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TRANSCRIPT

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Panel 1: The Evolving Threat Landscape in Europe

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FEATURING

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Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the U.S.

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Former Acting and Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

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Seth G. Jones: Thank you very much, Mr. Profumo, and thanks to all of you again for joining. My name is Seth Jones. I'm the director of the International Security Program here at CSIS and senior vice president.

Just want to introduce our first panel and give you a little bit of a sense for how we structured this day. In the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine we have designed, really, a day that focuses first on understanding this landscape. The purpose of the first panel is – that'll be chaired by my colleague, Emily Harding, will focus on that landscape and how it is evolving.

Then we'll move into a discussion with the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, an American perspective from the Joint Staff on how the U.S. is thinking about its industrial base, its position in Europe in the context of U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific and other areas, and then broader implications for how the chairman and the vice chairman and senior Pentagon leaders are thinking about the evolution of competition and warfare.

Then we'll move in the afternoon to looking at the challenges of European defense and opportunities. We'll have colleagues from Germany and France as well as one of our former colleagues here at CSIS, Heather Conley, who's the president of the German Marshall Fund, and then we'll finish on a discussion on the Defense Industrial Base and cooperation across the transatlantic on avenues to better think about cooperation, coordination in the industrial base. So that's how we structured this day.

With that, I will turn this over to my colleague Emily Harding for the first panel. Emily joined CSIS as deputy staff director from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Before that Emily was an analyst and manager at the Central Intelligence Agency, also spent a tour at the National Security Council at the White House. So she is well positioned from her time on the Hill, at CIA, and at the White House, to have a conversation, to lead a conversation on the threat landscape in Europe.

So, Emily, with that, I will turn this over to you. Thank you.

Emily Harding: Thank you so much, sir. And welcome to our distinguished panel.

So up here with me, I have Ambassador Marek Magierowski, who worked as a reporter, editor, and columnist for over 20 years prior to becoming Poland's ambassador to the U.S. He served as the head of the economic and foreign affairs desks at several leading newspapers and was editor in chief of another. In 2015, he entered government service working for the Chancellery of the President as an expert on public diplomacy, then as head of the Press Office, undersecretary of state at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His previous overseas posting was as ambassador to Israel, and we are

hoping that today you bring both your keen journalist's eye and also your official positions of the government of Poland to our discussion.

We also have Rear Admiral Tim Woods. He became the British defense attaché here in Washington this spring, so welcome to him. A warm welcome from a beautiful D.C. spring. He's coming from Kiev, where he was the British defense attaché at the frontline of the UK's support to the Ukrainian military. He also has served as the head of the British Defence Staff in Eastern Europe, commanding all defense attaches across Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine. Quite a comprehensive job. We're looking forward to exploring the runup to the war with you. His previous roles have included active duty in Afghanistan, deployments to the Far East, submarine patrols, secondments to NATO, the UK Ministry of Defense, and the National Security Secretariat.

And then I'm also pleased to have on stage my former boss, and one of my best bosses ever, John McLaughlin. He was the former deputy director of the CIA and is currently a distinguished practitioner in residence at SAID right across the street, which is also his alma mater. He served as acting director of CIA in 2004 and as deputy director from 2000 to 2004. His CIA career spanned three decades, and it is completely fair to say that his leadership shaped the modern practice of intelligence. Certainly shaped my career. His career included roles as deputy director for intelligence, vice chairman for estimates, and acting chairman of the NIC. He served as the Director of the Office of European Analysis during the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. And after the breakup of the Soviet Union, he represented the intelligence community on the U.S. diplomatic missions that established relations with these newly independent countries.

So we have quite the distinguished panel to launch us off today in a strategic discussion about Europe.

So let's start by going back to late 2021 in the runup to the war, to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Opinion was divided at that point on whether Putin would really do something as audacious as launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Richard Betts once noted in his analysis of surprise attacks, war involves discontinuity, an aberration or divergence from normal. So it is hard to imagine sort of, by definition.

So first, I want to start with you, Mr. Ambassador, about how your country and how you saw the landscape in Europe, in the runup to the invasion in early 2022 and what you saw as the evolution of Europe's realization that this was about to be a land war.

Ambassador Marek Magierowski:

You mentioned my previous incarnation as journalist, so I have to be very careful not to mix these two roles of a hack and a public servant. I'll do my best. It came as a surprise to many political leaders also in Europe, I mean the invasion, in spite of the fact that the CIA had taken an unprecedented decision to share intel not only with America's closest allies, but also with the public opinion, which is also quite pretty stunning from our perspective. I think that we are now, after a year of intense hostilities – and everybody was surprised in – I mean, not everybody, but as I said, many – many politicians were surprised by the mere fact that Russia chose to invade Ukraine. And then we were also surprised by the mere fact that Russia did not seize Kiev in 72 hours. So I think that we all overestimated Russia's military might before the invasion began, but now we tend to underestimate it. I think Russia can still – and President Putin can still flaunt the front lines in Ukraine with manpower, hundreds of thousands of new conscripts, drafted in all those, you know remote villages in Siberia without major political consequences for himself and for his closest acolytes in the Kremlin.

