

Virtual CRT: Defending Americans at Home and Abroad Transcript June 27th 2025

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It's kind of a muggy summer day here in Europe. I'm in Germany. I'm Riki Ellison. I'm the chairman and founder of the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance. We are built for the sole mission of making our nation safer, the world safer, through the deployment and evolution of missile defense.

This has been a significant month, historically, in the missile defense history of the world. There have been three different campaigns happen at tremendous levels, starting with June 1st when the Ukrainians took out the Russian bombers. A left of launch capability and Ukraine had to withstand the counterattack from Russia, which the highest ever in one day, over 500, with both ballistic missiles, drones, and so forth.

Then on June 13th, Israel did a magnificent left of launch again with special forces to go after Iran. They were able to withstand everything Iran had because they had a significant missile defense capability that has been built by us with them over the past 20, 30 years, and then here we go. Probably the biggest strike the United States of America has done. You can go all the way back on that, and the political will to do that, and our ability to defend against their counterattack, that happened.

This is the new way of warfare right now that's happening. We have to be able to get much better at defending our homeland and our bases forward and make that deterrent as strong as it is. That's a big stick deterrent. That stick, for some of us, has been wound back since 1978 with the Iran hostage crisis that elected Ronald Reagan. We swung that stick and we swung it hard and we hit a grand slam for deterrence around the world. That bat hit that ball and everyone understood what that was.

We were able to cover our first base, which was our bases forward closest to Iran with the Patriot units that the chairman so eloquently praised, the 44, I think, patriots [operators] over in Qatar. We've been there. We've had Defenders of the Year there, but a magnificent part of that, that they were one of many Patriot and THAAD units on that first baseline directly across from Iran that were ready to go to defeat and defend from that. We had our second base covered, and that was our Aegis ships, our BMD ships in the eastern Med., the four that we've been assigned to it, and the European phase adapted approach that we put forward, and the Romania site for southern Europe with SM-3s.

They were all poised, ready to play because Iran had the capability to strike U.S. bases in Europe. Then our third base coverage, which was the northern part of Europe with the Poland site, PAA, and our ships possibly in the North Sea, and our radars in Fylingdales and Iceland, all the way back to the U.S. homeland. We're all engaged, ready to play.

It was a team effort to make that deterrent so powerful and the message so powerful that the world is safer, and the United States sure is safer than it was a week ago, today. It's significant, but we have to defend our homeland. The Golden Dome that was announced three months ago has to happen with urgency and with authorities to get our homeland defenses strong because Iran didn't have the ability to strike us through missiles and cruise missiles to the U.S. homeland. Next two or three years, other countries can and maybe will. That's why we have to do as much as we can to do this. As my good friend, General John Hyten, has always said on deterrents is you have to have political will. You have to deliver a

knockout punch that they can't stop, no matter what, and you got to be able to defend against everything they got. That's called deterrence, and we did it. So, I'd like to start off the conversation with an expert, our board member, an expert on what exactly happened on the offensive side of bringing that knockout punch. That is Charles Corcoran. He is the former Deputy Director of all of Air Force Ops, and just a great man involved with this whole thing. Corky, thank you for joining us. I look forward to your remarks.

[Major General (Retired) Charles Corcoran]

Thanks, Riki. Thank you for your continued leadership with MDAA and to all the other panel members. It's great to see you all here again today and be a part of this team. I'm glad, Riki, that you hit all the way back to the late 70s with this Iranian regime. They've been a thorn in our side, a thorn in Israel's side, and a thorn in the side of so many others since they took power in 1979. We've been making attempts to counter that malign influence since that time, but I think that it all reached a tipping point on, obviously, October 7th of 2023 for Israel.

What you've seen since October 7th is Israel execute a very strong campaign to one by one dismantle all of Iran's proxies that were near them to take away Iran's ability to attack them through those proxies. That prepped the battlefield, if you will, taking out Hamas, Hezbollah, making sure that the threats in Syria are rolled back. That then allowed Israel to go after the last capability that Iran had to reach out and touch them with, which is the ballistic missiles.

Then you saw a methodical campaign there by the Israelis. We often talk about or people think about MDAA being focused on maybe endgame effectors, whatever, but this crowd knows and many of our listeners do know that when we talk missile defense, we're talking full spectrum. As you mentioned, from left of launch, political pressure, all the way through endgame terminal effectors and having passive defenses in place for the missiles to get through.

What you're asking me to talk about and I'm happy to talk about as a left of launch piece, that political and diplomatic pressure is, like you said, General Hyten tells us, it's the essence of deterrence. Your adversary has to know that he or she will pay the price if they launch these missiles or drones or what have you at us or at any of our allies. That has to be there. That political will has to be there. It has to be backed up with the capability. The capability that we're talking about here is, in a short phrase, it's the ability to hold global targets at risk.

Any point on the globe, we will find you, we will kill you, above ground, underground, doesn't matter. We have the whole of government capability, including a joint military force that has the tools and the training and the organization and the know-how to get in there and take out anything you have to threaten us. You cannot hide anywhere on terra firma or above it.

That capability is not a pickup game. Like I said, it's a whole of government partner effort. What you saw just in the U.S. part of it, with our part of the strike that piled onto what Israel had already done, you saw space assets, cyber assets, Air Force assets, Navy assets, Army. It was the whole joint force. The entire joint force played in going in there and thumping Iran to carry on the effort that Israel was already doing. How does this happen?

How do you get that capability? It starts with intel. You have to have exquisite intel that is constantly updating every little detail about what capabilities the enemy has, where they're located, where they're stored, how they're launched, what their way of doing business is, and then what defenses are available.

