Virtual CRT: “Game Changer” Golden Dome for America Transcript

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Good afternoon from a misty morning, misty afternoon here in Alexandria, Virginia. I'm Riki Ellison, I'm the founder and chairman of the missile defense advocacy Alliance. Our sole mission is to make the world and our nation a safer place through the evolution, development and deployment of missile defenses.

This is our 75th congressional roundtable. We couldn't have picked a better topic than what happened yesterday. This is the game changer that happened yesterday on the Golden Dome for America.

A historic day in the history of missile defense. That announcement surpasses any announcement made on missile defense, though it wasn't as smooth and articulate as President Reagan's one 40 years ago. It was the most powerful statement by a President or a head of any nation on the movement and decision to defend the nation against the current threats that we are undefended from.

From ballistic missiles, hyper glide vehicles, from fractional orbital bombardment systems, from cruise missiles. That announcement stated that we will create a system, the best system ever created, to defend against all of those threats. And this is about reshaping our deterrent.

This is not about replacing mutually assured destruction. This is not about replacing the triad. This is adding to deterrence that we are unable to deter through our current deterrent capabilities in our strategic forces to be able to see what's going on in the world today.

The view and the power of this is his selection of one person, completely unanimous, as you heard him say, the best the nation has, of a four-star General, Mike Guetlein, to command this system, the development of this system, to put it in place. And this is the type of leadership that our country has turned to from our great Presidents in the past to people like Oppenheimer and Groves, like Schriever, like Rickover. This is going to be the hardest, most complex engineering, system or engineering, challenge that this nation has ever done. And let's think through what that is, because the backbone, the core of this whole thing is being able to collect data, and share that data. Collecting data from any launch point from anywhere in the world that would have those threats we listed coming into or near or at the United States of America. That has to be collected and it has to be shared amongst our joint services. We don't have a very good joint all domain command and control. This is the background, the backbone of Golden Dome. And that requires space, that requires thousands of satellites, collecting that data. And both the LEO, MEO, GEO, near space, all the way down to our terrestrial and put all that together. And then to be able to share that data.

That is where we're at this level of doing that. So with that, you would have layers of defensive capability. But the key here is to detect this stuff as far away as possible from the United States of America. That's the key. And the only way you can do that is through space.

The capabilities in space. And then we would layer that back down into, all the way back down, to the terminal aspect of it. So, it's a daunting task. It's one that obviously our technology is able to do... much more... As the President said, that was 40 years ago, SDI. It is affordable. It is, as the President said, $175 billion.

And they're going to get it done in three years. And let's just put that in perspective. You're not going to have a full operating system against everything in three years. You will have a step-by-step, year after year, integrating capabilities that you will demonstrate to take out each of those systems and bring them together. By three years, you'll have a blueprint and a plan to go forward.

So it's a historic moment for everyone. It's going to change; I think it's going to change the world to make it a much more stable and safer place because of this.

So we are really honored today to have three great perspectives to come to you. We have a policy perspective. We have an Army perspective. And we have, I would say, Cyber/Hill perspective coming at you with our board and our guests, former Undersecretary John Rood for Policy, DOD, General Charlie Flynn, and Rear Admiral Mark Montgomery.

So I'd like to start it off with talking about the policy implications of Golden Dome. With a man that's been here, and we first met after the 2001 experience in the country pulling away from the ABM Treaty. So John Rood is very familiar with the arguments of destabilization. I think it would be very clear, John, if you could give us in the audience a perspective of destabilization or stabilization of what Golden Dome will do for our country and for the world. So ladies and gentlemen, John Rood.

[Mr. John Rood]
Well, thank you, Riki. It's great to be with everyone. And you're right, the announcements this week that the President made from the Oval Office, truly a historic moment in missile defense.

And the history of missile defense has been such that it has taken that kind of leadership by Presidents before to get us to this point. Riki spoke about Ronald Reagan's address, excuse me, from the Oval Office in 1983, setting out a vision for the Strategic Defense Initiative. And we should never lose sight of the fruits of that labor.

Reagan said, in my lifetime, we may not see the fruition of that technology. And he was right. But what came from the SDI initiative is the missile defense systems we are using today.

The Patriot system, the THAAD system, these were all part of the Strategic Defense Initiative. And in fact, the first international effort under SDI was the creation of Israel's Arrow missile defense system, which we saw so ably defend that country against large scale attack from Iran. And so the early parts of the missile defense effort in the modern day all sprang from that.

And then the other big thing, President Trump early in his administration here in May of 2025, making this announcement from the Oval Office, reminds me of it takes that kind of leadership after George W. Bush was elected, of course, in May of 2001, his first major

national security address from the steps of the National Defense University at Fort McNair was to announce that there was a change in the way that the United States would approach missile defense, that it no longer saw the world through a Cold War lens, and that his first major initiative would be to move beyond the ABM Treaty and to deploy a national missile defense system for the United States. Within a year, we were out of the ABM Treaty managed smoothly. And the President issued a directive that ordered the first deployment of a national missile defense system.

And two years later, that system was beginning to defend the United States just in the nick of time before North Korea wanted to create a crisis by erecting an ICBM class missile on the launch pad with the intent to threaten the United States. So here we are again at a moment where presidential leadership is being shown to put forward a vision with President Trump talking about a bold initiative, as he self-described, that will feature space to a much greater extent than done before. And General Mike Guetlein from the Space Force, certainly a terrific choice to lead this, just a tremendously capable individual.