We are doubtless facing a race against time now in Ukraine with the Russians mobilizing their forces, regrouping along the front lines in Ukraine, and the Ukrainians awaiting more Western-designed, state-of-the-art weaponry. And there is, of course, a recurring issue for the indolence of the European and American industrial base in terms of not only supplying weapons in Ukraine, but also in terms of reprising our own military capabilities in the framework of NATO. That's why, for example – Poland has delivered, for instance, more than 250 tanks to Ukraine, which is not a trifling quantity, I would say; also countless amounts of ammunition, and anti-aircraft systems, and so on and so forth. And we are still waiting for proper backfill or compensation because we cannot, you know, deplete our own military capabilities endlessly.

We are keeping our fingers crossed for Ukraine to win this war, and we believe in Ukraine's victory. On the other hand, we have to look at the wider picture of deterrence and of our military preparedness for an eventual major conflagration in this part of Europe.

And on the final note, I would like to stress one important development; namely, Poland has been perceived until recently as a net recipient of security. Now we are trying to transition to a new role of net provider of security, and not only because – not because we do not believe in the sacrosanct character of Article 5 of the Washington treaty – President Biden, by the way, has stressed on numerous occasions that we are ready to defend every inch of NATO territory – but, on the contrary, we do believe that this is our obligation, and it should be our firm commitment, not only in political but also and predominantly in military terms, to increase our military capabilities to provide security to other countries. So we are now ready not only to defend Warsaw or Prague, our immediate neighbors in Central

Europe – we are ready to defend Berlin, we are ready to defend Paris, and Helsinki, of course.

So I think this is the – we are going to increase our military budget up to 4 percent or our GDP in a few years' time, which is also unprecedented and quite an achievement. I'm not saying that without social and political burden, but I think that this something – I'm not saying that Poland is a model to follow – although I'm saying this, actually – (laughter) – for other countries in Europe which have somehow neglected commitments in this respect.

So from net recipient to net provider – this is a motto which we try to adhere to nowadays.

Ms. Harding: Well, in true journalist style, you have provided a perfect chapeau to everything – (laughter) – we want to talk about in the rest of the session. I appreciate that.

First I want to turn to you, Admiral, and ask you basically the same question. How did you see the evolution in your own country? London has been extremely forward-leaning in supporting Ukraine from the very beginning. How has the U.K. played that leadership role?

Rear Admiral Tim Woods: Thanks, Emily. So we, obviously – what we saw happening in late 2021, we'd kind of seen that happening around Easter 2021 when we saw Russian forces from the Central Military District, Eastern Military District starting to build around Ukraine's borders and into Crimea. But at that stage, we didn't really see the intent. We saw the capability building in terms of equipment and then the people, but there was no real evidence at that point of intent.

And then from October onwards, we saw some worrying things that we and the U.S. shared with some of our European allies, that this was more than just a demonstration of force. It took some persuading for people to actually get there, and it was a lot of leadership from the U.S. and the U.K. bringing in other Western leaders, saying, look, this is the thing. This is going to happen. It's not a case of if; it's a case of when.

So we decided to start delivering lethal aid for the first time. And you'll remember the NLAWs, the new generation light anti-tank weapons, that arrived in early 2022. Obviously, the U.S. had been providing other anti-tank weapons for some time by then. But we decided that, to use an expression, you can't fatten up a pig on market day, and that we needed to make Ukraine strong before the war, shooting war, started. So that is the role that we started playing. We'd already been there for seven years doing the training. So we had had a succession of training, along with our Canadian, Lithuanian, Polish, and U.S. partners. And then we were doubling down on that.

And it was very eerie being in Kyiv in February, because it was like watching a train coming towards you, and you were on the crossing, and you'd flooded the engine. And you saw this coming towards and you couldn't do anything about it, because you knew it was going to happen. But deep down, no one believed it would happen because I think what happened on the 24th of February was one of the biggest strategic miscalculations we've seen for decades. If you'd looked in Putin's office the night before on his white board, there would have been Nord Stream 2 coming on stream later in the year, tick. The ability to split NATO because of different approaches to trying to secure peace, tick. The ability to split the U.S., the Canadians, and the U.K. away from Ukraine – because by the night before that that happened the U.S. and the Canadians and many other allies were no longer in Ukraine. So all of this – no sanctions, you know, tick, tick, tick.

But he went and undid that. And as we heard, you know, we've now got Finland in NATO. So Russia's basically just doubled its border with NATO overnight because of what it did. And my final point is, even the Ukrainians could not believe that something so significant would happen. And I remember in late January speaking to a Ukrainian official down in Odessa. And I took him aside and I said, they're coming for you. They are coming to decapitate your government. You know, they're going to come to an airport. And he got very cross with me. And he said: You and the U.S. have got to stop saying this because it's harming our economy. And I said, no, it's happening. So, you know, there was denial in a lot of levels because such a strategic miscalculation.

