

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Meeting Today's Global Security Challenges with General Joseph F. Dunford

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Location: CSIS, Washington, D.C.

Time: 10:00 a.m. EDT
Date: Tuesday, March 29, 2016

Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
www.superiortranscriptions.com

JOHN J. HAMRE: (In progress) – here. Thank you very much for coming, and I can understand why it's such a – such a good crowd. It's not only a big crowd, but I just – I look around the room, and I know we can't afford the billing hours that are sitting here, so we're going to make this fast. My introduction is very short.

But first, when we have public events, we always give a little safety announcement. I'm your responsible safety officer. I'm going to make sure everybody is taken care here if we do have an emergency. If we have a problem, I'll ask you to follow my directions. The exits are right back behind me. Right by this door is the stairs that take us down to the street level. If the problem's out in the front, we're going to the back, and we'll meet across in the courtyard of National Geographic. If the problem's in the back, we're going to go out the front over to St. Matthew. I think the general's a good Catholic, so I think he'd be able to lead us in a prayer of praise that we got out of this OK. Nothing's going to happen, do not worry, but I do want you to follow me if we do have – (off mic).

We're very fortunate to have – (off mic) – is generous to give us this opportunity to present to the policy community, you know, the leading thinkers in national security and defense. And I'm very grateful for that – (off mic).

We're very fortunate to have General Dunford with us today. An exceptional officer. Of course, you have to be an exceptional officer to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs. I know for a fact he didn't even want that job, but his country asked him to do it. And we're so fortunate at this time, with so many problems ahead – let's remind – spin around the globe and land a finger on any place that isn't a problem right now.

(Audio break.)

GENERAL JOSEPH F. DUNFORD JR.: (In progress) – as a result of the changing character of war today and into the future.

And let me start with a quick comment about our men and women in uniform. Since assuming my current assignment in October, I've had the chance to get out there with a lot of soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. And I would tell you, after 14 years of war, well-known fiscal challenges and uncertain security environment, they're running pretty hard to meet our operational requirements, maintain our equipment and prepare for the future. But they remain incredibly focused and committed. And it shouldn't surprise you that the closer that I get to the fight the more spirited I find our young people are.

I say all that because I don't actually take it for granted. And I believe we need to closely monitor our recruiting, our retention, our deployment-to-dwell rates, and other key health – other indicators of the health of the force. Some of our folks are still on a one-to-one deployment to dwell ratio, that is they're gone as much as they're home. And without a change in either our requirements or our force structure, we're going to be sustaining a high level of operational tempo and running hard well into the future. Again, the force has proven to be remarkably resilient, but I would tell you there are signs of wear and tear that we're watching pretty closely.

There's also challenges with our equipment wear and tear that we need to address if we're going to maintain our competitive advantage. Over the last several years, we've exceeded the planned miles in our vehicles, hours in our aircraft, and usage on other equipment. And this has happened concurrent with deferred modernization as a result of the fiscal environment. And while I'm not going to talk about it much today, one of my three priorities is joint readiness, which at the end of the day is the foundation for our responsiveness to provide viable options to the national command authority in the event of a crisis or contingency.

It's about the flexibility for us to transition from one crisis to another. And it's about the resilience of our infrastructure and our joint capabilities. And for me, at the end of the day, readiness is about maintaining our competitive advantage and never finding ourselves in a fair fight. And as you'll see from the remainder of my comments, I don't think we can take that for granted.

Former secretary of state, national security advisor, and current CSIS trustee Henry Kissinger, oft-quoted now as saying that this is the most complex and volatile security environment since World War II. And I would tell you this morning, you're not going to get an argument out of me. Although the institutions and the structures that have underpinned the international order for the last several decades remain largely intact, the U.S. is now confronted with simultaneous challenges in Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and, of course, violent extremism.

The threat from Islamic violent extremism is certainly the most pressing challenge we face right now, but before I offer my thoughts on where we are and where we need to go against ISIL, al-Qaida and other groups, let me briefly discuss the capabilities and the behaviors of the state actors that I mentioned. While I'm humble about our ability to predict the future – and I think if nothing else that's what my years in uniform have probably instilled in me, is a degree of humility about our ability to look at the future – when I look at those challenges, I think they form a useful lens to inform the capabilities and capacities the joint force needs to have.

So I don't say that these five challenges are the only ones that we may expect in the future, but in my mind when you look at the aggregate challenges – the five I mentioned and the threats associated with those challenges – to me it's a useful framework, again, to inform what we need to do in terms of joint capability development, what we need to do in terms of innovation. And you will also see this year that it also informed our priorities for investments. So that's really what we use these five challenges to do.

First, the Russian military presents the greatest array of threats to U.S. interests. Despite declining population, shrinking economy, Russia has made a significant investment in military capabilities. Putin has recently fielded a wide range of systems to include new intercontinental ballistic missiles, aircraft, nuclear-powered submarines, tanks, and air defense systems. We've seen some of Russia's more modern conventional capabilities on display in Syria, and we're closely tracking Russian developments and actions in space and in cyberspace.

Russian capability has to be viewed in the context of their saber rattling, it's got to be viewed in the context of what others describe as gray-zone activity in places like Georgia, Crimea, and the Ukraine, and their expressed and demonstrated capability to project power in multiple regions simultaneously. So when we look at Russia, we think of not only their capabilities, but those three things. Its actions to threaten NATO – its actions threaten NATO cohesion and undermine the international order. Their military modernization and doctrinal development aim to neutralize our traditional competitive advantages and limit our strategic options.

With regard to China, our policy emphasizes opportunities to cooperate, but frankly we're closely tracking their rapid military modernization, their expanded presence in Asia, and their increased military presence outside of Asia. While Chinese military investments, capability development and intentions are opaque, it's clear they're investing in a manner that balances requirements for large conventional forces, a growing navy, an increasingly sophisticated air force, and advancements in nuclear, space, and cyberspace.