How do they defend those assets that they might shoot at you? That and other things allows you and allows us, Israel, to develop the capabilities that we need to go after those defenses and ultimately go after those offensive capabilities that could come at us with, to develop the material that we need to test, to refine, to train, and be ready to go, should we be called on to do so. Again, this was not a pickup game on Israel's part.

It was not a pickup game on our part. We were ready to go when the National Command Authority said go. In the case of Iran, we knew, the Israelis knew, our partners knew. The missiles that are available to affect Israel numbered around 2,500 to 3,000 pre-conflict here. They had about 350 launchers that could propel those things towards Israel. They're surrounded with significant air defenses to protect those launch sites and those storage places.

Israel started all this; they went in there last winter and started to dismantle the air defenses. Then more recently, they had an integrated plan in place, with both in-nation assets and then long-range air assets to go in and degrade and destroy the air defenses first, which enabled their Air Force to have freedom of maneuver, to stay overhead and take out these missile launchers, as well as attack missile storage sites.

You can't do that if you don't have air superiority. It started with a really solid plan to get air superiority over Iran. Then from there, allow them to hang out overhead with that freedom of maneuver and basically play the old whack-a-mole game when the Iranians poke their head out to continue to take out launchers.

What we've seen since the beginning of the conflict until now, when the ceasefire happened, that missile number that they started out with 2,500 to 3,000, Israel assesses that Iran's down to about 1,000 to 1,500 missiles, still a lot, but probably a third of what they had. Israel has taken out 250 of those assessed to be 350 launchers, so only about 100 launchers left. Again, if Israel had to go back, the air defenses in Iran have not been reconstituted, so that capability is still there as well.

What this allowed us to do is the higher-level strategic campaign goal for Israel and for us is we don't want Iran to have a nuke, where you can't just go in there and attack those nuclear sites. You had to prep the battlefield, like we said. You had to take out the ability for them to hit back at us, which Israel largely did for us, and you had to take out those air defenses.

All that enabled us to go in with our naval assets, things like tomahawks, our air assets to suppress any additional air defenses remaining and get the B-2s to the target so they could drop their weapons on those nuclear sites. All this to say, again, it's a team effort. It's a team effort, starting with the intel, understanding the adversary, and then organizing, training, and equipping as a joint force, integrating with your other government agencies, your covert kind of operations, and integrating with your partners in the region to be ready for the aftermath of those strikes.

This is how it's supposed to be done, and like you said, something like this, I do believe, helps restore deterrence because the adversary sees that there isn't any place on this Earth that you can hide from American air power, from allied air power, from allied joint power, I should say, because again, it's a team effort. I'll stop there, Riki. Thanks.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

Yeah, thank you, Corky. What's remarkable about this one, the U.S., it was just a couple hours. It's not a sustained fight like the Ukraine thing is, like the Israel-Iran thing. That's preserving our capability, but a single strike like that and we're out. That's all that was

needed. Why do you just think that that happened? I mean, they had a little scurry, a cutoff, but they're done. It's over. Is that fair to say that we did that correctly?

[Major General (Retired) Charles Corcoran]

Well, if you're talking about the U.S. strike in particular, that was focused on a few hard targets that Israel's Air Force or Israel's Joint Force didn't have a capability to get at.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

We didn't have to. We just did that, and we're good enough with this. We're just coming in, inserting, getting out, and now we have the terms.

[Major General (Retired) Charles Corcoran]

We did that as part of—that was one piece of a much larger campaign that we are joining Israel in to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon for some amount of time, hopefully a very long time. We'll wait and see how that unfolds. But we helped our partners, Israel, to push back the current Iranian regime's ability to get a nuclear weapon.

From a missile defense perspective, it all started with Israel dismantling the air defenses and our combined teams understanding where Iran's missile threat resides, who operates it, taking out their operators, taking out their comm networks, taking out their ballistic missile storage facilities, taking out their launchers, and proving that we can go back and do that again should it be necessary. All that has to happen before you go in and take out the nuclear sites or you're setting yourself up for quite a disaster.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

I'm just giving you a collective win, Corky. That's a win. That is a powerful one. Thank you, Corky. I'd like to turn now over to a four-star perspective, former Commander for the U.S. Army Pacific. I want to have Charlie talk about the political will, because that's a critical piece. If you don't have that and you have the other two, you still don't have the deterrent. I think Charlie gives us a great perspective.

[General (Retired) Charles Flynn]

Thanks, Riki. Thanks for your leadership and what MDAA does to advocate for this important role of protection and defending. I think Corky laid out a really good scene of the offensive part of the capabilities that we have.

I'll stitch together a couple of comments he made there that require a little highlighting. The will and capabilities Corky talked about, you have to have both of those. You have to have the will to do it, political will to do it, and you have to have the offensive, defensive, protective capabilities to actually have the credibility to do it.

The threat of all that and the combination of those two is really important. I think this discussion of intelligence, the way I look at it is the President gave a 60-day warning, and they didn't get their act together in 60 days. If I put my military hat on, that begins a series of activities to get options together.

You heard the Chairman and the SECDEF lay out very, very well in the last couple of press conferences what actually occurred. But as you all can imagine, for those members here today talking, but everybody on the net, for all of us that put our uniform back on, all of that planning that goes on during that 60-day period is to create options for the President and the National Command Authority. What does all this mean? I think that Iran, at the end of the

day, they need two things. They need proxies, and they need the threat or the actualization of a nuclear weapon. Now the proxies are dismantled.