Ms. Harding: Absolutely. I want to get back to a lot of those points, in particular the – up until the last minute, the idea that what we were focused on was the economy, not the impending storm.

John, I want to turn to you next and talk about this intelligence sharing piece. There was unprecedented declassification and discussion of the information that the U.S. and the U.K. had in the runup to the conflict to try to potentially dissuade Putin, which did not work and probably was never going to work. But then, more importantly, to try to get all of the European allies onsides and unified in the face of what was about to be just dramatic aggression against Russia's neighbor. What were you thinking when you saw these releases of intelligence?

I mean, I know my reaction as a former intelligence officer was like, ah, oh no, what are we going to lose for giving this away? But then, working through my own mind and previous discussions I'd been involved in on the pros and cons of releasing intelligence like that. You know that you're probably going to lose some sources, you're probably going to lose some accesses. But on the other hand, if it could have the huge benefit of averting a

war or of unifying a continent to protest that war, then it's worth it. What was going through your mind?

John McLaughlin: Well, actually, the release of intelligence, or the sharing of intelligence in a way that an adversary understands it and sees it, is not a new thing. The new thing here is the volume and the accuracy of this intelligence. Thinking back to my own career, I had been sent to Russia a number of times to – with documents that said at the top "Secret: Releasable Russia." In other words, they had been, what we would call, sabotaged to the point where the objective is to share with someone what you know, but not to share how you know it. And the striking thing in this case was the volume of it.

As it turned out, I had been asked – pulled back into government or a short period of time to do a study for the DNI around this period before the war. And I began hearing these – indications of this intelligence probably around November. And my first reaction was, as with all intelligence, is that really accurate? You know, intelligence is good but it's not always exactly right. And I think the reaction that I was having and that many Europeans were having was simply that we thought, most people thought, this kind of thing was over.

I remember being with students across my school in Sicily about eight, nine years ago. We were studying the battles of World War II there. A military historian was with us and he said to me, do you think we'll ever see this sort of thing again, that is, battles like this between major countries over territory? We talked about it for a minute, and both of us said we're probably past that. We're probably into another era. So I think that's what happened here. This was such a shock to people that a large country could invade another sovereign country blatantly and without provocation.

So that was my reaction to the intelligence. And basically I think it was a good idea. I don't – there's also a hidden advantage to this, and that is, when you release this kind of information, the other side has to wonder, since you're not telling them, where did that come from? And it can cause them to go into a kind of paroxysm of counterintelligence investigations, which is always good to take some steam out of them for a while. So there's all sorts of things going on in an intelligence release.

Ms. Harding: Yeah. I do love a good internal mole hunt for distracting the enemy. (Laughs.)

One thing that's very different about this particular conflict is that it really is the first open-source war. We have seen – because so many people on the ground are serving as collectors, in a sense, and posting everything they have on Twitter or on VK or wherever, there's a huge amount of information just out there for the taking. Now, of course, the question is, is it legitimate information? How much of it is doctored or how much of it is real?

So, as you have seen through your 30-year career in intelligence work, what do you see this trendline being? Is there a move towards further open-source intelligence, greater exploitation of open-source intelligence?

Dr. McLaughlin: Well, if you just look at this war, there are many examples of the power of what we now call open-source intelligence. You can go online and you can see, courtesy of The New York Times or the New York Times visual investigation unit or some other comparable organization, transcripts along with the audio of Russian soldiers talking to each other on their radios or cell phones. And you can trace their operations. You can understand their shortage of ammunition. You can hear the fear in their voices. So that's just one example.

Add to that the availability of commercial imagery, which is now carried out through small satellites that are launched quickly and last for not as long as the big satellites that you and I would remember that, you know, last for 10 or 12 years up there, but which photograph things quickly and with great resolution and are easily available to media outlets and to CSIS, which has done some pioneering work with open-source intelligence on things like the new silos and missile ICBM constructions under way in China and so forth. So this is a new factor in the intelligence world, and it's playing a big role in Ukraine.

Ms. Harding: Yeah. I think this is going to be the continuing trend going forward.

Amb. Magierowski: A brief addition to that, if you don't mind.

Ms. Harding: Yes, please.

Amb. Magierowski: I think it's also important and of fundamental importance, actually, in terms of collecting evidence and documenting war crimes –

Ms. Harding: Yes.

Amb. Magierowski: – committed by Russian troops in Ukraine, all that – you know, DIOCENT, which has – which has grown so fast in the course of the war. We are flooded by information. But on the other hand, it's much easier for us today to collect evidence of unspeakable atrocities committed in Ukraine since the beginning of the invasion.