And these developments over time erode our competitive advantage in Asia – could erode our competitive advantage in Asia. And they certainly will challenge our ability to assure access in a fight. In the South China Sea, Chinese activity is destabilizing and could pose a threat to commercial trade routes. And while our exercise of freedom of navigation provides some assurance to our allies and partners, it hasn't stopped the Chinese from developing military capabilities in the South China Sea, to include on territories where there is a contested claim of sovereignty.

In order for me to discuss the current fight and spend some time on the so what of the trends that I see in the security environment, I won't spend a lot of time on North Korea and Iran this morning, except to note the trends in ballistic missile development and in cyber capabilities. We've also seen North Korea's focus on improving its nuclear capability. And I would add that Iranian malign activity across the Middle East is certainly something we pay keen attention to.

Meanwhile, the fight against violent extremism continues to be, for obvious reasons, on page one above the fold. While ISIL is clearly a transregional threat, and we're always looking for opportunities to address the wider challenge, our focus to date has been on core ISIL in Iraq and Syria. And I suspect most of you are familiar with the nine lines of effort and our overall strategy that cover areas such as governance, intelligence, finance, messaging, and foreign fighters. And while there's a military dimension to all nine lines of effort, the military campaign is really focused, at the end of the day, on two critical elements.

The first, being strikes intended to kill ISIL leadership and fighters, degrade their military capabilities, interdict their lines of community, and deny them sources of revenue. The second critical element is to develop and support effective partners on the ground to seize and secure ISIL-held terrain. Conceptually, the military campaign is designed to put simultaneous pressure on ISIL across Iraq and Syria, but there's clearly differences on the ground in application. Without a clear partner on the ground, Syria has presented the difficult challenge.

Success in Syria requires us working with our Turkish partners to secure the northern border of Syria, supporting vetted Syrian opposition forces who are willing to fight ISIL, and conducting strikes to attack core ISIL's command and control, sources of revenue, while disrupting their ability to plan and conduct external attacks against the homeland, our partners, and our allies.

Our primary partners on the ground, the Syrian Democratic Forces, have been successful in recovering a large swath of ground in northeast Syria. And I'll call them the SDF. The SDF's recent operations in the town of Shaddadah effectively severed the last major artery that connected Raqqa and Mosul. Over time, the size of the Syrian Democratic Forces, and specifically the Arab component inside the Syrian Democratic Forces, has grown. And our focus right now is on continuing to – continuing that trend to grow the capabilities of the Syrian Democratic Forces, and specifically the Arab component of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

And while not universally implemented, the current cessation of hostilities has allowed some humanitarian assistance to get through. The Geneva process for political transition in Syria has started, albeit pretty slowly. One of the concerns I guess I would – I would mention – not in my prepared remarks – with regard to Syrian Democratic Forces, is that as I speak about growing the Syrian Democratic forces and the Arab component, one of the things we're particularly sensitive to is Turkish concerns about Syrian Democratic Forces and the Arab component.

One of the things we're particularly sensitive to is Turkish concerns about Syrian democratic forces in the Arab component. So we're carefully managing that aspect of the campaign. It's very difficult because, again, Turkey has significant concerns about the linkages of the SDF with other Kurdish elements that are viewed as terrorists, and Turkey clearly concerned about the intentions particularly on the Turkish border in north Syria. So managing that aspect of the campaign has perhaps been part of the most complex part of the campaign.

With respect to Russian activity in Syria, there is absolutely no doubt that they stabilized the regime and they have put themselves in a position to influence the political solution. And we're still really assessing what the real meaning of their state of withdrawal is – or, more importantly, what the impact is going to be. It's just been a matter of a week. But on balance, the – this is what I believe – on balance, the pressure we put on ISIL in Syria has degraded their capabilities, limited their freedom of movement, and reduced their resources.

In Iraq we have a partner, but the relationship is complicated by the political landscape, sectarianism, and Iranian influence. Success requires supporting the development of Iraqi and Kurdish security forces and enabling their operations with intelligence, advisers, logistics, and combined arms capability.

While very mindful of the complex challenges we face in the campaign, we're encouraged by developments in places like Baiji, Sinjar, and Ramadi, and now most recently in the western Anbar province. To me those operations actually indicate what's in the art of the possible. And we've also been more effective – as our intelligence is developed over time, we've been more effective in conducting strikes against ISIL's leadership as well as going after their resources, particularly in the oil industry.

Moving forward, we're going to look for ways to reinforce success as the Iraqi security forces and Peshmerga prepare for operations in Mosul, which we think is a strategically significant operation. And we'll seize every opportunity to increase the tempo of Iraqi security force operations, and most importantly their enduring effectiveness. And I know a number of you probably have questions about the counter-ISIL campaign. Some of you probably have some advice for me in the counter-ISIL campaign, and I'll look forward to hearing that in the question-and-answer period.

While the fight against ISIL dominates the headlines, we also continue to face an extremist challenge in the homeland and our interests in South Asia. And from my perspective, the constant pressure we've put on al-Qaida in that region over the past 14 years has prevented another 9/11, but the threat has not been eliminated. And of course I'm talking about largely the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

The continued threat requires that we maintain an effective counterterrorism partner and platform in Afghanistan. And while the focus has been on al-Qaida, we've certainly seen recently the rise of the Islamic State in the Khorasan and we're also dealing with that. That's further complicated the situation in Iraq – in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The mission we've performed is designed to further enable Afghan security forces. It's also to demonstrate our enduring commitment to the region.

The good news is President Ghani's administration is fully supportive of a U.S. and NATO presence and is an opportunity to strengthen the long-term strategic partnership that we're going to need to achieve our common objectives. I think, as most of you know, that's a significant change from his predecessor and has made it – as difficult as the circumstances are in Afghanistan, the relationship with the government in Afghanistan has made it much easier for us as we move forward, certainly much easier for us to identify common objectives.

