, every single element of this is tied together. And again, it – kind of pivot back to who shares our values and who doesn't. Iran is definitely on the side of who doesn't.

BOWMAN: We see Iranian drones killing Ukrainians in Ukraine and we see those drones targeting our troops in Syria, we see them attacking our Arab partners and our Israeli allies, and it really does, as you said, General McMaster, kind of tie together these threats and suggests that maybe Iran would like to keep us divided and distracted, and maybe it's our interest to build a more cohesive and unified coalition to make them think twice about this 40-plus year track record of aggression against us.

MCMMASTER: Absolutely. And I – you know, I just think also that we gave up economic coercion or deterrence against Iran because of failure to enforce the sanctions as the Biden administration came in, the existing sanctions on the Iranian regime. And then we also gave up military deterrence because we didn't respond to many of the attacks that you mentioned, or we have responded in a way that was really a – just portrayed weakness to the Iranians.

I think that the time, you know, has passed for us to recognize what the return address is associated with attacks that are conducted by Iranian proxy forces. The return address is Tehran, you know? And so I think at some stage, an American president is going to have to decide what to do, and I think at that stage, you know, it will probably be time to destroy some of their military capabilities but then also maybe to go after some of their nuclear missile capabilities, you know, which they have continued.

I mean, what – I think it's important to mention that when we're trying to revive the Iran Nuclear Deal, the Iranians said "OK, well, we're going to have to restart the program," you know, that they said never existed, right? And...

(CROSSTALK)

MCMMASTER: ... I mean, it's – you know, it's just ridiculous to trust this regime, you know? And again, we're going to

trust them with – to use this six million – \$6 billion – for humanitarian purposes? I mean, that's self-delusion.

BOWMAN: We saw and short on time but I – you know far better than me, General McMaster, we saw them during our time in Iraq build the explosively formed penetrators, specifically their – for the purpose of penetrating American armor and killing American service members.

The Quds Force smuggled it across the border, trained people to use it, and hundreds of Americans died as a result. So this isn't some DC theoretical discussion, this is life and death for our forces and our partners, as you know far better than me.

So, you mentioned a naval power, and that's exactly where I love having that – a naval expert here. So it's – it's wonderful. We can do Army, Navy, and everything in between. Following a spike in Iranian seizure and harassment of commercial shipping vessels earlier this year, White House spokesman Admiral Kirby announced in May that we were going to be sending a lot of additional forces, the Bataan Amphibious Readiness Group [and] the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

And we've been doing some research here at FDD, at our Center on Military and Political Power, and from January of '21 to June or July of this year, we've documented at least 26 incidents of Iranian harassment, attack, or seizures.

And what's interesting – and it's kind of obvious when you say it, but I think there's policy implications to it – when the U.S. Navy shows up, the Iranians think twice and – and they fail to seize – they in most instances. And so to me, that just underscores the value of power, of hard power, and the value of forward presence, particularly a naval presence.

I – this is what we call a softball comment but I'm going to allow you to take – wherever you want to go with that.

LURIA: Yeah, well, I mean, I – I did touch on that a minute ago. And it is true that, you know, over the course of the 20 years I spent in the Navy, most of my deployments included some portion of the time, you know, in the Middle East, in the Gulf, in the north Arabian Sea.

And the Iranians have this habit of harassing our forces, harassing commercial shipping, as it comes through – and it's been cyclical over time but we have put, you know, Marine LEDETS [Law Enforcement Detachments] Marine detachments, security forces on, you know, commercial vessels, especially U.S. flag vessels going through. We've worked closely with our partners and allies who have, you know, continuously had rotational forces in the Gulf to escort ships at various times through the Strait of Hormuz. And, you know, we have to be there, we have to have a presence.

And I can just go back to the – you know, some comments I recall in the Armed Services Committee. You know, I think that, you know, quantity has a quality of its own. We have to have enough ships, enough aircraft, enough presence around the world.

And I would say that this administration's position, really reflected perhaps by, you know, the former Chairman of the Armed Services Committee and now the Ranking Member Adam Smith – you know, he would say that was ludicrous, but the truth is you can't be where you need to be with the consistency you need to be there, showing the American flag and working with our partners and allies to maintain freedom of the seas, free navigation, free

commerce, all these things that are important to our world order, you can't do that if you don't have enough ships and you don't have enough sailors, enough soldiers.

And again, back to – you know, we need to continue to look at the level of investment and where we need to get, relative to being able to provide, you know, those forces that we need to around the world.