Mr. McLaughlin: Again, imagery from space can allow you to coordinate what you're hearing from witnesses who testify to something, to what you are seeing and archiving, photographs; so to the ambassador's point.

Ms. Harding: Right, without having to declassify anything, so already there. We held an event here last week on content provenance and how you can attempt to prove that an image taken is actually what was happening in the image. And you can trace the entire chain of custody of that image from the person who took it all the way to when it landed on your desktop. We were working with C2PA, which is a coalition of companies that are trying to construct technology that would actually let you trace that line of custody. And one of the things that we've talked about extensively is being able to use it for war-crimes trials and prove its existence and truth.

I want to remind our audience in the room that the QR code to ask questions is on the agenda on the tables. So if you click that, you can send me a question. I'll pick it up on the iPad here. And for online guests there is a link to the question form on the webpage, so we look forward to receiving your questions. We'll turn to those in a few minutes.

But first I want to go back to you, Mr. Ambassador, and talk about this role of Poland as a logistics hub. I mean, aid has poured into Ukraine in every form from all over the world, and Poland has done, I think, a masterful job in trying to manage it and get it across the border securely. Can you talk a little bit about how you see that role and what lessons you've learned as a frontline state?

Amb. Magierowski: Well, I chatted with the admiral just before this session and I told him that whereas the Ukrainian army is now one of the best prepared in terms of its military skills and preparation, Poland has acquired such an expertise in terms of logistics, absolutely unprecedented in NATO's history. So I think that I don't know where we would be without Poland as a logistical hub for all those deliveries that somehow had to pass through Poland since the beginning of the Russian – of the Russian offensive in Ukraine.

But again, contrary to conventional wisdom, we were always very well organized, and we were also very, very adamant and insistent on the necessity of coordinating all our efforts with our NATO and EU allies. And I will just remind you that incident which occurred a few months ago when a Ukrainian stray missile fell on Polish soil – two casualties, a tragic event. And of course, those were two very stressful hours in my diplomatic career, as well, because I didn't know how my government would react with, you know, that little information we had about what had really happened and that – on that day. And then it turned out it was the perfect coordination with Washington, with London, with Berlin which allowed us to hold the horses and to – not to react hastily and prematurely. So it was ultimate proof of our maturity, as well as a NATO member. So I think that our credibility was bolstered quite significantly on that particular day. So it's not only about logistics, but it's also about political coordination within the framework of NATO.

Ms. Harding: Absolutely, that restraint and good judgment, I think, marked that incident.

Rear Adm. Woods: Can I just come in there, Emily? So I'm back in western Ukraine in late February remaking to someone it's going to be a battle of logistics. It's going to be Western logistics against Russian logistics, because, ultimately, it's logistics and command and control that win wars. And then, having been in Rzeszów and seeing the scale of effort and coordination that was going on –

Amb. Magierowski: You've got perfect pronunciation. (Laughter.)

Rear Adm. Woods: Learned over many cocktails there as well. (Laughter.) But I mean, it was – it was the coordination. I'd go to the morning meetings and you'd have many countries – not just European countries – in the room talking about aircraft coming in, talking about what was on those aircraft, talking about how it was going to be unloaded. You know, that level of detailed logistics was incredibly impressive, speaking as a non-logistician.

Ms. Harding: I think that's absolutely right.

So, speaking of frontline states, Finland. Welcome, Finland. Super happy about that. What are the implications of Finland joining the alliance, in your view? And what advice would you give them now that they're part of this exclusive club?

Rear Adm. Woods: So it's fantastic news and we just – we only hope that Sweden follows suit in the near future.

Ms. Harding: Indeed.

Rear Adm. Woods: I mean, Finland's got a lot to teach us because, you know, they've been staring the Russians and before that the Soviets in the eye for a long time and managing that relationship really carefully. So applying a careful balance of deterrence and not provoking, because of being where they were, you know, almost as – isolated in that respect. But what they can teach us, and as a lot of the Baltic states and Poland can teach us, is about total defense. And it's when push comes to shove you can mobilize very quickly all parts of society, because we've still got that threat in Eastern Europe. Whilst the war at the moment is contained to Ukraine, you know, we can't guarantee that there will be another strategic miscalculation by Putin. So it's learning how we mobilize everyone very quickly so that you can stop any further invasion into Eastern Europe.

I mean, you know, today we've got Putin meeting with Lukashenko in Moscow. You know, who knows what Belarus might do? They've already kind of been weaponizing immigration whilst Russia have been weaponizing

energy. So I think the threat is not just Ukraine. The threat is to the Baltic states and to the Nordic states still so that's where we have a lot to learn.

And I've, you know, been to Finland. I've seen the Finnish armed forces. They are hugely proficient, hugely professional, well drilled so, you know, a much welcome addition to NATO. And, of course, there's the political aspect as well so that, you know, NATO is not just, you know, all about militaries – a political alliance.