Last summer highlighted, though, that the Afghan forces continue to need our support to build their capacity, specifically in areas like logistics, special operations, aviation capability, what I'd call broadly ministerial capacity. There is no question about it; there is much, much work to be done in those areas. And that's really the focus of what's called Resolute Support, which is the NATO mission that's ongoing right now, which is focused on training, advising, assisting, and developing Afghan capability in those specific functional areas.

The commitment of the international community to Afghan's future is also important to success, and in particular the funding for the Afghan security forces. And this year there will be a NATO conference in Poland in the summer. One of the key issues that will be addressed is continuing international support both from a development perspective but – again, in the context of my comments this morning – most importantly from an Afghan national defense security forces perspective, funding that will push the horizon out for the Afghan forces out past 2020, which I think is very important.

One of the things I think that's inhibited campaign progress is always kind of almost a Y2K effect every year. You know, whether it's 2013, 2014, 2015, psychologically it's had an

adverse impact on our Afghan partners. And so what we're really hoping to do with the NATO conference this summer is push the horizon out where the Afghans can focus on further developing our governance, addressing the capability gaps that exist that I mentioned without having to worry about what's going to happen on December 31st of whatever given year it happens to be next year, 2017.

The current challenge of violent Islamic extremism and the potential challenges associated with developments in Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran have a number of implications for the joint force, and I'll talk about a few of those from my perspective.

The first implication is foundational. We need a balanced inventory of joint capabilities that are going to allow us to deter and defeat potential adversaries across the full range of military operations. We actually don't have the luxury of choosing between a force that can fight ISIL and one that has a modern nuclear enterprise, robust cyber capabilities, robust space capabilities, conventional and special operations capabilities. We, as the United States, have to have a complete inventory of balanced capability.

In the current inventory, from my perspective, it doesn't have the kind of depth that I would like it to have. In getting the balance right in addressing the lack of depth in areas like ballistic missile defense, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and certain logistics-enablers, frankly I think is going to be probably one of the biggest challenges during my tenure. And we're going to be doing that while modernizing a nuclear enterprise.

And in this crowd I probably don't need to say much about the fiscal challenges that we have experienced over the last few years. And, frankly, although the bipartisan budget act is going to get us through fiscal year 2017, we still have \$100 billion of sequestration looming over us and a – (inaudible) – wave of modernization requirements – again, I mentioned it earlier today – that we have deferred over the last several years. All of that will kind of come together. At the same time, we're trying to get out of a fairly significant readiness trough. And managing that over the next few years I think, again, will be a significant challenge.

The second implication is the need for us to continue to think about how to most effectively use the military instrument and national power to address today's challenges. And I think we need to develop more effective methods to deal with what we've seen of Russian behavior in Georgia, the Crimea, and the Ukraine, or Iranian malign influence across the Middle East or Chinese behavior in the South and East China Sea.

Our traditional approach is either we're at peace or at conflict. And I think that's insufficient to deal with the actors that actually seek to advance their interests while avoiding our strengths. And as an aside, you know, I don't find the current phasing construct for operational plans particularly useful right now. If you think about it, we bend authorities and capabilities according to where we think we are in a phase. And our adversaries, or potential adversaries, or our competitors, they don't actually – they don't actually find themselves limited by that same – by that same framework.

And just as an example, just to highlight that – because it may be something we talk about in the question-and-answer period – you know, if you think about the threat, we gathered all the combatant commanders together last fall. We said: Hey, in your area of responsibility, what phase is your adversary in? And I won't get specific here. I'm not trying to make headlines in that regard. But what phase – and consistently the combatant commanders said: Well, I think our adversary is in phase 2, or our adversary is in phase 2 ½.

And what that means is the actions that they are taking on a day-to-day basis, whether it be in what's been described as the “gray space” – I call it competition with a military dimension short of a phase 3 or traditional conflict, but the activities that they're taking with regard to employment of cyber, unconventional capabilities, space capabilities, information operations are absolutely not associated with what we would call phase zero shaping. And so we've got to kind of work our way through that. We also need to develop a framework within which to deter cyber threats and obviously attributing threats, managing escalation, and hardening ourselves against cyberattacks are all areas that require more work.

I think one of the most significant implications of the current trend is the high likelihood that any future conflict will be transregional, multidomain, and multifunctional. And this is a marked shift, in my perspective, from conflicts in the past. Information operations, cyber activities, space and counterspace, and ballistic missile technology have made the character of war today much more dynamic and complex, in my assessment, than it has been in the past. And we're going to see such capabilities fielded by both state and non-state actors. And conflicts are very quickly going to spread across multiple combatant commanders, geographic boundaries and functions.

You know, the current fight against ISIL is certainly recognized as transregional, but to maybe put a little bit of context in the comments that I just made, if you thought about a North Korean contingency maybe 15 years ago you could have imagined a North Korean contingency isolated to the peninsula. North Korea develops ballistic missiles. It now involves a region. Today, if you think about a conflict with North Korea, you have to quickly factor in not only ballistic missiles, intercontinental ballistic missiles, cyber capabilities, space capabilities, in addition to the traditional conventional threat that we confronted on the peninsula.

So again, when I talk about multidomain – sea, space, cyberspace, undersea – when I talk about transregional – if I talked about a Korea scenario right now, I can quickly talk about the Pacific Command, Northern Command, Strategic Command, and obviously Cyber Command as a subset. And that's just immediately, and that's if nothing else is going on in the world at the same time. So when we look at that, from my perspective, our current planning, our organizational construct, and most importantly our command and control is actually not suited to that character of war and we need some significant changes. And this gets into the area of defense reform.

Today we're regionally focused. We rely on kind of what I describe as cooperation and collaboration between combatant commanders. We have supported and supporting relationships, and that's all worked well for decades. But if you think about it, the secretary of defense is the

decider and is the integrator in the department, and he's the lowest level at which integration – actually full integration – takes place amongst the combatant commanders.