I won't say defeated, but they're certainly degraded, disrupted, and they're denied the ability to operate. Then the nuclear program, again, I know there's a great debate out there, but from my perspective, what's been briefed, and what we know right now is it ain't coming back anytime soon. With those two prongs of what the regime needs to retain strength, and now you have this swell of cooperation, I'll say, in the Middle East, I don't know where it's going to go.

But what the National Command Authority, under the President's leadership and the direction of SECDEF and the Chairman and the Joint Force, this is an extraordinary moment in time for us to look at what's actually occurred in the Middle East and what that means globally for reestablishing deterrence. That would be my first point. The second point I'll go to is, if we look at, and Corky laid out, there's protection assets in there, there's defensive assets in there, there is multinational assets in there, there's joint assets in there that have to be employed and put in place to conduct that strike.

Then I'm going to go to this other part of deterrence, and this is about Golden Dome. I think it's really important right now. The second point, the discussion about putting in place Golden Dome from a protect and defend standpoint, and then a counterfire standpoint is really important.

Again, it's going to take the joint team to do that. The third point I'd make is that we have to get ahead of this. It's not just offense. It's not just defense. It's also this ability to collect, to sense, to identify, detect, characterize, track, and conduct a counterattack or an intervention against it, or make sure we get the effectors in the right place. I thought the chairman did a really, really good job of highlighting the Patriots the other day in his press conference because you have to be able to defend because you're going to get something on the back end of this.

I know that we talked about this the last time, but I always say in the THAAD, Patriot, even in the other assets that are there on air defense or integrated air and missile defense, everybody loves the launchers, but it's all the sensing that actually has to happen for those launchers to be effective and to put those effectors on target. All of that collection of seeing, sensing, understanding, identifying, tracking, characterizing, tracking, intercepting, that's where the music is made. That's a really, really important point, I think, on the Golden Dome architecture, which, again, I don't want to get deep into it, but that's an important part of what Mike G and the team are going to do to pull that together.

The fourth point I'd make is, boy, after this month, and Riki I thought you did a really good job of laying out like what's actually unfolded in the last 27, 28, 30 days here, but we have to have a sense of urgency right now. We cannot let our foot off the gas pedal. We cannot follow normal processes in the Pentagon or in any of the defense agencies to deliver Golden Dome.

That direct report program manager, as the direct report to the Secretary of Defense and the President on the delivery of the Golden Dome of America, got to have the responsibility, got to have the authorities, got to have the organization, and they got to move quickly with, I'm going to say, public-private partnership to pull this together. Otherwise, we're not going to get there. These are not normal times right now to do this.

My last point is, we all have to have a sense of urgency to deliver this thing because, back to the beginning, you have to have the will, political will, but you also have to have the military capabilities to actually pull these offense, defense, and protective-like attacks off. We need it to be enabled by the multinational friends that we have, but it must be a joint operation, full stop from beginning to end, in order for this to work. You just saw, in my view, the extraordinary state of the joint force being able to pull something like that off.

The other thing, the last point I'd make is, no military on the face of the earth can pull off what we just pulled off. That ought to send shivers down the spines of every leader who does and wakes up every day to do harm to the United States of America or our allies and partners. I think that that's a really important part of what we just all witnessed. Again, thanks for the team here and for the listeners. Riki, back to you.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

Thanks, Charlie. Great, great, great interpretation. You're right, and so is Corky, on that Golden Dome data collection. Any place in the world that has the C2 to be able to shed that data to the joint force to be able to enhance our deterrent is huge. That is going to be offense and defense with that. That can only happen, Charlie, if Mike G has the authorities to do this.

He's not hampered by not having those authorities. Like you said, we've got to move out on this. Can I ask, over the last 40 years, Charlie, why all of a sudden—and let's not get political. I don't want to get political, but this is a perfect storm. Why hasn't this happened 10 years ago, when all these other situations have happened this close? Why hasn't it taken us this long to do a perfect deterrent position? We weren't ready for that or was it political will? Just your thoughts on why this is the most optimal time we've ever seen to do this.

[General (Retired) Charles Flynn]

Well, let me state something up front, and then I'll come to—I don't know if I can answer why, but I'll tell you what I think are contributing factors to the lack of our ability to pull this together. First of all, I believe that we have always had the technology, and today the technology exists. That is not the problem.

My view on this is that we've not been well organized. We don't have a designated leader in charge of it, and that there's been a fragmented and fractured way about going about pulling all this together. So my hope is that through a direct report program manager, a designated leader of the Golden Dome of America effort, that there's some decision authority, because he's been given the responsibilities to do it.

If you give the leader the responsibility to do it, and you don't give them the authorities to do it, we're not going to get there. So if you're going to make somebody responsible, you're going to have to give that responsible leader the authorities to actually do it. And make decisions. And I think that that has been, in my view, where confusion sets in. And again, back to my last point, this is not the time for normal processes to be followed on the employment, deployment, and construction of the Golden Dome of America. So we have to follow something different.

And I'm encouraged that we've designated in writing the direct report program manager for the Golden Dome of America. That's a good step in the right direction. Now it will be put in concrete, real roles, responsibilities, functions, and authorities in order to get that done. Otherwise, everybody's arguing about breadcrumbs, and that's where we get screwed up. So that's my thinking on it.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

Thanks, Charlie. Thanks for being in my office right there. It's great with Reagan behind you. You look great. Thank you. All right. Let's go now to JD and talk about the defensive capabilities that we have in place abroad and at home that was able to enhance our deterrence and our confidence and our ability to strike Iran without them being able to hit us back. JD?