So as Riki talked about, why are we doing this? Well, first of all, the contemporary threat environment has really evolved substantially. This is no longer a case where a small number of missiles might be launched at the United States and our potential adversaries.

We are again in a great power competition with China and Russia and the Chinese Communist Party with a very organized plan to systematically develop the capabilities to become the world's leading power and to advocate an ideological approach under which the communist model is superior to that of that shown in the West and democracy and free markets and the other things that we have come to prize. And so with that, there has come the development of thousands of ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles, cruise missiles and others by China, Russia. And don't forget about Iran and North Korea featuring these.

There used to be a discussion point and deterrence and other things that went along the lines of if an adversary were so bold as to launch a missile, they would face complete annihilation as a counterpoint. Well, you only need to read the pages of the newspapers today to see that missiles are being launched on a daily basis in very large scale numbers. Salvos of hundreds of missiles are not uncommon.

And that's not only occurring in the Ukraine war or in Iran's use of missiles against the Israelis, but smaller adversaries like the Houthis launching substantial salvos. And that's just been continuing a trend that we've seen for some time. And it's not just the development of simple ballistic missiles.

What China and others are doing, the adversary has not stayed idle after we rushed to deploy a national missile defense system. They found ways with large numbers of long-range cruise missiles, hypersonic missiles, maneuvering missiles, different types of fractional orbital bombardment systems. That's been the history of warfare, that the adversary will not sit idle.

So we have to also step up our efforts. And unfortunately, after being briefly ahead of the threat in the early 2000s, we've fallen substantially behind that threat. And weakness is provocative.

Weakness is the sort of things that leads to conflict. And there are many quotes throughout history from learned people and many examples in the pages of history. So here, what is destabilizing is to be weak and to be vulnerable and to present an opportunity for your adversary, in this case, the People's Republic of China or the Russians or others, to gain an advantage by striking.

Missile defenses are stabilizing. This is an old McNamara-era argument from the 60s that they were not. As you recall, that bad argument went that if we build defenses, it will encourage the adversary to build offenses. And so the United States for decades restrained itself. Well, what happened after that? Largest arms race in history through the Cold War and the buildup of many long-range ballistic missiles.

It's very interesting to me that somehow political science, it has that word, doesn't observe the rules of science that, you know, you need to gather data after you observe your theory to see whether the data supports your theory. And there are just many, many examples through the course of history here where this theory has been proven false. So where missile defenses are stabilizing, look at other examples.

When we first deployed the nation's first missile defense system in the early 2000s, North Korea erected an ICBM-class missile on the pad in Taepodong with the intent of creating a crisis. And very serious people like former Secretaries of Defense, William Perry and Ash Carter, argued the threat was so grave to the United States that we must conduct a preemptive strike on North Korea to eliminate this threat. And that would have touched off a large-scale war.

What did we do instead? We activated the nation's national missile defense system for the very first time to provide a defense so we could live stably behind that. We didn't raise the alert level of our forces. We didn't deploy more forces to the region. All the things that can lead to the sparks of conflict. But we had the ability to de-escalate the situation.

More recently, you saw this when Israel launched, faced an attack with several hundred missiles launched by Iran. What did Israel and the United States and other allies like the UK do in defending Israel? Shot down 300, salvos of 300 missiles, drones, and other things that the Iranians launched.

And after that, the Israelis could have exacted a very large-scale revenge. But they did not feel compelled to do that because of the destabilizing quality of being able to frustrate an attack like that from Iran through the use of effective defenses. It doesn't mean that you take away the threat from offensive retaliation.

It strengthens deterrence and provides a stabilization because otherwise any nation under which your citizens have been attacked by hundreds of missiles would feel compelled to respond in a large and aggressive way. And that's where missile defenses give you the ability to take away that. Those that argue this will create an arms race or other things, I'll just point you to editorials.

For example, in the early 2000s, I believe it was December of 2001, the New York Times carried an editorial titled ‘Invitation to an Arms Race’ and predicted that over the next five or ten years, there would be a massive buildup of Russian nuclear armaments in response to

exiting the ABM Treaty. Again, that didn't happen. It's interesting that these claims are resurfacing again, that President Trump's announcements will cause a destabilizing arms race.

Well, what Russia and China are doing by stockpiling thousands of ballistic, hypersonic, and other weapons, seems to me that's already occurring at the period of time in which we are not sufficiently defended. But somehow that's not a data point that's taken into account by some of these critics. There are many other ways that missile defenses are destabilizing and strengthen deterrence, because after all, an attacker has to calculate that if they try to attack and you defeat the attack, they still may face overwhelming retaliation.

And it gives you a way, other knobs to dial. Now, it will never be impervious or perfect defenses. This isn't a case where you only carry a shield. You also carry a sword, if you will, into battle. And that's where we can be a stronger, more secure nation if we leverage our technical talents to develop those capabilities. So that's just a little bit on the destabilizing nature.

Back to you, Riki, and thank you for inviting me.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Thanks, John. Yeah, great explanation on that. I do want to ask one question to you on a policy thing.

Are we restricted in any way with being able to test, shoot, intercept, sense in space? Because I know the Presidential executive order said we were going to do that. But as a policy expert in the Department of Defense, do we have policy restrictions for the United States to move forward with intercepting space, space-to-space, all of that?

Is that clear or does that need to be more clear?

[Mr. John Rood]
That will need to be updated to accomplish that objective. I mean, start with the basics. Why would you do activities from space?