And if you think about how I described the character of war, and you imagine the secretary of defense trying to make decisions in that environment, clearly I think we owe him better in terms of command and control, a better framework within which to make decisions in a timely manner based on the character of war we see today and, as importantly, a better process for the prioritization and allocation of resources in real time when you're dealing with the kind of challenges that I've described. And again, not only in isolation, but my assumption and the thing I think we should plan for as military leaders, we should plan for some of those happening either on overlapping timelines or simultaneously. And we've got to make sure that we're prepared to be able to do that.

And although we'll make some recommendations in the coming weeks to Congress, we're already moving out within our authorities to make some fundamental changes to be able to address those challenges I discussed. And I expect we'll hear more of that as Chairman McCain and Chairman Thornberry work through defense reform in the coming weeks.

I think I'll stop there. That, I hope, will be enough to generate some discussion. And we can talk a little bit more about what I've just mentioned, or anything else you want to talk about. But let me close, because I did mention some challenges.

I am absolutely confident in our joint force today, in our ability to deal with today's challenges, but I'm also mindful that you actually get no credit tomorrow for what you did yesterday. And so what today is all about is making sure that we continue on the path of joint capability development; we continue to adapt the force to meet today's challenges. Some of the challenges we have today are not challenges we have foreseen and so we need to adapt, but also we need to be focused on how we innovate, to make sure that tomorrow's force, perhaps doing things in a fundamentally different way, is prepared for the challenges of 2020 and beyond. And that's actually our focus.

So with that, Kath, I'd be happy to open it up. (Applause.)

MS. HICKS: Thank you very much, General Dunford. You, I think, captured well the Henry Kissinger quote just in your description of – brief description of the world environment.

GEN. DUNFORD: I was just trying to make everybody feel sorry for me. (Laughter.)

HICKS: Well, this is a town that feels sorry for itself constantly.

GEN. DUNFORD: Yeah. Right.

MS. HICKS: So you're in good company here.

So we're going to do a little back-and-forth and then we'll open it up, so please be thinking about the questions you'd like to ask.

To that end, of course, I won't be able to cover the world over as well, but if we could group a little bit the complexity issues. You mentioned what I often call gray area. You had a more refined term that I did not write down quickly enough, but the gray space challenges. Or some people refer to them as the hybrid challenges. We're seeing them in different manifestations with Russia, with China, certainly ISIS, and Iran itself with its destabilizing activities. All are sort of forms of gray-area conflict in different ways, combining information. Some of these folks are combining energy or political coercion, et cetera. And these challenges, as you point out just in the ISIL example, go well beyond the military.

So as the principal military adviser, how do you – to the president, to the secretary, how do you think about the role that the U.S. military plays in this much broader context, very politicized context that, as you said, crosses regions, crosses economic, energy, and military spheres? How do you best provide advice in that context?

GEN. DUNFORD: Yeah, to be honest with you, what I described it as is it's competition. And in most cases – or at least in some cases it's adversarial competition. It has a military dimension.

So I'm trying to shy away from the gray space hybrid because it's kind of – it doesn't really do justice to what we're talking about. We're talking about, you know, a competition with an adversary that has a military dimension, but the adversary knows exactly what the threshold is for us to take decisive military action. So they operate below that level. They continue to advance their interests and we lose competitive advantage. And, frankly, our interests are adversely affected. And for me it's actually one of the most significant challenges that we're dealing with right now.

In fact, to that point, next Wednesday we have, you know, a quarterly session with the combatant commanders. In the uniform day, the first day, this is the topic. This is the topic. We're going to spend a whole day just talking about this. And we're going to use the case studies that we're dealing with right now.

You know, clearly Russia is probably the clearest example where they have fully integrated the whole of government to deal with issues like Georgia, the Ukraine and, you know, even to some extent in the Baltics on a day-to-day basis, where they use information operations and so forth to advance their interests.

I think, from my perspective, what we owe – and this is kind of how I would frame next week – we owe our leadership clarity on the military dimension of dealing with this challenge, what we can do in the military dimension and what we can't do. And then we lay those capability gaps out on the table so that we can precipitate a conversation with the rest of the government to figure out how to more fully integrate our government.

But honestly, we're not there. I mean, one, we need to burn a little bit of intellectual capital to better frame the problem. And two, you know, back to the theme of, you know, the character of war today or the character challenges we have today, our decision-making process,

our interagency process, much like – you know, I’m going to focus on the joint staff and the Pentagon. I’m not going to solve world hunger here. But there is a broader piece in our government that’s going to be required, you know, to make some changes in order for us to better integrate these capabilities for these kinds of scenarios, and, as importantly, to be able to operate, you know, at the same speed that our adversaries are doing.

So from my perspective, I think what we owe senior leadership right now is better clarity in the military dimension of it and then what other things we need to do to make the military dimension work.

MS. HICKS: Just following that line, are there changes that you already have under way or know you want to have to get at this theme? You hit it in a number of ways; how to institutionalize the way in which we innovate, that we adapt, that we deal with challenges that, you know, might be cross-regional crisis, cross-functional, et cetera, inside just the military component? How do we need to change the way we do business?

GEN. DUNFORD: Yeah. First thing, you know, I talked broadly about the secretary. And I’ll just be specific about it. I think what we need to provide him, number one, we need to provide him with a common operational picture and a common intelligence picture. He needs to be able to see the fight.

And right now, again, based on how we fought in the past, he would be reliant on kind of point-to-point – you can almost imagine a VTC point-to-point, with a combatant commander having a conversation about what’s going on at Pacific Command. Well, that’ll be wholly unsatisfying to a future secretary of defense when he has NORTHCOM on the Net, EUCOM on the Net, CENTCOM on the Net, PACOM on the Net, all having a conversation about what they need. And he’s reliant – you know, again, the point of him being the lowest level of integration, he can’t see the fight in order to make decisions and in order to allocate resources. So that’s number one.