[Mr. JD Gainey]

Yeah, thanks, Riki. Fellow board members and panelists, it's great to see you. So first and foremost, we've mentioned it, but you got to give a shout out to those soldiers at the Patriot Battalion. I don't know if you've seen on Instagram or YouTube videos, the voiceover during the launch. You hear things like, "yeah, that's my missile." The ownership, the pride that these soldiers conveyed. It was cool. It was inspiring. It just gives chills how awesome it is, especially when your stuff works the way it's supposed to work and to achieve those effects because those soldiers know if anything gets through Patriot, you rely on hope, luck, and prayer to save the day. So yeah, tip the cap to those guys. However, as was mentioned, that kill chain starts well left of the actual engagement. And I know this when I had command of Hopper.

I had this mission on deployment. We had the mission—I was activated as the ballistic missile defense commander and integrated air missile defense commander for CTF-50 during that deployment. So I saw it from not only the detection of those threats coming from Iran, but it's the intelligence piece to put that Patriot Battalion in the right posture to be able to light off those effectors. A lot of technology is involved with this. People don't realize that the weather, especially that area of the world, is significant. And it does a lot of confusion and adds complexity to your standard kill chains of the defense design. So when we start talking about the sensors, understanding what the threat is, classifying the threat, identifying it, those are all critical pieces that happen almost instantly when those threats are lit off. And seeing that information pass through various kill chains and various battle management command and control nodes that ultimately get to the Patriot is significant. It's absolutely significant.

But the reason why you saw that success is like the Aegis ballistic missile defense training program, like the Patriot and the THAAD ballistic missile defense training program, they have been prepared. And they've been prepared not only for that mission, but part of that curriculum is you have to demonstrate efficiencies to defend other critical asset defense designs, like the defense of Japan, defense of homeland, defense of Korea, defense of Israel. So just because you saw a successful piece over Qatar and our critical asset defense is out there in the middle of the Persian Gulf, that doesn't mean that's their one and only mission.

So again, shout out to the Army Air Defenders. You guys crushed it. As an Aegis guy, outside of being on the Aegis ship, you guys are the safest place in the world with that type of technology and training and commitment to excellence that they portrayed. So that's super cool. I've been seeing a lot of questions come up about the application of the actual defense kill chains with respect to Golden Dome, with respect to regional IMD. It was mentioned by panelists before, but I want to focus on scaling the problem that we saw, the successful engagements to other homeland defense to include Hawaii or to Guam defense.

In the Middle East, it's saturated, especially from a space-based perspective, looking down, those satellites have the ability to see almost everything at the same time. You don't have that luxury with respect to the amount of territory that requires constant evaluation in ISR like in the Pacific or over the Atlantic. And this is applicable to Golden Dome because not only do we have to increase the capacity of those overhead and space-based sensors, there's a tax

that's associated with that, is be able to get that information up and out to the decision maker to be able to pass that information down to the thing screen effects. In this case, it was Patriot. So the level of complexity added Golden Dome is there with respect to, I need more stuff. I need more stuff in orbit. I need a resilient data architecture to get the stuff from orbit down to the effector. And I need to have those effectors in position or posture to be able to achieve the effects. So those effectors, they could be land-based as we saw, they could be maritime-based.

So these are things, I don't want to say challenges, but these are things that the Golden Dome of America plan is going to smoke out and be able to show; hey, there's things that work right now that we need to scale and utilize, but there's gaps in the defense design. There's gaps in the information sharing, in the engagement piece that we need to go after. So when we talk about going after it, do we take residual capabilities and use it in a different way? Do we have to go build something from scratch? The answer is D, all the above. And so it's going to take a pretty significant effort from the Golden Dome team to have that forward-facing commercial interface to be able to understand what's out there that can enable this mission set.

Thank you.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

JD, thank you. I want to draw back to the Army, Patriot, and THAAD. Their dwell time, they are the most overworked, I think, branch in the entire U.S. Army. We only got eight, I think, of these out there. A lot of them are at home because we have to rotate them. We've gone through a tremendous amount of inventory. We're not producing enough to do this. When we do the Golden Dome with \$175 billion, great, but you cannot neglect our bases forward and the lack of capability they have today and inventory. So how would you balance that? Are you going to ask for more money for that mission outside of Golden Dome to cover that? Because Golden Dome's not over there yet.

[Mr. JD Gainey]

Yeah. So it starts with policy and roles and responsibilities. What Golden Dome is going to have to require is persistent and enduring defense for the United States. We don't have persistent and enduring missile defense forward. It's episodic, right? Because to your point, we will smoke the THAAD batteries and Patriot, but even Aegis, for that matter, those operational availabilities, those on-station times, for all those manned platforms, there's a timeline associated with that.

So when we look at applying the lessons learned from this sustained missile war between Israel and Iran, the sustained conflict in Ukraine, especially from the defense, we have to look at how we can take what we have right now and put that into a persistent and enduring construct for homeland defense. So we just have to start relying on more automation, more autonomous platforms to be able to fill that role. Like containerized fires. We've been dabbling in containerized fires for like five or six years. Okay, great. Containerized fires is good because it requires a very small manning obligation and footprint, right?

So there's going to be a policy requirement for roles and responsibilities on who owns this type of containerized fires, who owns this autonomous platform, sensor platforms, autonomous command and control relays, et cetera. So those are the lessons learned we need to take a look at and apply that to the Golden Dome.

[General (Retired) Charles Flynn]

Hey, Riki, I'll jump in a little bit here and add to what JD's describing. Like the Aegis Force and the BMD assets in the Navy, you're right, the Patriot and THAAD units have the worst and have traditionally had the worst, what's called deploy to dwell time. So the back and forth required, because they're not just doing the Patriots forward. They're also manning the TPY-2 and they're manning the THAADs and they're kind of doing a variety of different training that has to happen back at their home stations and then just give them a break. And then also these guys have got to go to schools, they got to stay up with the technology. I mean, it's just not that simple.