And the reason I have this background is I happen to lead a space company, and that's one of our satellites, but I wanted to show the perspective of what you can see looking down on the Earth from a satellite, and why that's such a powerful high ground to sense and observe missiles as they're arcing through space or they're maneuvering through the atmosphere in a way that being based on the land where you're quite limited in what you can see in your field of regard looking up. And that's why people fly low to approach targets and other things of that nature. The same thing applies, by the way, to sea-based defenses.

Being able to look down from the high ground and sense and observe and then react provides enormous advantages that we've not yet leveraged. And a lot of our thinking in the Pentagon, unfortunately, is still thinking of the days when they were very large, multi-billion dollar satellites and not of the type today where small satellites are produced routinely in large number at very low cost. And launch is very...

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

John, I want to get to the actual interceptors shooting down stuff in space from space.

[Mr. John Rood]
Yes, and there's a huge advantage to using space-based interceptors for that reason. And the things that made that technically infeasible before, the ability to move data rapidly with low latency to provide accuracy and to be lower and therefore closer to your target to react in time to intercept from space. There have been many changes in the state of the technology.

But to your point on policy, there are present policy restrictions, some put in place, for example, by the previous administration under President Biden, that limit that. Now, those are policy decisions that the United States has made. And obviously, the President and the Secretary of Defense and others and the new Undersecretary of Defense for Policy can address those things and should because there will need to be many areas where policy is updated because of the thinking.

But I will say in the past, there have been some critics who have argued, well, that's called a weapon in space to have an interceptor and therefore that's undesirable. I would just say, look, the weapons that are traveling through space or that our adversaries are basing in space, we're going to have to adjust our thinking here and just dispense with some of this nonsense from before that that would be difficult. Now there are some practical considerations, about not creating debris in space and other things, but there are methods and there are ways that we can test effectively our space-based defenses, including interceptors, that does not create these kinds of challenges, if done smartly.

Now, if you do think foolishly, of course, you can create hazards and issues, but this will be the challenge ahead. It's both a technical challenge, but it's also going to be a large policy advantage. And there's going to have to be a lot of effective explaining and rallying of allies and partners to this because we're going to need allies to support us in this effort.

And it's going to be important to get their international support for the types of changes that we plan to make.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Thank you, John. Thank you. Okay, I get to turn to Charlie, General Flynn, and to the public, if you can help explain the power that was invested in Mike Guetlein yesterday.

And how this is so special to do the speed and the movement and all the stuff we're going to do in three years, and how that position is so important. And I think it was also maybe a blow to the Army and to Huntsville and that this is a space general instead of an Army guy. And the mission, which has been theirs for terminal defenses for the years that we've seen. So if you can just help educate us on a couple of those points there, it'd be great.

[Gen. (Ret.) Charles Flynn]
Well, I mean, thanks, Riki, for having me. And to John Rood's comments, I mean, there's a good follow-up on the policy side. So first of all, I guess I would say the announcement yesterday and the words of the President, the words of the SECDEF, and the words of Mike on what this is were incredibly powerful. The comments from the senators were also helpful.

So I really just have kind of four points that I want to highlight that are sort of a step down from the policy comments I think that John was making. First of all, Mike, as the executive for this, has and needs to have and was stated pretty clearly by the President and the SECDEF yesterday, has the authority to convene together the team to be able to put a operational view on how we're going to kill in space. And then from that operational view, they need to get a operational architecture together to support that view. That is the nuts and bolts, you know, blocking and tackling that has to happen now. And they need to get on that, you know, immediately. There is no time to waste. The President and the SECDEF have a three-year timeline that was clearly, again, stated yesterday. So the point being that basically I think that Mike was given a hunting license yesterday by the President and the secretary of defense to begin this work now.

There are some advantages that we have, but there are some disadvantages that we have. And this is where we need to get ourselves organized around Mike to pull this together. This is not going to be solved by a range of OPTs running around the Pentagon or other places. It's going to be solved when Mike becomes the quarterback and starts, you know, calling plays from each of these huddles. That would be my first point.

The second point is, and John touched on it a little bit, is just the space-based assets to gain that access that we need to see what's actually coming out. And I thought Mark Montgomery, Admiral Montgomery, made a great comment the other day when we were talking to the China Select Committee about what it is and what it is not. Because the question was really about nukes. You know, that is mutual assured destruction as a counter.

But what we're trying to do here is kill hypersonics, kill cruise, kill ballistic missiles, fractional orbital assets that are coming at us. And we know that the adversaries are producing these at an alarming rate. And I won't go into the numbers here, but the numbers that I saw, you know, basically between 19 and 21, what the Chinese alone had produced compared to what they had produced in one year in 22, they're cranking that out at an alarming rate. So to John's point, this is not just, you know, a couple of catches here and there. We've got to put an actual network around, you know, the dome around the homeland to defend the homeland. So that's my second point.

So, Mike's authority and his organization with the consensus of an operational view on how we intend to kill followed by an operational architecture to support that operational view. Second point is we've got to have domination in space in all the layers from LEO up. And then we also have to have that connected in many ways with the terrestrial layer.

So there is a role to play for the Navy and the Army on the ground because they're going to have to be uplink and downlink that we must have because we can't be reliant on just one layer. We have to have a terrestrial, aerial, and space layer that is connected from top to bottom, from National Command and compartmented all the way down to encrypted on the ground. And to John's point about the allies and partners, that is another area that we need to make sure that we are communicating very closely with them because when we gain, they gain and vice versa.