So I think it's a massive step, and I go back to that thing, you know, Putin's whiteboard. There was no mention of Sweden or Finland joining NATO at that point, you know, and if you'd said in early February 2022 that some 14 months later Finland were going to be a member of NATO no one would have believed you.

Ms. Harding: Right. More evidence about the strategic blunder.

Mr. McLaughlin: If I could add to that –

Ms. Harding: Please.

Mr. McLaughlin: – you know, I think sometimes the symbolism of an event in international affairs is as important as the fact of the event, and Finland just carries a symbolic meaning that exceeds the size of the country or the fact that it has joined. Its whole history in the Cold War, as Dr. Hamre pointed out, is one that resonates strongly in Russia and with us, I think.

Also, there's – its adherence to NATO, and I'm convinced Sweden will come in. I'm convinced the problems with Turkey will be worked out. When you add Sweden and Finland there aren't many EU members left who are not in NATO. That's sort of a hidden consequence of what's happening.

I would expect that the talk that we've heard for many years about strategic autonomy and so forth within the EU, that that talk will die down because the overlap now. I think it comes down to maybe once Sweden is in it's only Cyprus, Austria, Malta, and one other who are –

Rear Adm. Woods: Ireland.

Mr. McLaughlin: – Ireland – who are not – among EU members who are not in NATO. So that's kind of a hidden not yet fully digested implication of what's going on here, and as a European analyst said recently in a way what's happening is that the three tribes of Europe are, if not uniting, there is a great – there's much more uniformity among what this analyst called the three tribes of Europe, meaning Southern Europe, where the threat has been prior to this felt mostly from immigration; Western Europe, many of those countries thought they

were living in eternal peace; and the frontline states, which have felt existentially threatened all along.

Those distinctions are not as sharp as they once were so you have Europe really coming together politically, and in terms of its understanding of threat that's something with just enormous consequence in terms of the international system.

Amb. Magierowski: I think we have all realized in the recent months how important the Baltic Sea is in terms of our energy security, especially from Europe's perspective, which is one of the most crucial components of the overall security architecture in our continent.

So Finland's accession is pretty vital also with this – in this regard. The Kaliningrad enclave just across the Baltic Sea from Finland, which is basically a huge military base or an unsinkable aircraft carrier, still posing existential threats to – not only to Poland but I think to the whole region. So, again, Finland's membership in NATO is also pretty important from this particular perspective.

And, thirdly, Finland was attacked by the Soviet Union in 1940 – the Winter War – so they know – they remember mentally but also physically how unpredictable Russia is as neighbor. So I think that also in terms of our mental approach to Russia's threat to hold Europe, it's also important to have Finland in our camp.

Ms. Harding: Exactly. The Winter War was the first book I pulled out in February of 2022 to learn – relearn some of the lessons. So on this point about the strength of Europe and the newfound unity in European purpose, how do we keep that momentum going? The energy question, I think, is a vitally important one. And I, for one, have been really impressed to see how Europe has adjusted to exceedingly high energy prices and sort of adjusted their strategy to compensate. What do you see as the future of the next winter through Europe? How do you see this momentum building?

Amb. Magierowski: Ask the weather forecasters. (Laughter.)

Ms. Harding: We did have an exceptionally mild winter last year.

Amb. Magierowski: Just very briefly, Poland has been prescient from outset that Putin would want to use energy as a weapon, which he did at the beginning of this – of the current war in Ukraine. So, for example, we inaugurated our first LNG terminal six years ago, almost seven. Last year we opened the so-called Baltic pipe, which now transfers gas from the Norwegian continental shelf via Denmark to the Polish stretch of the Baltic coast. And since October last year, we have been entirely independent of imports of Russian gas, which is

also quite an accomplishment not also in the political – not only in the economic, but also in political terms. We are now transitioning from coal to gas to nuclear. So again, energy security, from our perspective, is of utmost importance.

This has been a very painful lesson, not only for us but also for our partners in Europe. It was hilarious to hear some political leaders in Western Europe complaining about their constituents' apprehensions that they would have, for example, to lower the temperature in their swimming pools by one degree Celsius during harsh winter. Fortunately, harsh winter did not materialize. But of course, it's very hard to predict what comes next. And but I think that also mentally – for example, in Germany's case it was a very interesting development and a very intriguing phenomenon to see Germany, for example, reducing its reliance on imports of Russian gas from roughly 55-60 percent to virtually zero. So it was possible, in spite of all those fears that, you know, have accumulated for so many years in Germany.

Mr. McLaughlin: You know, Europe deserves a lot of credit here because here in the United States we didn't really have to sacrifice for this, except perhaps gas prices. And they were spared that terrible winter that could have occurred, but nonetheless I think deserves a lot of credit. Now, it's going to get harder because OPEC has just cut production again, and this will benefit the Russians.