BOWMAN: That's a great point and I mentioned these 26 incidents. There were many instances that we discovered where there was a drone – an American drone seeing the Iranian fast boats swarming, but because there was no U.S. naval vessel around, they got away with it.

But when – and then there are other instances where the U.S. Navy was there and the Iranians who had already boarded the ship then fled. So, I mean, you know, this is not rocket science. You know, this stuff kind of matters.

Anyway, shifting to the Department – oh, did you – wanted to add anything to that?

MCMASTER: No, I just wanted to say that these new forms of warfare, use of drones, the swarm drone capabilities, for example, typically don't replace the old forms of warfare. They're additive.

BOWMAN: Right.

MCMASTER: And I think this goes back to your point that you made earlier, Elaine, which is really, really important. Some people who want to kind of just kind of play the shell game in defense investments say, "Oh, we can divest of the old because we have this new stuff coming down the road." And I think what we're seeing is a lack of capacity now in forward-positioned capable forces capable of operating at sufficient scale and for ample duration to defeat aggression. That's where the deterrence comes from, not from sprinkling forces around as tripwires or the – you know, the 300 troops we sent to Romania, you know, during the invasion of Ukraine. I mean, 300, I mean...

So I just think quantity does have quality on its own, and I just wanted to put an exclamation point on that.

BOWMAN: That's actually the perfect segue, because I wanted to go next to defense industrial base issues. You know, a lot of Americans who may have the sense that, you know, we have the best industrial base in the world, and we do. But at this moment when we're simultaneously trying to arm Ukraine and make Taiwan a porcupine to deter aggression from the PRC and conduct what I and others have called the most significant military modernization effort in 40 years, in four decades, we've turned to our industrial base – and it's not quite what many of us thought it would be. The arsenal of democracy is not quite there. When you look at munitions, for example, you know, you saw this, I'm sure, when you were on the Armed Services Committee. I certainly saw this when I was staffing Senator Ayotte in the Senate Armed Service Committee. We'd often buy munitions at the lowest-possible rate just to keep the industrial line going, because that was always often the bill-payer for other things, kind of in a just-in-time model.

And kind of that's what we're seeing going on in the world. I think – I'm feeling like a just-in-time model is not that wise when it comes to munitions when you consider, as Mark Montgomery and I have, you know, the Long Range Anti-Ship Missile. You know, we probably need about a thousand, 1,200 of those. We've got about two- to 300. We're going to run out in the first week or two. I would call that suboptimal.

So what's your assessment of the U.S. defense industrial base?

LURIA: So I think that one could pretty easily go back to the discussion you had about, like, you know, what does the Armed Services Committee authorizing?

BOWMAN: Yes.

LURIA: What are we funding every year? And you know, the defense industrial base is made up of private companies which, you know, exist in order to produce something. And I truly believe that these providers of munitions and capabilities and platforms for our troops and our, you know, our military, they believe in the product and they believe in, like, the why they're making it – to protect democracy. But in the end, they are companies...

BOWMAN: Right.

LURIA: ... that have to, you know, keep the lights on, make a – profits for their shareholders, and they're not going to make unreasonable investments in creating an – a vast capacity and having a huge number of employees who are producing nothing or producing something that doesn't have a buyer.

So we've kind of done it to ourself over the course of time of saying we're going to keep the minimum amount. We're going to order the minimum amount per year to keep the production line going. But then having this false perception that they'll just ramp up whenever we tell them to, and...

BOWMAN: Yeah. We'll have plenty of time to do it. Yeah.

LURIA: ... be able to find plenty of people who have the skills to make these things, plenty of raw materials that go into making these components. And the truth is, is that supply chain is very complex. Those skills are very fungible and tangible, and it has not proven as easy to ramp up as, you know, we kind of – we all have this vision of, you know, how the – we as a country ramped up for World War II and started building hundreds and thousands of ships and platforms and munitions in a very rapid fashion.

And you know, the truth is there has to be a commitment – if there's going to be a ramp-up – there has to be an – investments to do that, and there also has to be a commitment that there's going to be a longer-term sustained demand for these.

And so it – it kind of becomes this balance of, we can only ask industry to do something that's not going to essentially bankrupt and kill the industry that we need in order to do it, right? It can't be a Catch-22, where we ask them to do something that's going to essentially bankrupt them and cause them to not be around to do it the next time we need it.

So I think we need more consistency. We need more consistency and longer-term commitments in procurement in order to get industry on a glide scope where they're comfortable making those investments, hiring those people and reinvigorating that supply chain to produce at the capacity that we understand we need.