Third point I'd make is and this is where I'll say you know we are not going to cost our way out of this problem. There is no way we're going to be able to produce Patriot, THAADs, the radars that go with them and the interceptors that go with them and get ourselves out of this challenge that we have. We're going to have to use unique capabilities. Again, much of that is space-based but there's a there are a number of things out there in the compartmented areas that are that are ground-based that help with the uplink downlink of the layers in space. And I would just say and JD Gainey is aware of those things that we're using. They're very, very capable. They're very cost efficient and they can be part of this program and must be part of this program. That would be the third point that I make.

And then the fourth point I want to kind of end on is we cannot and this goes back to my very first point. We cannot have the same challenges and problems and retread mistakes that we made in areas like the defense of Guam. We have to avoid that and I will just say what yesterday represented to me was a clear designation of an executive four-star general that is, must be, given the authorities to convene and then be able to make decisions so we can get there quicker. This cannot be a five-year, seven-year or decade-long effort. We have got to get this thing operational as the President said yesterday and three years and the arguing and the bickering and the pointing of fingers that has to end. Mike has to be able to convene that huddle and he's got to be able to call those call those plays and we have to follow that leadership and obviously we need to put a good solid joint team around him to do that and I know that he's going to get the support from the President and the secretary of defense and undersecretary for policy Colby and then of course the chairman. So the services have to play a role here because the funding stream is coming through the services and the COCOMs, multiple COCOMs have to play a role here so this is actually a great example of how that team needs to come together to be able to gain the most from what the President's directive was yesterday verbally which was protect the homeland and defend the homeland.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
And that memo that gives him all the authorities, the resources, the command that is his documentation plus the President to step out of the processes that we have been in that have limited our ability to do a complete integrated missile defense capability for our country. That is that's coming on top of that.

Can you talk to the Army role under this? So, I need to understand how that fits in under Mike under this big space and I know Army SMDC has a tremendous role in space but how do you how do you see that?

[Gen. (Ret.) Charles Flynn]
Well, I mean you know we're going to still need to you know meet the mail on the current assets that are in play right? I mean there's THAADS that have to be out there there's the AN/TPY-2s there's the Patriots there's IFPC that that effort I think needs to in the interim needs to continue. I think the difference is that the space and missile defense commander as a component to STRATCOM and SPACECOM because that's already designated in the UCP so they have to be able to then use that position and then you know merge together with those COCOMs bring a service voice into this because that's going to be a resourcing mechanism that at least the Army's going to have to pay.

You know there's money that's got to come out of the Navy there's money that's got to come out of the Air Force and Space Force everybody's got to put on the table their contributions but there is no other mechanism within the Army other than the space and missile defense commander to I will say it to be dual hatted here he's dual hatted in the sense that he's got he's actually tri-hatted if I look at what his component role is to space and STRATCOM but also his title 10 role to the secretary of the Army to bring those resources and to bring the understanding of what it is that the Army's contributions need to be to Golden Dome.

And again, back to the operational view that I think Mike has to create and then the organizational architecture to support that operational view. Just to be clear because I said this in the last podcast. The operational view that I'm talking about is where and how we intend to kill. Like where are we going to kill? And if that's not understood by where we're going to focus our efforts and focus our resources on where we intend to kill and what I'm talking about intend to kill for the defense of the homeland. That's what's got to be designated in that OV-1 and then that OV-1 needs an architecture to support it.

And there ought not be a whole lot of bickering once everybody slaps the table on how that intends to be done. And the staffs and the services and the COCOMs need to be in support. Again, that's where he gets, you know, the license to do what he has to do from the President, the secretary of defense to Mike.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Now, from a warfighter position, getting rapid capability, innovative, how does that position now change what we've been doing in the past? Do you see that as a revolutionary change in speed of capabilities getting to the warfighter through Mike Guetlein and this special organization?

[Gen. (Ret.) Charles Flynn]
I mean, it is too early to tell in that regard. This is, you know, effective yesterday he's been designated as the executive. I think, you know, however Mike intends to organize on how he intends to do what you're talking about, I think that will be important.

I mean, you know, it may be best if JD, you know, maybe makes a couple of comments about that, about how, you know, the COCOMs can support. I mean, obviously I'm of the view that testing, and John mentioned this, testing this in all the layers, you know, from the terrestrial layer to the aerial to the space layer, the weight of this is going to end up having to be in the space layer and the terrestrial layer because that, because that work that has to happen. But some way, somehow the Department of Defense is going to have to grapple with, well, how are we going to do this experimentation?

How are we going to do the research and development? How are we going to do the test and evaluation? So that along the way, they're making the right decisions and they're checking off on the path of that.

I'm calling it an operational view. Basically, it's like, how are we going to defend and where are we going to kill? And then the operational architecture has to come from that operational view.

Right now, if somebody said this is going to be the operational architecture, they had to be thrown out of the room because we don't have the operational view done and we have to get the operational view of how we're going to defend and where we're going to kill first. And that's, if I were, if Mike were sitting here, I would tell him, job one, operational view, how you're going to kill, where are you going to kill. Job two, operational architecture to support that view.

And then, and then you've got, you know, an azimuth and direction, so to speak, as we say in the infantry on where you're going. Thank you. That's great, Charlie.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Okay. We're going to have Mark up here. And Mark, you talked a little bit about the challenges that we may have in the building and in Congress with this as well as, you know, MDA. MDA is going to be a big part of this. Let's not forget about that huge resource to be fit in underneath Mike, but that's a big resource that we haven't talked about on how that could help move forward. So I'll open it up to you, Mark, on your comments.