The biggest area, though, that we’re focused on is strategy development, military strategy development. And the national military strategy next will be a classified document. We will take each one of these challenges I spoke about today. We will take the threats associated with those challenges. So when I talk about a challenge, I would talk about something like Iran. When I talk about a threat, I would talk about ballistic missiles, nuclear capability, cyber capability, space, whatever the case may be. And then we’ll talk about cross-cutting threats, whether it be readiness, logistics and those kinds of things.

And today I think we go from policy to OPLANs. And what I would tell you is operation plans aggregated do not a strategy make. And so what we actually need is a strategic framework within which those OPLANs are made. And I don’t mean that we don’t have a strategy – a strategic framework at the policy level. But I’m talking now military ends, ways and means, informed by policy, so that when you look at Russia and something happens – if today we had – hypothetically we had an operations plan to deal with the Russians going into the Baltics and we have a crisis with Russia, first of all, it’s unlikely that the conflict we’ll have with Russia will unfold exactly like the OPLAN envisions it unfolding. And the OPLAN development is not

going to give you the kind of broad options globally that you need to have to fight a trans-regional fight across those domains and functions.

So the strategy needs to be focused on – the end state of that strategy needs to be viable options in a crisis or contingency that are flexible enough to anticipate, you know, a wide range of challenges, as opposed to, you know, what I describe as the science of war, which is the OPLANs, which will tell you how the planes, trains and automobiles need to move in order to get to the fight. What it doesn't do is give you the kind of intellectual rigor that will allow you to think through a problem and provide options to the president real time in a crisis.

So the two big areas that I think we're focused on right now is the secretary's ability to make decisions and then strategy development. Now, with regard to joint capability development, you know, innovation and so forth – I think as we go through – and we started yesterday; in fact, we did the problem set in the tank yesterday. And we're right in this year's national military strategy with the combatant commanders and the chiefs in the tank.

So this is not a document being written by the staff and then subsequently sent out for comment. We sit in. We're framing the problem. We're providing top-down guidance on each of these problem sets and then pulling that together. And as we do that, and as we look at our – you know, we're basically doing a net assessment with each one of these problem sets as we go through. We'll identify where we are in terms of our comparative advantage in these functional areas. And that'll inform – that'll inform our, you know, efforts for either adaptation or innovation.

I'll tell you one that we are already after is ISR. You know, people talk about intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance. We can't buy more Predators. We can't have more CAPs and think that we're getting out of the problem. So if you talk about an area where something disruptive is necessary, something innovative is necessary, it's what information do we need to make decisions and how do we get that information is the question we're trying to solve, not how can we afford to buy more CAPs.

And so we'll – these are the kinds of things we'll tease out of our, you know, frankly, journey through these five challenges in the development of the national military strategy. And so at the end of next year, you know, we'll have a refined – I think a refined strategy for dealing with these challenges. We'll have a refined approach to what are the priorities for capability development and innovation where we don't have a clear path towards capability development. And then looking at these challenges in execution or looking at these challenges in combination in execution, one or more occurring, it'll also inform our assessment of risk and the capabilities and capacities that the joint force has to have in the future.

So fundamentally, again, without even the legislation yet, we're making – I think those are two fundamental changes. And as I look at my responsibilities, I really look at them in kind of four lanes. You know, one is to provide best military advice. Two is this strategy development piece. Right now, by the way, the law reads that I should provide oversight of our operation plans and developments and so forth. It doesn't task me to write strategy.

The other areas, this idea of supporting the secretary of defense and making sure that the joint staff provides the integrating functions – we have the responsibility for integrating functions.

MS. HICKS: And the NMS is a requirement in statute.

GEN. DUNFORD: The NMS is a requirement. But as you know well, it's an unclassified document that has historically, you know, been written for the public. And we will certainly articulate to the public, you know, the guts of a national military strategy. But in my mind, what the national military strategy ought to do is drive the development of our operation plans and, more importantly, drive the development of viable options that we would need in a crisis or contingency. And then the fourth element is the joint capability development.

So by cleaning up our responsibilities in those four areas, and frankly – and I won't talk now because I'll cause people to be concerned about their jobs – but we are divesting ourselves of some things that we've done; broadly, the Title X issues. As an example, we have not had a tank on a Title X issue since I came in in October. I told the chiefs if there's an area where you think we need a collective voice, well, come and tell me. But otherwise these are the four areas that we're staying focused on, because, you know, again, there's been a lot of discussion about overlap and what I describe as beehive soccer. There's plenty of people that are working through those other issues, and that's not what we need to be focused on. We're going to be focused on these four what I describe as core competencies. And again, that doesn't mean that the chiefs won't gather to have a collective voice on some other issues. But on these issues that you highlighted, I think that is the purpose of the joint chiefs. And that will bring the chiefs in collectively and the combatant commanders.

So again, just like everywhere else in the planning process, it's a top-down focus with leadership thumbprints in the beginning. I'm not looking on the back side of this to have a national military strategy that we get a comment from one of the services that says I non-concur with line 15, paragraph three; I think we ought to change the word to X. We're not going to do that.

MS. HICKS: Yeah. There's a – there's a beer on the line, probably, for a bet on that.

GEN. DUNFORD: Make it a case.

MS. HICKS: Yeah – (laughs) – having lived through many of those documents.

Let me ask you a little bit about Afghanistan. You have Lieutenant General Nicholson now in there. He's undertaking a 90-day assessment. You've been where he's been. What is it that you hope he's looking at, expect to hear from him in terms of the areas he's examining in that 90-day assessment, in order to give feedback and advice on the type of U.S. and coalition military –

GEN. DUNFORD: OK.

MS. HICKS: – that we need there?