And we also need to rely more fully on allies and partners. I mean, we – you know, it's – and I had some arguments with some other members, now former members when Visclosky was the chair of Defense Appropriations, for example, a lot of the Made In America requirements for the frigate program. You know, I tried to talk about how they

were counterproductive. They were going to cost more. They were going to make the timeline longer, which we've often struggled with meeting deadlines for major programs like that.

Some of our allies and partners have incredible capacity and ability to scale, and like I mentioned earlier, we're seeing the Koreans do that now with the howitzers, for example. Yet, we create policies that sort of prevent us from working globally with our aligned countries and participating together with the defense industrial base. You know, we build the Arleigh Burke class destroyer in Maine, in Pascagoula. But who else builds the exact same hull based off our design, but in other countries? The Koreans, the Japanese. They essentially – you know, we have partners with whom we can collaborate in order to increase our capacity, yet we sort of stovepipe it in this Made In America mindset, which I think to get where we need to get in the current world environment, we need to broaden that aperture and look at how we can both work with partners and maintain, you know, American jobs and industry. I'm not saying that we off-shore it.

BOWMAN: Yeah, yeah, sure.

LURIA: I'm just saying we just collaborate where each entity focuses on providing what they're strongest and most capable in providing for the collective benefit.

BOWMAN: It's a great point, and the increased use of multiyear procurement might incentivize industry to make those investments so they have the additional capacity and the – personnel power there to produce more things.

Any quick thoughts, General McMaster, on defense industrial base issues that you'd like to have?

MCMASTER: No, there's just – there's two points that you're it's, of course, the hardware and the equipment, the manufacturing equipment which is taking a long time to, you know, to deliver to get them the lines open. But it's also the workforce, you know, has been trained and maintained over time, as well as the upstream components of munitions, for example, or anything. I mean, batteries. You know, I mean, just think about how reliant we've become on batteries and magnets and you know, other really critical components for everything that we make – microprocessors, you know, chips and so forth, computer chips.

So I just do think that, you know, we don't want a heavy-handed industrial policy that makes the government the resource allocator, but we do need to incentivize some significant changes in not only the industrial base, but also the supply chain that's critical to developing the weapons and the capabilities we need.

And then also, just to have a vibrant economy. If you look at single points of failure in supply chains that are associated with overconcentration in China in particular, you know, it is an aberration that so much of the world's manufacturing has been concentrated on the southeastern coast of China. That now is a huge vulnerability, and we have to take corrective action now, and one with allies, as Elaine has said.

BOWMAN: Totally, yeah. To scrunch a lot of things in the last five minutes here, a comment from me, then a question for each of you. The comment, you know, here we are just a few days from the end of the fiscal year, and once again, we don't have a National Defense Authorization Act passed. We don't have a defense appropriation, and we're even eyeing a government shutdown. So, I'd say at a time when we're facing extraordinary threats, it feels like we have one too many self-inflicted wounds here, I would say, and it's going to take people of good faith from both parties to get us to a better place, hopefully. So there's the comment, and now...

MCMASTER: And how about not confirming senior officers?

BOWMAN: There we go. That's where exactly I was going. So to you, if I may, Ms. Luria, Senator Tuberville has a blanket hold. According to the latest information I have, that's 319 nominations that are currently being held as a result of those holds. 72 of them are unable to assume positions. There's deep concern coming from all of the services about the – not only the personnel impacts of this but the readiness impacts of this.

Any quick thoughts on Senator Tuberville's holds and the impact it's having on the military?

LURIA: First, the most ironic part of this is who's forcing a vote on confirming the Marine Corps Commandant is Tuberville himself, where he has the hold in place. But I think it has significant impact. I recall sometimes when I was in Congress that I sought to make sure we didn't use the defense bill as a way to litigate some of these social issues, which I think are kind of the things that have led up to Tuberville's position that he is not budging on, which is now causing this hold.

So, you know, the easiest thing to do were – for him to be – say, like, "enough is enough, I've proved my point. We're going to change that in next year's bill," and have some compromise and people coming together to make sure that both, you know, women's reproductive health can be taken care of for all of our military, but second, addressing those concerns, you know, for people who view the current policy as potentially using taxpayer dollars to do something that they don't agree with.