[Rear Admiral (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]
Thanks. So it's great to be here after John and Charlie and good to be with you, Riki. So first, I want to say exactly what you're getting at. Organization matters. Charlie talked to this, having a single leader in charge is critical.

From a congressional point of view, it's one throat to choke. You know, from Secretary Hegseth's point of view, it's one throat to choke. He needs to have one leader to be held accountable. And we're just lucky, Mike Guetlein is uniquely qualified to be that leader with both a missile defense and a space background at exactly the right moment. And so I think, you know, that's the right, we got suitcase the very first thing. Having a good leader with the right authorities is critical. We got the good leader.

Now we have to watch this carefully. We have to make sure the building doesn't, you know, like get its ligature, get its like roots and branches under the ground, pop up and grab authority from General Guetlein. He needs to... we need to knock that crap off. Secretary Hegseth needs to be, you know, a warrior on that, helping him. The General Caine, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, needs to do the same thing. Both their organizations are the actual criminals I'm talking about.

I'm talking about, you know, OSD agency offices. You know, we had a problem with CAPE during the defense of Guam issue. We've had a problem with JIAMDO, which is under the Joint Staff before. Those are good, important organizations. Their job is not to construct the vision in the system for Golden Dome. That's been assigned to General Guetlein.

All right. Now he brings in who he needs. And that's the other thing he needs to be given, the authority to bring in the right integrators, the right architects, the right engineers. And you're absolutely right. MDA is a critical part of all three of those, whether they're the lead architect and lead engineer, you know, he's got to determine how he uses them. And there are other agencies that can assist with that or have a leadership role in it.

But MDA has to have a clear role underneath General Guetlein and a leadership role in terms, I think, probably of the architecture. We pay for a metric butt ton of engineers to be at MDA. I don't know exactly how many. You tried to pin down the MDA leader a couple VTCs ago. It's in the hundreds. That's where we put them.

Put them to work. Get them to do their job. The service is going to play an important role in this. But in the end, they need to work according to the vision of General Guetlein, and I think we'll be in good shape. So first, let's get it organized right.

Second is the cost. On the Hill that's going to matter. Look $25 billion is just a nugget... a starter money... you know that's like that down payment on your house, and its more like the GI bill down payment not a regular downpayment, I mean its small. Its $25 billion. Look the President said... I'm confident the President was told, “hey we’re looking at a $175 billion for the first tranche... Don’t say that number sir.,” and he immediately said that number. Which is a lessen to whoever briefed him. So, he said the number $175 billion. It wasn't messaged at all ahead of time, right? You know what I mean?

But I'll tell you what it is. It's not the final number. Look, we have a pretty good idea that just the space-based interceptors is probably over a 10 to 15-year period going to run you $160 billion. You know, these things, the overall cost is, let's say $350 billion over 10 years. That's $35 billion a year. Just to put it in perspective, less than 3% of the Department of Defense budget to get a major threat to the homeland and/or defend our forces forward.

Charlie and I spent careers forward in Europe, in the Pacific, in the Middle East. Those forces need to be defended. They carry out the American national security interests, and they will be defended from this.

So, look, if you tell me it's $35 billion a year over 10 years, I'm living with it. It doesn't make me thrilled, but we're already spending $10 billion a year at MDA. So everybody needs to get rid of the fake angst and verklempt over this.

It's going to cost money. And by the way, if you ignore a problem for 20 years while your two adversaries kick your butt at it, and then the bill comes in and it's a little higher than you expected up front, that's what happens when you ignore a problem for 20 years. Riki, you've been harping on this for 20 years, and that's what it is.

Now, this cost is a lot less than it could be. The reason this is working in 2025 and not 1983 and not 2004 is the cost of launch has been driven down. I give Elon Musk credit on this and other space launch companies. They have driven down the cost of launch 90 plus percent.

The other thing is emerging technologies have come out that make some of the infeasible, some of the intercept ideas that the SDI guys had in 1983, and others had in the 2000s. They're there.

And then finally, we have really created any shooter, any sensor mesh networks, starting with CEC, Cooperative Engagement Capability, 35 years ago that JD and I had in the ships we commanded that really gave you this. We've evolved it. It's become a joint. It's become coalition, I hope, over time. It's certainly become coalition with some of our closest allies like Japan and Australia. We can evolve that network, that mesh network to have speed of

data, transfer of information that enables these kinds of intercepts. And that's where what Charlie said comes in very true. Terrestrial systems will inform this. If I'm trying to shoot down a cruise missile that's skimming along at 600 to 800 feet over thousands of miles, space based is interesting, but that's going through a lot of muck. The JORN-type radars that were like the land-based radars that we're going to build in Canada and the United States, four or five of them are going to be how we see that. Dirigibles up there with fire and quality track radars, I saw that the Army fielded its first THAAD-based radar that can see hypersonics. The Navy has, SPY can already do that.

One of those two systems up in a dirigible at 40,000 feet is going to give you, you're tipped off by a JORN. It's going to give a fire and quality track data to a space base interceptor that's going to hammer a cruise missile. It's going to hammer a hypersonic missile.