They will gain an enormous amount of money from the fact that oil prices are now projected to go up from around $75 a barrel for crude, now as high as $95 this year, and then perhaps ascend to over $100 in 2024. So we're not out of the energy crisis yet in terms of this war and its implications. I mean, oil is always sort of the X factor in international affairs. And Europe's done very well up till now, but I think harder times could be coming if we have a bad winter.

Ms. Harding: Do you have a sense for the health of the Russian economy overall? There's been some reporting that its economy is not shrinking as much as expected over the course of the last year, but that it is shrinking somewhat. The Economist had an article recently saying – projecting, I think, 2 percent growth in the Russian economy. But it's very hard to get good numbers out of Russia. So what sorts of things would you be looking for to see whether their economy is hurting because of this?

Mr. McLaughlin: Well, the number – it's very hard to get good numbers, as you say. So I think –

Amb. Macierowski: It's easier to get bad numbers.

Ms. Harding: Yes, indeed. (Laughs.)

Mr. McLaughlin: Yeah. Yeah.

Ms. Harding: It's easy to get official numbers.

Mr. McLaughlin: Actually, there was a time – I haven't been in Russia since 2018. There was a time then when you could get a serious statement from their economic officials about their economic situation. You really can't get that now. Sanctions have to be hurting them, but they're expert at eluding sanctions. The fact that they're working so closely with Iran and China I think will help them economically. So I wouldn't count on economic stress being the – you know, the critical factor that we assumed it would be at the beginning of the war with sanctions. And, you know, the problem with our policy is always that sanctions is our default response to almost everything, and it's one weapon we can easily invoke. But I'm not thinking this is a killer for the Russians at this point.

Rear Adm. Woods: I think what's going to affect them as much as the sanctions – and we should obviously be putting sanctions on all the cronies and all the companies and all the rest of it – it's been the migration of the labor force. You know, the Russians have lost so many skilled labor, either avoiding conscription or because they're just not going to put up with what they're seeing as increasing totalitarianism and oppression. And I think that's going to bite in the long term because they're going to get – they're having a brain drain.

Ms. Harding: People voting with their feet, if they can't vote, actually.

Mr. McLaughlin: Yeah, I've always felt that, you know, again, you know, the Russia that we knew prior to this war, was a Russia in which people liked to travel abroad, they liked to send their children abroad. They had a lot of money to spend. They were integrating into the world in a way. And I think more than sanctions itself, more than the availability of specific goods in Russia, I think the thing that is most painful to them, those who have remained – and many, of course, have left – but for those who have remained, it's the inability to move about freely in the world and to participate in the world in the way that Russia had become accustomed to doing. And this is one of the things, going back to Putin's whiteboard, that Putin threw away with this war. The fact that, I mean, back a year ago, I wrote my first piece on this, I made the point that Putin will be a pariah and will ultimately be accused of war crimes. Now, I have to think that the people around him, his closest associates, are thanking, well, me too, maybe? So there has to be – even though it's hard to see, there has to be some kind of pressure building inside of Russia to either stop this war or to change the situation in a way that would once again take Russia back to where it was before Putin threw it all away.

Amb. Magierowski: You know, the Russian economy and the Russian society are extraordinarily resilient, have always been. And I should not be even saying that as a diplomat, but with all due respect, they can survive on cabbage and potatoes for many years. I do believe that they will finally – they will eventually feel the pinch of sanctions. But it will take some time. It's always a very arduous process. We can – we can, you know, recall the example of Iran, of Cuba. It's never like this.

On the other hand, you know, there are so many social inequalities in Russia, which paradoxically, helped them survive this crisis, because people who have always lived well, they still enjoy a good life and comfortable life, be it in Moscow, in St. Petersburg, or in Dubai, or in Istanbul. And all those who have lived in abject poverty up to now, they still do in – again, in all those, you know, remote villages in Siberia. So, sanctions for them are completely irrelevant, because they don't change either positively or negatively their day-to-day existence. So I think that it's also important to – not to look at the Russian economy and the Russian – and the foundations of the Russian society through the prism of our own European views.

Finally, I think that what we have seen now with Europe reducing its dependence on imports of Russian raw materials, how irrelevant, how unimportant Russia is, actually, in terms of the global economic bloodstream. You exclude oil and gas and Russia has nothing to offer, actually. And you're absolutely right that the only – there are a few countries which do – it's like, you know, an IV drip for Russia Today, China purchasing humongous amounts of Russian gas and oil; India as well, unfortunately. So I think that when that ends, Russia's role in the – in the global economic constellation, if you will, will be absolutely naked, and we'll see in plain view how weak and how unimportant Russia is, quite interestingly, for the – you know, the global picture.

Mr. McLaughlin: Picking up on the ambassador's comments, though, absolutely correct that there is this division in Russia between St. Petersburg, Moscow, and everyone else.

That said, Putin's war has broken the social contract with the elites in Russia, because if you talk to people in influential positions in Petersburg or Moscow, something commonly said when I've been there is here's the social contract. Stay out of politics and you can have a nice life. And really life was very nice for the elites in Russia or for people living in those two cities, at least, and some of the other large cities.