I don't know the cycle on the BMD crews inside the Navy, but I'm sure it's somewhat similar. That's my first point. Second point is, but again, I'm going to hat tip to those teams out there. And I thought JD's comment about what's happening on social media was great. It's great to see the pride of that. Second thing I'd make is, so our air defense force inside the Army is also having to rebuild our short range air defense. So the mobile SHORAD that's going out there has to be rebuilt too. So the Patriot and THAAD soldiers are only one part of the regaining of the lost assets with the SHORAD. Because again, we had those assets when I was in my, from Lieutenant Colonel to Second Lieutenant with Avenger, Stinger, Vulcan, Chaparral.

So we don't have those now. So we're trying to recreate those. So that's another drain on assets available, the schoolhouse, the equipment, the procurement, et cetera, et cetera. And the last thing I'd say, so that's kind of that view. The last thing I'd say is back to this fencing layer. And it is really important, I think, that we think through tying together the space layer and the terrestrial layer, both on the surface of the sea and on the surface of Mother Earth. Because those two layers during this design are going to be really important. That uplink and downlink has got to happen. Otherwise, you're not going to be, as JD mentioned, you're not going to have the right information at the time and the right location to the decision makers. So one of my concerns about the development of this, and I'll say it this way, is space actually begins and it ends on the ground. Like somebody on the ground actually has to make a decision to do something. Because those decisions aren't being made in space.

Yes, we're going to need AI. Yes, we're going to need the ability to conduct interdiction operations, offensive operations, defensive operations in space. But ultimately, we're going to have to have some human in the loop who is AI enabled. And that meshed network has to be open and transparent to our multinational partners. Because they also have assets and we need to get those in the game. So I'll stop there.

I think that that would probably you know, engender some tough questions of us too. So those are my thoughts. Thanks.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

And Charlie, as you guys know, I was just yesterday on Honor Field's training center where they are moving our counter UAS with our maneuverable force and exercise, which is awesome to see that blend back in the U.S. Army with missile defense IND counter with our maneuvering force. But it has to be paid for. It has to be paid for.

And that's where we don't, we got to balance this correctly. You're right in creating that golden dome, the sensing that's common for every common value for everybody on it. But still, there needs to be some concerted effort with the Army to get more funds into that ADA branch. And same with the Navy, with the BND branch, it's not going to come from the golden dome, which I think a lot of people think it's going to come from the golden dome. That's the away game. Golden dome is the home game.

Thank you, Charlie. Now we've got our acclaimed superstar now, Mark. You're both on Fox News last week and on MSN. So you are qualified, balanced. You've got the game in front of you, buddy. So great to have you with us, Mark.

You can comment on all this and you know it well.

[Rear Admiral (Retired) Mark Montgomery]

I just got to get CNN and I get that media EGOT. Okay. Look, first of every, I attach myself to everything Corky and Charlie and JD said. And with Corky, that's unusual. So I'm excited to be on here with this group. And I'm really glad for what you've been doing in Europe and Hawaii over the last couple weeks, Riki.

I think we're making a big difference in MDAA. Listen, I want to reemphasize the deterrence thing. The United States, this matters because sometimes we have groups in the United States that are kind of more prioritizes, think about China, Taiwan. What we did here matters for two reasons. One, it helps restore deterrence. After our chaotic, poorly planned and executed withdrawal from Afghanistan, where we didn't inform our partners, our partners on the ground, the Afghans, but also our NATO partners, and just kind of hightailed it out of there, left a lot of people behind.

There was a lot of questions about us. Our support to Ukraine has been weakened by the performance of both of these last two administrations, one for not giving them access to the right equipment and then limiting that access. And now President Trump's been even more prescriptive on his support. A lot of our allies and partners around the world are looking at us going, is the United States a credible, reliable ally? And here we very much stood up.

There is a threat to the United States from Iran. I don't dismiss that. But the current, the existential threat right now is to Israel, our partner in the Middle East. And we stepped up and delivered the final coup de grace at the end of a 12-day air campaign by them. And I don't want to downplay their role. If this program set back years, it's because of the Israeli effort. And then we're, I wouldn't say we're icing on the cake, but we're definitely the top layer. They did great work. But what this does for Taiwan, for Korea, for Japan, is a signal that the United States is a reliable ally, even for the Baltic states who are uncomfortable with what we're doing in Ukraine. Seeing what we did for Israel against Iran matters.

The United States was willing to risk its airmen and its soldiers on the ground and its sailors out at sea in order to impose a cost on Iran, who is at that moment really threatening Israel. Okay, so that's the first thing. Deterrence is restored. To me, the second big takeaway is the Israeli campaign plan. It's a reminder to us that air power matters. I know we get confused watching Ukraine, where no one can really get that air supremacy. But Israel moved to air supremacy. And at some point, you could almost call it air dominance in the control of this. They've also destroyed the Syrian Air Force and the Syrian air defenders. So they're using Syrian airspace as an extension of Israeli airspace for their refueling, or whoever was refueling them. I'll assume it was the Israelis. But that mattered, that ability to establish that. It's important for us to remind that. In fact, I kind of wish the president had let them go another four to six days. I think that there'd be an advantage to that.