So those three things, the cost of launch, the technology of engagement, and the mesh networks that, you know, and there's again, the companies, you know, I mentioned SpaceX, Palantir is probably part of this. They're not all of it though. And that's something that, you know, Mike Guetlein gets to set. It's going to have the traditional special industrial base, the new guys like Palantir and Anduril and SpaceX, but also companies whose names we don't know who are developing the coolest technology out there. And they're going to be either coming on their own or be purchased by those other companies that come in and be part of this.

And finally, if I could mention one other thing, it's the President said three years, look, the President's not like a military planner. So, he doesn't use terms like IOC and FOC, initial operating capability, final operating capability. There's going to be some IOC during his time as President. He's going to ensure it. That's in three years now. The final operating capability on what we're kind of envisioning here is probably seven to nine years away, 10 years away. That's okay. Look, get some IOC out there, some initial capability out there and invest towards your final operational capability. And don't get distracted with the IOC, get distracted with the FOC, get that done.

And if I say one other thing, this is about terms you and I use all the time, DAL and CAL. Your CAL, your critical asset list, what I want to protect in America and my forward deployed forces. It's large, it's everything. It's population centers, it's military bases, it's your forward deployed forces, your DAL, your defended asset list, which you can really defend. It's infinitesimally small right now in the homeland. It's the national capital region against cruise missiles and a very limited nuclear strike from North Korea. We got to grow the DAL to look like the CAL. And that's what happens over three years, five years, seven years, nine years. That's how you measure success. You don't get wrapped up in this.

So I wish we kind of hadn't said three years. I wish we hadn't said 175 billion, but they're out there. They're good metrics to work from. But the guy who's going to drive this, General Mike Guetlein needs to be constrained only, he needs to be constrained only by his own vision and the resources he's given. So he's got to go sell this in Congress and do everything. I'm excited.

Last thing I want to say, the President was asked, did your military commanders ask for this? He said, I told them and they liked it. They asked for it. How many times did we hear

General Glen VanHerck? I mean, I thought he had to be restrained his last couple hearings. He was demanding this system. He was the former NORTHCOM commander. The current NORTHCOM commander wants it. The INDOPACOM commanders wants it. Crazy US Army Pacific commanders were on it. Commanders have been asking for this for 10 to 15 years. President Trump has stepped up and is going to deliver it here.

And I think on a bipartisan basis, Congress is going to support this because Congress wants to defend the homeland and they want to defend our forces in the field. So Riki, this is a great announcement, just like you said two days ago. I'm excited and I look forward to discussing this and supporting General Guetlein as he moves forward over the next few years.

[Gen. (Ret.) Charles Flynn]
I would say one thing on Mark's comment there. It's incredibly important when there's already response out of China on this. So that point is a really important point here is that they're listening to every word. They recognize in that office that the Secretary of Defense followed the President's comments and then Mike's comments.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
You have a legitimate general. You have a legitimate four-star general.

[Gen. (Ret.) Charles Flynn]
That right there to Mark's point is organize around him, give him the authorities to do what he has to do. And I agree with you on the timeline, but I actually think it was important to say three years yesterday because we need to get on the gas here very quickly and gain that kind of speed momentum so that your point is a good one in that it may be seven to eight years, but in three years, we got to be on azimuth and we got to be, you know, positive of the momentum that we're on.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Mark, just two things for you. This is, if you have 8,000, 10,000 satellites up there doing the sensing, collecting data, this is not just the United States anymore. It's not. We know that. So that hasn't been incorporated in that. And if you're able to detect wherever these things are launched from, you're going to be able to precision strike possibly from that. Do we want to, is this big golden dome anyway shape or form part of a left of launch offense or structure, or do we just leave that alone and just build that to what it is? I'm just pushing this a little bit.

[Rear Admiral (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]
That's a great question. So first I want to address that we're going to have different tranches of satellites or different layers of satellites. We're going to have satellites that detect and sense launch. We're going to have satellites that do fire control, that do tracking. We're going to have transport layer satellites that move information between them. And we are going to have engagement satellites. And we've been talking about defensive engagement satellites. So I'm hoping the number's not 8,000 to 10,000, by the way, Riki. I'm going to peg my number around 1,000, maybe 800 to 1,200, but you could be right and I could be wrong on this.

And I'd love that you mentioned it because everything, because this is about our allies and partners as well. Canada and us do cost sharing on a lot of things. Eventually we'll do some cost sharing on this. They're going to pay for a couple of JORN radars that are critical to us because they need to be placed in Canada for the purposes of seeing what we want to see coming from Russia and China. And they should potentially pay for other things too as we get this. And we've done that with them through the North American Air Defense Command over the last 60, 70 years. I'm comfortable with that.

You mentioned, I think offensive weapons for space, that's an option. That's a decision we make. I think, I've moved well into that camp, but I recognize that's a presidential decision that needs to be made. The good news is we've got a long way to go to that decision. And I think, I'm not sure that's what Mike Gutlein's being asked to design at this moment, but eventually he may be given that mission, I think. And then we have to go through a lot of discussion on our side about how those weapons are controlled and things like that. But right now let's concentrate on the fact that this is a significant defensive effort to ensure the American homeland's protected. The same way we protect our border, the same way you invest in cyber defense, and the same way you invest in this critical missile defense, and also to support our forward deployed forces who are already, I mean, the risk to them is today. The weapons hit them today. The weapons we're thinking about hitting us, a handful could hit us today, but there are not a lot of Russian or Chinese hypersonic and cruise missiles that can range us at this moment. But they're coming and they're coming within, you know, you can measure it in years, not decades.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Mark, so those satellites can protect this architecture to protect our forward operating forces forward, because they're all, right? That seems logical. Is that correct or not?