Life is not so nice now. And so that's something we can't gauge at this point – certainly I can't – the effect of what I think is breaking that social contract with those in Russia who are most important to Putin's survival and the stability of his regime.

Rear Adm. Woods: A contact in Gima, in Moscow, told me at the start of the war 95 percent of the siloviki, so all the sort of securocrats, were in favor of the war. Seventy percent of the businessmen were in favor. After one week that had flipped for businessmen, so only 30 percent were in favor because they could see what was happening. And even the siloviki had gone down to about 70-30.

So there was a definite realization within the first week of the war that this was not going well, that there had been this miscalculation, that Putin underestimated the cohesion and the solidarity of the West. He had definitely underestimated the Ukrainian army. And so those societal tensions, as you say, they will play out and we will see what that means over time. But when you look at stampedes at Ikea in Omsk on its last day before being shut, you can see that there was definite an impact that sanctions were having.

Ms. Harding: That's quite the sentence – stampeded Ikea in Omsk. That's a lot of geopolitics and economics wrapped into one sentence. (Laughter.) And it is true, the Russian oligarchs are all cut off from their yachts and their penthouses in London at the moment. And every time you see some kind of hint in the press that an oligarch is coming out and criticizing Putin, it's like the new Kremlinology. Who is perhaps turning their back on the Kremlin?

Were you going to add something there?

Rear Adm. Woods: No, no, no, no, no. Just absolutely, you know, and the children of oligarchs not going to their finishing schools.

Ms. Harding: Indeed. It's a tragedy.

Mr. McLaughlin: Well, you know, we know that a spring offensive is planned. A lot hinges on that spring offensive that the Ukrainians are going – will mount. We cannot yet – I certainly cannot, at this point, gauge how it's going to go; great shortage of 155-millimeter ammunition. That has to be pushed in, and many other things. HIMARS are going. Tanks are going. But we don't know how that's going to go. But a knockout blow on the Russian military in that offensive could have a ripple effect in Russia that is hard to calculate at this point.

I think, you know, we're entering a period where Russia is even less predictable internally than it has always been. And we should be prepared for surprises.

Ms. Harding: I think that's true. So on that note, I'm going to turn to some audience questions. One person asked about the theory of victory in the Russia-Ukraine war. So what does victory look like for the Ukrainians, in your view?

Rear Adm. Woods: So, I mean, you talk about a spring offensive and being able to perhaps cut that land bridge to Crimea. I think victory is not just about the military lever, because at some stage we need the diplomatic community and everyone else to come in and start looking at actually what does a peace settlement look like.

So I just think we need to be careful when we start talking about victory. You know, there needs to be conditions by which both sides end up going to the negotiating table. And I don't think we're there yet. Certainly the Russians keep just plowing people into Vuhledar, Bakhmut, Avdiivka. So they're certainly showing no sign that they're ready to negotiate. I think it would be suicidal for Zelensky to negotiate now. So this is where we just need the diplomats to come together and work out actually what is – what is the equation that allows us, both sides, to come to a solution on this? Because, yeah, we're going to see the military play out, and the Ukrainians might score some tactical operational successes. But ultimately, strategic success is going to be with a diplomatic lever thrown in.

Amb. Magierowski: I don't believe in a diplomatic solution, not after all those atrocities, again, committed by Russian troops in Ukraine. It would be like negotiating with Hitler in April 1945. I do believe in Ukraine's military victory but, quite frankly, everything boils down to what will happen with Crimea. This is, I think, the most important element of this whole equation. Russians are probably pretty much concerned about the Ukrainian government's designs in this respect. And I think that the most purse definition of Ukraine's victory would be to have their borders back, all those territories attacked, invaded, annexed, and occupied since 2014. As simple as that.

Mr. McLaughlin: That's, as the ambassador described it, is the way I would define it as well. Have the borders back to where they were before 2014, Crimea being the big problem. How you deal with Crimea is – I think if you get to that point, that will be the major diplomatic challenge. I hesitate to even suggest a solution. I've seen people talk about maybe you need to have a referendum there – an internationally supervised referendum. The Crimea – you know, obviously Ukrainians want it back. But that, I think, will be the sticking point.

And then we have to think about, if that is a victory – and, again, I agree with the ambassador that up to the point when we – until we – once we learned how the Russians were conducting this war, with what are now universally accepted as war crimes, I could see that a negotiated solution could be possible. But once that – once we've crossed that bridge, I can't imagine the Ukrainians settling for anything other than what the ambassador has described.

Then we have to think about, well, what happens after that? Russia is still under sanctions. How do they get out from under sanctions? Where does the money come from to rebuild Ukraine? Presumably, Russia will then have reparations, or the billions that we've sequestered that are, you know, off limits for the Russians now can be devoted to that. So there's kind of a bleak and dispirited future for Russia, I think, in any aftermath of this that I can see.