GEN. DUNFORD: First of all, we're not waiting on a 90-day assessment in Afghanistan. General Nicholson, like every other commander, you know, has the opportunity, has the responsibility, to provide his input in terms of course of speed corrections we might make in the campaign. But we know what happened in 2015 and we know what fundamental changes are going to be necessary in order for us to have a different result in 2016.

So General Nicholson, who has extensive experience in Afghanistan – couldn't be a better individual to be selected for that command – has already been decisively engaged with us in crafting recommendations for the president.

The 90 days, just to be clear – because, you know, this can't be one of those documents everybody's sitting forward waiting for the 90-day document – in testimony, he was asked some questions. He said I'd like to have an opportunity to do what every other commander does, which is to get on the ground, make an assessment, and make some recommendations. So 90 days is out there as a figure of speech.

He'll have a chance at 90 days, 100 days, 120 days. I mean, he'll have a chance to make recommendations whenever he wants to. But what I don't want people's expectation to be is that we're going to wait 90 days. Here's the reality is we are approaching now the period of high operational tempo in Afghanistan. We're approaching now fundamental decisions that NATO has to make as to what their contribution is going to be in 2017.

And just to put that in a little perspective, if you think about just force generation, today phase one of the NATO mission is due to end in December. Phase one of the NATO mission is an advise-assist mission down at the core level. So if a decision wasn't made, we would be advising at the ministerial level only and we wouldn't be down at the core level. And we wouldn't be at the aviation level, where we have been to date.

So clearly NATO, as they go into meetings in June, have to – first they have to make a political decision before June. Then in June they have to make a decision on what forces would be deployed in January of '17. And then they have to train those forces for the next six months. So we can't wait 90 days for an assessment in Afghanistan before we move forward.

So we very much today are involved in making recommendations. I already have input from General Campbell. I have input from General Nicholson. I have input from General Austin. I have crafted a recommendation to the secretary of defense. The secretary and I have been in dialogue over the past week. And at some point in the future we'll bring those recommendations forward to the president. And General Nicholson will be a key piece of that.

But, look, this is a dynamic environment. And what I don't want people to think is that there's a static point in time where we make changes. We ought to be making changes all the time to be successful.

MS. HICKS: Great. Last question from me, and then I'm going to open it up – civil-military relations. You sit at the apex, really, of that issue set. Certainly you are the senior-most military officer in the United States. Transition periods in our political system tend to be periods of heightened political – civil-military tension.

What is the tone and tenor that you think is appropriate to get the best dynamic going through both an outgoing administration and an incoming administration, sitting from where you sit –

GEN. DUNFORD: Sure.

MS. HICKS: – on the military side?

GEN. DUNFORD: I mean, look, this is not – this is not anything profound, and it's exactly what I've said to the staff. And we've talked about this a lot. The most important commodity that we will have in transition and the one that should be expected is trust – trust. And that requires us to remain apolitical. It requires us to stay out of the fray.

I will tell you it's difficult sometimes for me to do that, as I testify and so forth, because as – you know, or when you appear before the media, because there's always people that are trying to drag you into that. I think we need to do that, stay above the fray. Fortunately, I think there's a lot of great role models in our history, senior leaders who have done that. And so I – you know, I certainly can look to them as an example.

And I think, at the end of the day, you know, if next November a new administration comes in and views us as we know we are, as an organization that can immediately turn loyalty and be focused on another administration and be prepared to provide the best military advice, then we will have won. That's what winning looks like to me in transition is that next year they won't look at, OK, we need to get rid of all these senior leaders because they're part of the old team. No, we're not part of any team. You know, we swear to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States.

And I think those who have worn the uniform know that, you know, even at the company level, platoon level or battalion level, as soon as somebody walks in and somebody walks out, loyalty immediately shifts to the new guy. We do that. It's in our DNA. It's in our culture. And what's important for us to do is transmit that to a new administration coming in so that they know that they will be served by professional, competent, apolitical advice that they can trust. That's what we're trying to do by next January. And we'll work pretty hard to do that. (Applause.)

MS. HICKS: OK. We have mics coming around. As I call on you, please state your name and your affiliation. It should be a question. It should be short and end with a question mark.

We'll start right back here in the back. There's a mic coming to you.

Q: Hi. My name is Andrei Sitov. I am a Russian reporter here in Washington, D.C.

You referred a few times to Russia as your current headache. My question is about talking with the Russians. American diplomats are talking. As we speak, an undersecretary of state is in Moscow. My question to you, is do you feel that the military need to talk to each other? Do you feel that you need to talk to your counterpart in Russia? Are you on the same page with the diplomats? And secondly, briefly, on a scale of, like, I don't know, with five being the best, what is the military effectiveness of what the Russians did in Syria? Thank you.

GEN. DUNFORD: OK.

MS. HICKS: And I should have added, one question each. But you may answer both if you choose.

GEN. DUNFORD: OK, I'll answer the first one. First of all, I believe that we should maintain military-to-military communications and relationships in the worst of times. We did it throughout the Cold War and we should do it now.

I've spoken to my counterpart three times, General Gerasimov. I would tell you one thing I'm happy about is we agreed in the first conversation that we would not share the content of our conversation, that we would have a professional dialogue to talk through the issues, and it wouldn't show up in the newspapers. And he's maintained that pledge, and so have I. And so I won't talk about the substance of the conversation. But to your fundamental question, do I think we should be communicating? We absolutely should be communicating, in nothing else to reduce the risk of miscalculation. We should be doing that.

With regard to how effective the Russians have been in Syria, I mean, I will tell you that I think the – I mean, I'll just be honest. I think the Syrian regime was reeling last July or August. And it's stabilized right now. And Assad and the regime is certainly in much better shape than they were before the Russian intervention, which calls into question, of course, what the Russians were going in to do in the first place. The stated intent was to go after ISIL. They've now announced a withdrawal. From my perspective, still some work to be done against ISIL. So I'm not sure what their stated intent was, but they certainly were effective in propping up the Assad regime.