[Rear Admiral (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]
Correct. Yes.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
So we're not saying it, but that's part of the system.

[Rear Admiral (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]
And it's in his executive order. The President put it in his executive order. He said, defend our forces forward. Mike's got that as a tasker. I promise. Mike, General Guetlein has that as a tasker.

[Gen. (Ret.) Charles Flynn]
Absolutely. I think John brought up this point in his comments in the beginning, toward the end there. You know, we're going to have to, and I think it's very helpful to start having that conversation with the allies and partners where assets are today, and that we have to have that. You know, there's an interdependency that has to be created here between what they have and what we have. And I think that that is beneficial, not just for our forward deployed forces, but also for our forward deployed forces that are on sovereign terrain, sovereign territory of another country, you know, Korea, Japan. You know, soon we're going to have assets in Australia. You know, we're training in all these different, you talked about, you

know, the European continent and the Middle East. I mean, this is defending forward. Absolutely.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
And that adds to the deterrent of everything.

[Mr. John Rood]
Just to come in on that point, today, one of the big advantages of doing this kind of sensing from space and being able to provide data directly to forces forward, to allies forward, and ideally to the shooter forward, the holy grail is to provide data directly to the interceptor. In other words, as the target is detected upon launch and you can determine where it is headed, being able to provide that tracking data directly to an interceptor, which is already launched in flight to provide that closing end game, whether that interceptor is based in space or based in at sea or on land, that is within the realm of the possible. And don't forget that this will take several hundred, probably thousands of satellites, but that work is already underway.

The President is, you know, had the good sense to create the Space Force and Space Development Agency. We've already launched three tranches of missile tracking satellites by the Space Development Agency. Proposals went in yesterday for the next tranche. That was tranche zero, one, two, three. Yesterday was tranche three. That work to create hundreds of satellites in the proliferated warfighter space architecture is already occurring and shows the value of rapid acquisition. And that was done during the first term that the President had in office. That was put underway. It's now being materialized.

So, there's a good demonstration that it's possible and the enabling capability can really be transformative. We just have to unleash ourselves and really start to go after this in a structured, rapid way.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Thanks, John. Hey, Mark, since you're up on the hill, I was up there today. I met with Cramer and Kelly.

How do you see this as bipartisan? Do we have Democratic senators and congressmen that would support this or because of politics may not support this? Can you help?

[Rear Admiral (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]
It's defense, like I work a lot in cyberspace, you know, that almost everything's bipartisan. In defense, a lot is bipartisan. I mean, in the end, you get reasonable votes on the NDAA, particularly inside the committees.

So, I think there will be Democratic senators and congressmen that support this, that support defending the homeland. They may not, you know, when you took it to the next step of, are we going to use it for offensive weapons systems? I think you'd probably get more pushback there on that side right of the aisle right now. But for what the President has asked for, I believe he's going to get bipartisan support.

Now, look, if it's cloaked inside a bill that has other things they don't like, you know, other initiatives they don't like, they'll still vote against the NDAA or something. But that's not

about this issue. As this issue gets voted through committee, goes through conference, you know, gets into the final bill, it'll have bipartisan support. There'll be amendments from both sides. So, I'm comfortable that appropriations and authority support for this will be bipartisan. It won't be unanimous or anything, but it'll be bipartisan. Democrats want to defend the homeland. Democrats want to defend forces in the field.

I think there's been a general recognition. I get that the Biden administration and the Obama administration and even the last Trump administration did not push aggressively enough for defense of space, but the technology and the cost of launch weren't there. You know, they're there now. I think people can overcome, there's still a little bit of a theology out there that, you know, we shouldn't be fighting in space. Look, this is like saying, hey, my adversaries decided to start, you know, throwing, you know, haymakers. I'm not going to throw them, you know, and find out how that match goes, right? That's not going to go well, right? You absolutely have to compete with them in space.

So, I do believe we're going to have a bipartisan effort here, Riki. The problem is the overall bill may still break down on partisan lines, but it's going to be other issues, not Golden Dome, that is a purely partisan issue.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Mark, would you name any top leaders that you think would be part of this, that'll lead this, like we've got Sullivan and Kramer going on the other side?

[Rear Admiral (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]
I'd be surprised if Angus King or Mark Kelly were opposed to this. You know, I think they want to defend the homeland. They might be opposed to aspects of it and want some amendments.

You know, and I think in general, Senator Reed is about defending the homeland. Again, they will fight portions of it. They won't fight the concept and the vision of it, and they certainly won't fight the idea of General Guetlein being an empowered singular leader. I mean, that's Senator Angus King's number one thing. I want a throat to choke, you know, so I think we'll get it to him. In the House, I think Moulton. I think there's others, but Representative Moulton, you know, as long as we're proper about how we describe it, and as long as it's, you know, as long as it's fully explained and the costs are understood, I think you'll get some, so there's some very reasonable Democrats in this, particularly in the Armed Services Committee who are going to support this.