And should Iran be a bad player at the diplomatic table—and I think they will be—the president should say, you know, if we don't get somewhere in six days, I'm going to let my friend Bibi revisit your homeland. And then he should, at six days and about an hour. So for me, the campaign plan was important. It reminds us the importance of air power and our

investments, and things like the F-35, and the B-2, and the JASSM ER, and all the other systems that made this effective, and of course the MOP. Third thing is, it's a reminder of what we're really good at. You know, we saw Russia fail to execute large-scale maneuver warfare in February of 2022. Most of us thought they could do it. Myself, Ben Hodges, others who dealt with that area a lot, we were wrong. They couldn't do it.

It's a good reminder to us that we can do large-scale complex planning and execution. You know, the attack on Fordow by the B-2s, with 75-plus aircraft and a simultaneous Tomahawk, or a reasonably simultaneous Tomahawk strike on Isfahan, it reminds us that we can take a 100-element plan, any one of which is a routine thing for the servicemen and women involved in it, and stitch it together into an integrated, well-executed, great OPSEC plan, you know, operational event. And that's a reminder that we are the best joint force in the world, and it's good to see that.

Now, that's all the good side. The downside is we've all talked about the readiness of systems and the capacity in missile defense systems, and I was a little disappointed in the budget that just dropped, Riki. I'm thrilled with \$113 billion of \$150 billion being pulled from the reconciliation. In other words, reconciliation is going to prove \$150 billion. DOD's pulled \$113 billion from that, or OMB has, to put on top of the DOD budget. But the base DOD budget actually declined. Here's the problem. The five of us understand that you're judged by your base budget, right? Next year, when they start 2027, they're going to start with the base, and that base is going to be 2.8 to 2.9 percent of GDP. This is too low. This would be World War II low. So, the president needs to start now, and his OMB director, Russ Vogt, now thinking about where they're going to get that money to plus that up, because there's very little reconciliation money left over now.

They've used 75 percent of it in the first year. It was 10-year money. It's going to be multi-year money like that. So, Riki, I'm really worried, and here's what worries me. Within Golden Dome, we're going to buy some things. Let's say we're buying them for the Army. We'll just say something's a Patriot battery. I'm not saying that's going to be a procurement, but let's say it's that. The Army then has a bill for that Patriot battery every year that's about 10 percent of the initial cost. So, if you buy two of them, it's 20 percent of the initial cost of a battery. If you buy things for the Navy, unless you're buying a pure munition that's just fire and forget, and you'll use it before its maintenance due date, you're okay with munitions. But systems are going to kill us, and there's a lot of systems that—the Navy shipbuilding budget, for example, was gutted 85 percent in the core budget.

Knowing that we're going to build ships in 2027, the other services and the rest of the Navy need to be looking around going, who's going to pay for that? So, not only do you have these extra things you added with new budget requirements, you're going to have a Hunger Games fight for how do I get the things in that were hidden by—and the Air Force had a little bit of this, and the Navy had a lot of it—that were depleted in the actual budget because of the risk. Riki, this really matters because missile defense is not a poor man's game.

These are expensive things that we're trying to add in, and you have to think about this budgeting. We have way too many systems that the four of us have experienced in our careers we bought and then didn't properly do the lifecycle maintenance on, and they either ended early or, in the case of the Navy, got too expensive or the Air Force got rid of them. I'm exceptionally worried that the budget that we dropped is going to create a big problem for missile defense in 2027. And it's not that the number's bad this year. It's about 3.25, maybe 3.3% of GDP. That's a good number.

It's how they got to it and how OMB restarts. And just as a reminder, on a bipartisan basis, everyone hates OMB. OMB is not going to be our Department of Defense's friend in 2027 as we put this budget together.

So something for us to work on and advocate for and push for is to make sure that the missile defense stuff is properly accounted for as you build your 2027 budget, which, by the way, is happening right now. Now, that process is starting right now, and it's starting with a lot of holes in it, starting with that shipbuilding one I mentioned, some of the airframe one from the Air Force, and then anything that was newly added on, such as missile defense and some nuclear programs. I'm very worried.

So I know that's a long way of saying, I've got a lot of concern there, but I do. Deterrence was great, campaigning by the Israelis was great, and really an excellent war plan executed by the Joint Force. But let's give the credit where it's due to the Air Force.

Last thing I want to mention, the guys who built these weapons and executed it, they're agencies we don't talk about a lot, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. You barely see them, but a couple of guys there pioneered this work, developed it, and shepherded it through. But it wasn't just them.

There are Central Command planners that were there for a decade that all of us worked with, civilians that were there again and again and again and planned this out. Whether they were there the day we planned it, I don't know. Decades of work really should be recognized.

Finally, we don't say it enough, but Boeing delivered. We got to mention when industry does a good job. We don't get any money from Boeing. We're not looking for that. I'm just saying industry delivered. Then, of course, the Air Force delivered with the maintenance of the B-2s and the MOPs and getting them ready. So that was a real team effort. All right, that's all I had, Riki.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

Hey, Mark, you saw the President ask everybody to go 5% in NATO. Does that include us? If you're going to do that, you got to do it, right? But how do you balance the funding for these four bases, our bases away versus protecting the Gold Dome funds? This seems hard to do. We're making the allies at 5%. Put a good percent of that into that? How are we doing this? What's the solution?

I understand data sharing with Gold Dome and that part of it, but the actual commodities of effectors that have to work with this outside of our country protecting our bases have got to be paid for, upgraded, and all that. It doesn't seem we have the money for that.

[Rear Admiral (Retired) Mark Montgomery]

A couple of things. You unpacked a little bit of that. The 5% was 3.5% on traditional defense budgets like planes, ships, tanks, munitions.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

How come it's not for us? Aren't we part of NATO?

[Rear Admiral (Retired) Mark Montgomery]

No, hold on, hold on. That 1.5% is on defense-related stuff like what would be cybersecurity and homeland security for us, things like the Coast Guard, things like that. What the President said up front, this is for thee, not for me.