I mean, it – this is truly like litigating the Hyde Amendment through the NDAA. And, you know, I think that's something that should have been avoided, which kind of ultimately got us here. I don't agree with Tuberville's tactics and especially, you know, seeing the pile-up of these confirmations and the impact it's had, but again, I mean, this is really about, like, I think bad politics rather – and – you know, using that as a tool on the backs of our service members rather than, you know, what I would like to see more of in government, is, you know, people actually coming to a compromise, hearing everyone's concerns on this, and actually getting somewhere, where, like, we can sort of address the concern, remove the hold, confirm people, and then be able to focus more with some firm people on these issues that we've talked about today.

BOWMAN: For those taking notes at home outside the Beltway, I think your comment about 'backs of the military' is the key thing. As someone who, you know, advised U.S. senators a few times to implement a hold, those holds were always on civilian nominees.

And to me, the key principle here is we are going after members of the military based on a policy that we don't like, that they don't control. And to me, that's the principle – can't we all agree that you don't punish the military for policies they don't control? To me, that's the principle.

But General McMaster, we've talked a lot about worrying things here, but I – knowing you and admiring you for many years, I always know that you're essentially an optimist. And so I want to end on a high note as – to use your George Costanza quote there.

You know, the title here is "Extraordinary Threats and Opportunities." I put that – "opportunities" in there for you. For that – so, you know, if you were an alien landing from Mars, you'd pick the – you can be any country – you'd pick the

United States, wouldn't you? Is...

MCMASTER: Absolutely...

(CROSSTALK)

BOWMAN: ... why would you pick the United States?

(LAUGHTER)

MCMASTER: Yeah, well, I do think it's time for a renewal in our country, renewal in our confidence and who we are as a people and in our democratic principles and institutions and processes.

And I think what we've seen for too long is that many politicians, certainly not the former politician who's sharing the stage with us, have compromised our principles to score partisan political points, whether it's on holding up nominations or whether it's on driving what I would say is a radical cultural agenda within the military these days.

I mean, I think that, you know, General Milley's awards, for example, written, you know, with neutral pronouns is sort of – I mean, I was like – I mean, come on, you know? That's not what the military's for.

You know, we have an opportunity to focus on really what the military is for. We have a focus I had the opportunity to renew our confidence in our democratic process, and it's going to be under duress in the next year, but I do think we ought to take solace in the fact that, you know, we have freedom of speech, freedom of expression, that in our democracy, which appears really ugly, that we have means for self-correction short of revolution, that our democratic societies are quite resilient, and authoritarian regimes are very brittle.

I mean, I look at – I really think that China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are in extraordinarily weak positions right now. We saw an ex-hot dog salesman and an ex-convict take over the equivalent of CENTCOM headquarters, you know, and drive toward Moscow. That's not really a sign of strength.

We have, you know, of course, all the contradictions and in the Chinese economy are coming back, which is what looks to me to have been a decades-long Ponzi scheme that is on the brink of collapse. And you see the anxiety of the Chinese Communist Party as they race to perfect their technologically-enabled police state before people become even more discontent.

Iran, on the anniversary of Mahsa Amini's murder, is rounding up anybody they can and putting more political prisoners behind bars to prevent what they fear will be a great uprising.

And of course North Korea always appears on the brink of collapse. But North Korea has some very severe issues associated with its economy and droughts and so forth.

So I really – I think we should feel much better about ourselves. As you mentioned, you know, if you came from outer space, you came from anywhere, nobody's trying to immigrate to the four countries I just mentioned, you know.



Extraordinary Threats and Opportunities: A Conversation with LTG (Ret.) H.R. McMaster and The Hon. Elaine Luria

Featuring LTG H.R. McMaster and the Honorable Elaine Luria

Moderated by Bradley Bowman

Introductory remarks by Cliff May

(LAUGHTER)

And so I think we ought to help, you know, restore our confidence in who we are. We ought to focus on the problems that we have, but I think what I'd love to see is a restoration of agency, you know, a recognition that, if we work together, we can build a better future.

You know, I think the narrative so often these days is, you know, "the system is all against you." We want to put the words "institutional" and "structural" in front of every problem. Well, institutions are made of people, right? And people, under effective leadership, can effect change that's beneficial to our country and to future generations.

BOWMAN: Well, I want to thank you both sincerely for your decades of distinguished service to our country.

General McMaster, I want to thank you for leading our Center on Military and Political Power.

And I want to thank you for your principled leadership and all you've done for our country, both in uniform and on – on the Armed Services Committee. It's been a real honor to have you here as well.

I want to thank our audience, in person and virtually, for taking time to join us.

For more information on FDD and our Center on Military and Political Power and for the latest analysis on these issues, we encourage you to visit FDD.org. We hope to see you again soon. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

MCMASTER: Thanks.

END