MS. HICKS: All right. OK, let's go over here and, let's see, right over here. Sorry.

GEN. DUNFORD: All right, David Sedney with a hard question, I can tell. (Laughter.)

Q: Thank you. Thank you, General. You did really a brilliant job with presenting the set of new challenges that you have.

And I wanted to ask you about our allies. Do they perceive those challenges the same way you do? And what role do you see for the allies in looking at those challenges in those competitive areas?

GEN. DUNFORD: Yeah. Actually, I'm pretty encouraged. In, I think, the third week of April I'm going to get together with 11 of my counterparts in London and really the subject is transregional challenges. We'll obviously focus on the immediate, most urgent transregional challenge being counter-ISIL. But you know, in a large group, David, to be honest with you – and you've been part of it – if you sit with 28 in NATO, it's kind of hard to have a substantive conversation along the lines we're having right now. But when you have smaller groups – you know, either one, two, three, five, or perhaps up to 10, I think there is broad recognition of these challenges.

There's broad recognition of the need to do capability development to address these challenges. And probably as importantly, there's broad recognition for us to start to gain a better appreciation of the relative capabilities and capacities that we each have, so that we can complement each other in a conflict at the military level. Clearly in many cases I'm disappointed that perhaps the budget doesn't follow the challenges that we've identified. And so the investments aren't necessarily being made in these challenges. So I would distinguish between the nation's willingness, ability, you know, demonstrated intent to address these challenges, and the military recognition, which I find refreshing.

You know, that's been one of – probably there's been some things in the job that I've been – that I've particularly enjoyed. And I think the engagement that I've had with my peers to talk through some of these issues has been probably one of the highlights for me. And so I think there is broad recognition. But you know as well as I do that transitioning from a recognition that you have a problem to actually investing to solve the problem is two different things. And I haven't seen much movement in the regard.

MS. HICKS: OK, there's one right here.

GEN. DUNFORD: There are exceptions, by the way, in the Pacific in particular.

Q: Hi. Sean Lyngaas with FCW magazine. Thanks for being here, General.

You said that the U.S. needs to improve in cyber deterrence in terms of the framework for that. Is that notwithstanding the framework that the administration submitted to Congress a few months ago. I think DOD had a lot of input on that, so are you saying that that framework is not addressing the problem enough, and how can that be rectified?

GEN. DUNFORD: Yeah, no, when I – of course, when I talk about frameworks, I'm talking one level down from the broader administration framework. And I'm talking about really operationalizing that. In order to realize that framework, I mentioned a couple of things in my remarks. First of all, the issue of attribution, right? So in order to deter, you have to improve your ability to attribute cyberattacks. I think you've got to have clear military capabilities that are appropriate in response to that. Again, there's a military dimension to it. You may not use all the tools you have, but you need to make sure you identify, you know, an inventory of tools that can be used in the event of a cyberattack.

And then the third piece is, in order for us to have effective deterrence, you know, we've got to address the hardening, if you will, the resilience of our own systems – both military systems and across the nation. So when I talk about more work to be done, I'm talking about the fundamental capabilities, the resilience, if you will – both capabilities and resilience – that will allow us to – you know, deterrence – the framework is one thing. Operationalizing that and actually have the tools to implement that, those are all different things. And so I was really talking about the latter not the former.

MS. HICKS: OK. This young woman right here.

Q: Thank you. I'm Amanda Macias. I'm the defense editor of Business Insider New York.

And my question is, as the ongoing U.S.-led coalition airstrikes pound ISIL, what are the lessons that we've learned and what are our weaknesses thus far?

GEN. DUNFORD: Yeah. So what are the lessons we've learned? I mean, I would tell you, I'm into probably relearning lessons more than lessons learned here over the last couple years. I mean, number one is intelligence. And if you want to know why are operations more effective, and quantifiably more effective, today than they were a year and a half ago, it's because our intelligence is getting much better. The target development is getting much better. And to be honest with you, we relearned some lessons about target development. I won't go into it in great detail right now, but in terms of how you fully harness the intelligence community, getting the right people in the right places to do target development, has been something that – you know, frustrating to me – that we relearned. But over the last several months, I think we've made some improvements that result in the progress that we have made.

The other thing that obviously was a challenge is having effective partners on the ground to integrate combined arms. And so getting the right training down to our Iraqi or Peshmerga counterparts in Iraq, or to the Syrian Democratic Forces and other moderate Syrian opposition forces in Syria – getting them the right training to be able to more effectively deliver aviation fires has been the things that we've worked on the most. And the progress that we have made in those areas is directly attributable the impact that we've had on the command and control capability of ISIL, on the resources of ISIL, on the chemical weapons capability of ISIL and their freedom of movement. So those would probably be the areas that I would highlight.

MS. HICKS: Let's see. Right over here.

Q: Dan Raviv with CBS News.

You haven't mentioned the word "Muslim" or "Islamic." And I – you know, I don't want to cause controversy, that's not the point – but as a military leader who tells it like it is, the fact that the enemy ISIL claims to be Islamic, what do you do about that? Who are the allies and partners? (Laughter.)

GEN. DUNFORD: I'm pretty sure I did. I'm pretty sure I did. Look, I mentioned it specifically. I said – you know, I'm making a point – but I said that, you know, the focus right now is on Islamic violent extremism. Couldn't be more clear. I mean, that's what al-Qaida is. That's what ISIL is. So that's what we're dealing with.

MS. HICKS: OK. One right back here.

Q: Hi, there. Anna Mulrine with the Christian Science Monitor.