He has exempted the US from the 3.5% and the overall 5%. And that's okay. Because for 40 years, we've been doing a solid 3 to 4.5% while a lot of these countries took 1% busman holidays. They can take a big can of shut the you-know-what up if they want to complain about that.

We're fine there. No one said anything. Now, Spain said, we're only doing 2.1%. They got 31 other people kicking them in the jimmies because they're like, you sons of guns been doing 1.2% for 20 years. You haven't been carrying the load. Yes, you let us use ROTA, but you don't offset the cost there for us very much. Let's be clear. Spain's one problem. Look, he should stay above 3%, because we do. We go to Japan. We go to Australia. We go to Korea. We go to Taiwan. We're like 3% now, 5% later. We should be above 3%.

Plus, given the inefficiencies in our budgeting process, i.e. congressional set-asides, services that can't think outside of the program or record, we need more than 3% to be able to do all the missions we got to do. What he was saying is, I don't commit to 3.5% and I don't commit to the 5%. Believe it or not, we'll get to 1.5%. We spend a lot of money on defense-related stuff outside of DOD.

We'll get the 1.5%. I'm hoping, like I said, my whole thing was we're dropping down to 2.9%, 2.8%. I'm hoping the president sees that and gets us up above 3%.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

Where's the money coming from the foreign operating bases?

[Rear Admiral (Retired) Mark Montgomery]

Every country is different. Japan gives us over \$2 billion a year. It's about to be \$3 billion. We're negotiating it right now. We're negotiating poorly, but we're negotiating it right now. That pays for all the operations, all the facility maintenance in Japan.

Korea does the same thing. It's a smaller number. It's a smaller footprint. We only have 23,500 permanent or rotating. Many of them are rotating in Korea. We have a much bigger footprint in Japan.

In Europe, the deals are 25, 30 years old. They're run differently. They tend to not be money transfers or known expenditures. They're maintenance of the line of who does the maintenance, where, and what. We get some support in the UK, Italy, and Germany, our big three spaces. They're a little bit in Spain. We have some footprint there with Navy ships. We have 400 other facilities spread throughout Europe that could have one to 10 people at them. It's a split of maintenance on those. Sometimes NATO covers the maintenance, where we only pay 28%.

In the Middle East, it's different. They often build the things and we occupy them. They cover a lot of what we call utilities. We don't pay a ton of rent in the Middle East. I don't think we pay any.

I want to be careful when I say that because we're at about 15 or 20 spots. We have a forward operating base in Syria. That's probably being totally funded by us because there's no government to ask for money on. There are different answers everywhere. Let's be clear. When we have forward station forces, we have agreements with some level of cost sharing.

The Japan and Korea ones get into the billions with a B. We're negotiating those and President Trump has taken a very skeptical view to those agreements, and in a good way, to say, I want more money.

Sometimes he's asked for way more money than we could even justify we spend out there. Maybe that's a negotiating position. We'll work our way back to the right position. We are getting some support out there. Our defense spending is 2.8%. I'm pissed about it. But if I were talking to a European, I'd say, shut up. We spent \$863 billion this year. How did you guys do? Quantity, in that case, has it all on its own.

[Major General (Retired) Charles Corcoran]

I think there are some efficiencies to be gained here from Golden Dome, a space-based side of this too, Riki. These are LEO satellites that primarily are orbiting the Earth. The sensing capability is going to be traveling around the globe. The communications capabilities are all around the globe.

If we've got forward-based forces or even allies you want to support, you can share that data with them. They can have locally-based effectors. That becomes a win-win there. There will be a little bit.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

Will we charge those countries for that? Would we charge them for that?

[Major General (Retired) Charles Corcoran]

Charge them for utilization of our base infrastructure?

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

Yeah.

[Major General (Retired) Charles Corcoran]

We'll build agreements with each of them. I think depending on what they pay or if they pay, that's to be determined. There's also some goodness with having partners.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

We all got to share the load. As I'm saying, we can't do both. I don't think we can do both fully. The Golden Dome is number one, but the forward-operating are going to suffer from this, it looks like.

[Major General (Retired) Charles Corcoran]

Again, you understand the sensing is anything we have in space that's in LEO that's orbiting the Earth.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

I got the sensing. I'm just talking about the commodities, the effectors.

[Major General (Retired) Charles Corcoran]

You're talking about effectors? Yeah.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

JD, you want to ask a couple of questions? Just a minute or two, a couple of minutes, and we'll go.

[Mr. JD Gainey]

Yeah. I have really one question that we haven't covered. In light of the new budget rollout, in light of the lessons learned that we've seen, what's a realistic expectation of content and capability for Golden Dome of America to roll out in the next three years? Who wants to take a stab at that one?

[Rear Admiral (Retired) Mark Montgomery]

I'll go, I'll take a quick whack. Look, I think the President, he's the President. He's the President for three and a half, four years, so he wants to see something.

I think Mike Guetlein is going to have an honest conversation with Secretary Hegseth and then with him about two terms. One's called IOC, Initial Operating Capability, and one's called FOC, Final Operating Capability.

You have to describe, in IOC, here's what I've done. I've linked systems together. I've taken the existing systems we have. I've flushed them out a little bit. That's our IOC. Then describe to them FOC. FOC is, I've invested in a space-based network to detect, track this. Part of that's IOC, but it won't be completed at the time of IOC. I mean, part of it's part of your initial funding, but it's not completed at IOC. I'm doing this, and I'm developing these weapons systems, and I'm working with these companies. This will be done, at five years will be at this point, and at seven or eight years, we'll be at FOC. I'm making those last two numbers up, but I think they're reasonably in bounds.