[Gen. (Ret.) Charles Flynn]
I'm going to make one quick point, because this came up the other day in our session on the China Select Committee with Admiral Montgomery and myself. I, you know, a limiting factor in this is our ability to, we've got to secure some rare earth elements, and we've got to make sure our manufacturing base gets fixed. It is anemic right now, and there is pressure I would say that Congress is going to have to put, because these things, I mean, the numbers we're throwing out cost-wise are so high, but if we don't, you know, regain control of our supply chain to fix the organic industrial base so that defense industrial base can get the things it needs on time, and all of this is, you know, suspect. I mean, candidly, you know, sustainment of this or securing the supply chains in order to create these capabilities, I

mean, we are on our heels and buckled right now. We have got to fix that. We do need Congress to come in on that. Mark, I wasn't surprised at the questions the other day by a couple. I was more surprised that there were more than five that talked to us about it, and I thought that was important.

[Rear Admiral (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]
No, I agree. I think, Riki, we've done a good job socializing this, you know, and missile defense advocates like you have done that, so thanks. I'll kick it back to you.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Yeah, I'm going to let JD I'm sorry, we got some time here. JD, a couple comments from you, and then a question or two from the audience would be great.

[J.D. Gainey]
Yeah, thanks. Thank you for hosting this, Riki. Batting fourth in the lineup of All-Stars. Nobody knows who that is, so it's a pleasure to be here.

So, not a lot of questions coming out from the audience that we have not discussed. One in particular that General Flynn alluded to earlier, and the question was, what are the acquisition and technical risks associated with the President's announcement?

And as we've said, General Guetlein will have the authorities. He already has the acquisition mechanisms in place, some as recent as two months old, modular open systems, architecture guidelines, software pathfinder, acquisition plans. You have competitive acquisition plans. The General's going to have as many vehicles as he needs to go out and accelerate major program capabilities into his portfolio and go out and grab commercial technology and on ramp it into his portfolio through technical transition programs.

So, from an acquisition execution piece, we're in a good place there. The technical piece, it's really at that transition or implementation from what he designs and what he provides to the warfighters. And we've seen this time and time again. This is what General Flynn's comment was about with COCOMs. Each COCOM, rightfully so, has their own way of doing things. Geographically, threat-based, it doesn't matter. So, there's going to be that final 5% to 10% tweaking that has to occur at the combatant command level to be able to implement the Golden Dome requirements and necessities. More times than not, that final piece is not either paid for or funded or inconsistent across the COCOMs. So, when we start talking about technical risk, it's not really technical risk of developing this architecture and these capabilities. It's really that critical piece of handing off and implementing it with the warfighters.

And so, as we look at the roles and responsibilities of the warfighters and the combatant commands, they're not there to drive the solution. They're there to recognize, hey, this is going to work, but I need the following things, really resourcing, to be able to get it on par and implement it into my AOR. So, I just want to throw that out there.

The combatant commands already have joint exercise programs, experimentation programs, to be able to do on-the-go testing. And where we need major test events, nobody

does it better than the Missile Defense Agency. Their test evaluation program is heads and shoulders above anybody else's.

So, I just kind of put that out there as we have everything we need to keep moving forward. We just need the enablers to be able to raise their hand and say, I got your back, General. Tell me how to support. Not start creating, as you said, OPTs to start defending that piece. So, these are kind of the initial concerns that we're seeing come out. Over.

[Gen. (Ret.) Charles Flynn]
That's a great point, JD. I mean, you know, the unique aspects that the COCOMs need, that final, like you said, you know, five, ten percent, or, you know, the final, the last ten yards are going to have to be, you know, modified somewhat so they meet the needs of the combatant commanders. That is a really important point. And there'll be differences, and that's okay. We just have to account for that, and Mike has to account for that. And, of course, their voice has to have a form to be able to be heard in. So, great point.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Great. JD, anything else? You good?

[J.D. Gainey]
Nope, nope, that's it. We've covered all. It was a good one.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
I know it's a great discussion. I want to wrap up with those closing remarks.

Mark?

[Rear Admiral (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

I'm good.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
You're good. Okay, John?

[Mr. John Rood]
Well, just thanks for getting us together, Riki, on this important occasion. And I think this initiative, as it continues to go forward, inevitably is going to face detractors and those who are not on board, who will subtly try to slow that down. And we're just going to have to be attentive to how that's done. It doesn't mean there aren't other important missions or other important needs going on in the Defense Department or the Congress is dealing with. But typically, people will not frontally oppose these kinds of initiatives. It's rather through side mechanisms or delay. So, it's the kind of thing that all of us have got to pay attention to and try to rally the team around this great initiative and get General Guetlein the support that he needs to be successful.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Thank you, John. Charlie?

[Gen. (Ret.) Charles Flynn]

Nope. I just want to say it was a great day yesterday. Very timely to have this event here today, Riki. And John, good to see you. Thanks for your advocacy of all this work. Mark, great to see you again. Look forward to working with you if we need to go back at the Select Committee. And JD, as always, adding a touch of pragmatism at the end there. So, thanks very much for your contributions as well. And Riki, bless you for what you're doing here. Thank you.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
This is momentous. This is invincibility. It's taken 40 years.

It's taken 40 years of lessons learned to get this where it is today. We have invincible movement with this. It's only going to become stronger and stronger. It's the way to win. We'll figure out a way to win on this. And it is leadership. It is leadership on the top of this. Yeah, you can put all the new technologies, what you want underneath it. But if you don't have that right, you're not going to get it done. And we haven't got it done those last 40 years.

We are in the best position as a nation to make this happen for real. And it's going to happen. The momentum is unstoppable. And it's so fun to be on a team like this. This is what you live for, to be on teams that are invincible, that are world champions. And we're going to be the world champion. So, thank you for all of you for joining us today and communicating what happened yesterday to the public, to the movement on that. So, thank you very much.