General, you expressed concern after you took over as chairman that women in the combat ranks might reduce the lethality of the forces. And so I wanted to ask you, do you feel like its lethality – that lethality is the reason we haven't been winning the wars over the last 15 years? Or maybe you would take issue with the idea of winning wars. You know, there's some who argue that the idea of winning or losing a war is kind of a concept that is outmoded. You spoke about the idea of our traditional, you know, construct of being at peace or at conflict. You know, maybe we need to rethink that. So, you know, are we – are we going to essentially, you know, be at war or at peace, you know –

GEN. DUNFORD: Look, probably, you know, would wish I was a general in the days when you could go on the Battleship Missouri and, you know, sign a – sign the end of the war and it's all clean. But that's not the real world. And I think what I would probably say in response to your question is, I mentioned the current strategy for dealing with ISIL. And I said there was nine lines of effort, and two of those lines of effort are the military. Well, that indicates, you know, clearly that in order to win the war it's a much broader issue than the military dimension. There is a military dimension, make no doubt about it, and that's what I wake up and think about every day – the military dimension of it.

But in order for us to win in a conflict against ISIL, and frankly almost anything else I can envision, you know, clearly it's about – it's about a political end that we're supporting. And there's going to be all elements of national power that have to be integrated in order for us to win. Having said that, what I try to do when I'm talking to soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, is break it down so I can describe what winning looks like militarily in the context of the broader issue so it's digestible for them, because I think to ask young men and women in harm's way to do something and not be able to clearly articulate what they're doing and why they're doing it is actually professional malpractice. So we try not to do that.

But I don't think there is – you know, this idea of winning and losing militarily against ISIL I think is – or, again, any of the other challenges I identified – is not actually the 21st century. And I'm not sure it ever was, by the way. But it's certainly not now.

MS. HICKS: OK. We're going to take two last questions grouped together so we have time. I have a gentleman right here on the end.

Q: Hi. Scott Maucione with Federal News Radio.

Both you and Secretary Carter have talked about creating the Joint Chiefs – giving it an expanded role to take in the combatant commanders’ information, make it more transnational. Would that involve – if that comes to fruition, would that involve an expanded staff for the Joint Chiefs?

GEN. DUNFORD: No.

MS. HICKS: OK, oh, I’m just going to give you one more and then we’ll wrap up together.

GEN. DUNFORD: OK.

MS. HICKS: And I think I hand a gentleman right here with his cane in the air – right here.

Q: It works.

MS. HICKS: It does work. Well done. (Laughter.)

Q: Terry Murphy with CSIS, former U.S. Navy and proud parent of a United States Marine.

Just yesterday I received from Harvard University the text of a speech by its president to a new lecture series at West Point on leadership. And I’m noting that there’s large numbers of Naval Academy young people in our audience, who will be the generals and admirals after we’re all dead and gone. Do you have any words of wisdom to them? And I do commend this speech to you. It’s a fantastic speech on leadership at West Point, just yesterday released.

MS. HICKS: I’m sorry, it’s by the Harvard president? Is that what you said?

Q: By the president of Harvard University. I commend it to you, everybody in this room, on this general subject. But I’d like you to, sir, if you would take your last moment and turn it over to these young people who are going to have your job many, many years from now, and see what your wisdom is for them, as we heard from the Harvard president yesterday.

MS. HICKS: Great, so two last questions. The one of the size of the Joint Staff and the one on leadership.

GEN. DUNFORD: OK. First of all, no, it doesn’t apply a growing of the Joint Staff. What we’re focused on is the responsibilities of the Joint Staff, and not even the authorities, but focused specifically on the responsibilities of the chairman, the Joint Staff, and by extension the chiefs. There are some things that I alluded to that we’re doing today that actually are being done in several other places. And where I think the greatest opportunity is for kind of layering, if you will, is in areas where services now deal with service secretaries and deal with OSD on some of those broader issues. Those are things that the Joint Staff won’t do.

And I guess at risk of being more specific than I probably wanted to be, but in order to make sure I'm clear about what I'm saying, I'm going to give you a little insight. You know, for all the right reasons, over the last few years the Joint Staff has taken on a role in family readiness, wounded warrior care, veterans outreach, those kinds of things. And certainly as a former service chief and an assistant commandant, and other leadership responsibilities, I want to make sure, I wouldn't understate the importance of those at all. I just don't think I need to do that on the Joint Staff. Services are more than capable of doing that.

And I probably have four to five other examples where, for all the right reasons, over the last few years, you know, things have been picked up along the way where the Joint Staff has focused on areas. Some of it has been the result of the personalities of the secretaries of defense and what their expectations were from the leadership. Some of them have been a result of topical issues that leadership wanted to grip. So we're trying to clean that up now a little bit. And that's why we've tried to stay focused on those areas that I just mentioned.

With regard to leadership, with the midshipman over here, you know, clearly something that you can't wrap up in 30 seconds. But I guess what I would say to you is as you make the transition – and I think a number of you are making it this year – I think you probably have been told many times, and I'll just remind you, it's no longer about you. You know, to this point someone cared about your grade point average. Someone cared about your level of physical fitness. Someone cared about your personal appearance. Someone cared about your accomplishments, your achievements. The day you become commissioned, that's all in the sticker price of being a leader. Nobody cares. You get no credit anymore for any of those things.

What you get credit for is the impact that you have on the young men and women that you'll be so fortunate enough to lead. That's actually what you get credit for. So that would be my only soundbite for you. And I think I'll probably have a chance to see some of you all before you graduate anyway, so thanks.

MS. HICKS: Great. (Applause.) So let me – let me just – let me just note in closing, Secretary Carter is coming here next Monday at 2:00. We expect him to be speaking about defense reform as well. The title of –

GEN. DUNFORD: I hope he says some of the same things. (Laughter.)

MS. HICKS: I'm sure – I'm sure the coordination will be outstanding. And I just want to say a final thank you to you, General Dunford, for your efforts as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It's one of the hardest jobs in Washington, to be sure, and an incredible burden on you as well as an honor to represent the U.S. military. And you're doing it in fine form.

Please join me in thanking General Dunford for coming. (Applause.)

GEN. DUNFORD: Hey, thanks. Thanks. (Applause.)

(END)