Then just understand there's an IOC, and there's an FOC. Then say to them, Mr. President, this is a success because you inherited a 20-year, which includes your first term, a 20-year kind of busman's holiday on thinking about broad homeland defense. In reality, I mean, 20 years since they started to really push it, the Russians and Chinese, and when we have really started to deal with it.

Then show them some of the unique things like hypersonic defense, where we've got to make some investments, things like that. I think, Riki, the President can be happy and proud of the Golden Dome that he has in 2028 if he recognizes it's an IOC, and that his successor's successor, someone in the middle of their term in the 2032 term, will have the FOC.

[Major General (Retired) Charles Corcoran]

I've heard similar, Mark. I've actually heard like a tranche one by the midterms, tranche two by the end of his term. It's all focused on existing capabilities and connecting them longer term, like you said, buying and fielding new systems.

[Rear Admiral (Retired) Mark Montgomery]

I don't want to buy too much of the existing because the existing is the Navy stuff's 30 years old, the Army stuff's 30 and 40. Let's think about, do enough to say, look, we're doing a little bit of countervalue, counter-targeting here. Look, this is just like F-47. It sounds like a cool plane. I don't think we're going to be flying one in combat in Donald Trump's term. I think it's reasonable to suggest it be a couple more years, and that's okay.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

Mark, what about, do we have an FOC for the Joint Command and Control? Can that be done in three years? Forget about the effectors; that's the most important thing. Did you get that?

[Rear Admiral (Retired) Mark Montgomery]

I wouldn't call it an FOC. Yes. I think having a command and control system that's identified as the long-term command and control system, having it fielded and beginning to interconnect systems by the IOC, should be one of the lines of effort of the IOC. It's not a FOC or IOC to its own. It's a line of effort within there, and it'll have goals. And by the way, that system, the system we have in 2028 better be different in 2030 and different in 2032. I don't mean a different or whole new system. I mean a—.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

That's a huge waste. If we get command and control right—Charlie, you got anything on this?

[General (Retired) Charles Flynn]

I think Mark's point—well, I think two ago, we talked about like creating a—he's got to create sort of an OV-1, where we're going to kill, how we're going to kill. And then he's got to have an operational architecture that supports that operational view one. But to Mark's point, this is about expectation management and about saying, hey, listen, the IOC looks like this in 2027, 2028, 2029. That's what we're—that's where we're going to be. And then the FOC looks like this in 30—31, 32. And there's lines of effort within that.

I mean, you know, there's some planning that's got to go on here. And I think the important part that, what Mark is describing is that, you want to make sure that your political leadership, which was in the Oval Office with the President and the SECDEF, saying, that's Mike Guetlein. He's going to be Golden Dome of America.

And I think that having an expectation graph that everyone understands what that looks like is important, because it's not just going to be, hey, this is—it's going to be done in 2028 or 2029. It can't be. It's going to have to evolve and evolve at the pace of technology.

Also, again, I think this is where industry is going to have to really, really step up with our team and do that planning and be part of it, because it just can't be done alone by a program management office.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

But, Charlie, who says that? Is Mike the guy that's going to say that, or the President is going to say that, or the SECDEF? Who gets to say, we're going to do this? Is it Mike's— I think that's Mike.

[General (Retired) Charles Flynn]

I mean, I think that's Mike if you put the three people in the Oval Office, the President's behind the desk, SECDEF is describing what the Department of Defense is going to do, and he points and says, Mike Guetlein's lead. So Mike's, in my view, publicly been designated, you're in charge of this thing.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

JD, any other questions?

[Mr. JD Gainey]

No, that's it. We're after time. It's good stuff.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]

All right. Let's wrap it up then. Corky, you want to start? Anything to close?

[Major General (Retired) Charles Corcoran]

Great comments across the board. It's time to get after Golden Dome with a sense of urgency. Thanks, everyone.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Thanks, Corky. JD?

[Mr. JD Gainey]
No, I can't give a shout-out enough to those soldiers that executed that mission. Next year, I just hope Army football gets some wins like that Patriot Battalion did.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Deep shot. Mark? Mark?

[Rear Admiral (Retired) Mark Montgomery]
No, I'm fine. I think we hit everything. It's good discussion.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Charlie?

[General (Retired) Charles Flynn]
Thanks, Riki. No, really, really good. Good to see everybody. Thanks. Appreciate you doing this.

[Mr. Riki Ellison]
Thank you. Thanks, everyone, for contributing on this. It's good to let the dust settle, not get emotional about what happened a week ago.

You can see the tension in our country and the different viewpoints and having this come out to what everybody has agreed upon, that our deterrence has enhanced tremendously from this. The key thing on this is, we don't know what's going to happen the next three years that can threaten the United States, from which country and which kind of way to do it.

The urgency for Golden Dome to get their stuff together and get it going—it's crazy that that president's directive was in January, and we still don't have this thing going.

We're losing time, and time's not on our side. We have to have a defensive capability for our infrastructure, for our cities, for our counter value, counterforce. We have to have that in three years.

I know you've got IOC, but you're going to have to have some of this to give us that deterrent, because the weakest thing, if we don't have the defense leg right, that's not a deterrent. We've got a defensive leg right now because they can't hit us, but that's our weakest part of the deterrent three-leg thing right now.

We've got to focus on it, and it's the most important thing to do, and that's making Golden Dome happen.

Thank you. Great conversation. Appreciate your time and effort championing this.

You guys are all patriots. You're in it for the right cause to make our world safer and our nation safer.

Thank you.