Rear Adm. Woods: I mean, I have the utmost admiration for my Ukrainian friends in the armed forces of Ukraine. The ability to withstand what they've been – you know, well, throughout the whole 14 months, but especially at the start of this year where the Russians have just been throwing after conscript after conscript, equipment after equipment, into that eastern line. But the thought of – and I'd love to have my optimism bar switched up to 11 that says that the Ukrainians will be able to expel them from all parts of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson. I think Crimea's got to be a political solution because of just the concentration of force that is there and what it would mean for the Ukrainians to go in there.

Ukraine has been amazing, but they still haven't demonstrated kind of that air-land integration that NATO forces would show. So in any forthcoming spring offensive, you know, even that tactical and operational success will be met by further Russian escalation. You know, this is – Putin's neurotic when it comes to Ukraine. You know, if it's July '21 essay going back to the 1922 borders, if it's his speech last year that talks about the great northern war that went on for 21 years in 1700 onwards, you know, he's in this for the long term. So, you know, to say there's – I don't think there's going to be a very quick military solution. I'd love to be wrong, but I'm afraid I'm just looking at it through what we're seeing in terms of war attrition at the moment.

Hence, we just need to be seeing what are favorable conditions for Ukraine to negotiate. And I think the Ukrainians would be up for that, notwithstanding some of the horrors that we saw up in Abuja, and in Mariupol, and in Sumy.

Amb. Magierowski: It's been a longstanding tradition in the tsarist, Bolshevik, Soviet, and Russian Russia to perceive other nations in Europe as irrelevant, unimportant. We know something about that, by the way, we the Poles. So it's – as you said, so Ukraine is absolutely an undescribable, jarring element in Putin's mindset. So he can't even – he can't afford to lose this war because it is his, you know, political and also, if you will, psychological priority to crush the Ukrainians.

By the way, it is also one of his many accomplishments that the admiral mentioned a few minutes ago. It's not only about reinvigorating NATO, it's

not only about enlarging this organization, but also about strengthening the Ukrainian national identity.

Ms. Harding: Right.

Amb. Magierowski: That is absolutely incredible. I think before the war very few people here in America knew what the Ukrainian colors looked like. Now you can see Ukrainian flags basically everywhere. Nobody knew what the name of the Ukrainian president was. Now everybody knows Zelensky. So that's also pretty interesting.

Rear Adm. Woods: Yeah. We had a joke that, basically, Putin has done more for Ukrainian nationalism than Stepan Bandera did in the sort of '40s and '50s. (Laughter.) And you know, you're seeing more black and red Banderista flags now, you know.

Mr. McLaughlin: Although there was a generational change in Ukraine that was impressive. Putin sort of put the frosting on this with the war, but prior to the war if you went to Ukraine you realized there was a new generation of people who were not just patriotic but determined to stamp out corruption, determined to bring a democracy there, to polish their democracy.

I had a young member of parliament say to me, you know, here's the danger we face – this is before the war – Ukraine is the only country that can change Russia. What she meant was the Russians don't think of us as – they think of us as their little brothers, little sisters. If we have a functioning, transparent, prosperous democracy here Putin knows that his citizens will want the same thing if we can have that.

I actually think that's – I think that's a bigger driver for Putin than worries about NATO. He knows NATO is not going to attack Russia. But Putin – but he knows that Ukraine can change Russia.

Amb. Magierowski: You know why Bucha was attacked in the first place, because it was and still is a posh neighborhood. It was a symbol – the crushing and destroying a symbol of Ukraine's growing prosperity.

Ms. Harding: Yeah. They were determined very much so in the Maidan to look west and to tie Ukraine closer to Europe, and I do think that what was probably going through Putin's mind at the time was something along the lines of how dare they.

I am concerned that this will be a long-term war, and as you pointed out, the ability of the Russians to put up with pain, the commitment of the Ukrainians to fulfilling what they see as getting their – all of their territory back and to having a whole Ukraine and Russia kicked out.

And then you have NATO and a Europe and an America that are eager to see Russia pushed back where they are now as opposed to making trouble later on, and the question of, you know, what is a sustainable end to the fight, I think, is going to be one of those friction points in Europe that I am concerned about perhaps causing some friction in the alliance.

But I have been very pleasantly surprised to see us work through those thus far and hope that can, certainly, continue.

One more question from the audience. I think I have time for a couple more. A couple people asking about the Russia-China relationship. Felicia Schwartz from Financial Times asks, have you seen any change in China's willingness to provide weapons to Russia after the Xi-Putin meeting? Is China trying to find the red lines that would trigger a Western response?

Who wants to take that one on?

Mr. McLaughlin: Well, this was another case where – I don't know this for a fact but I assume the comment by the U.S. government saying there are indications that Russia is – or that China is considering lethal aid, I assume, without knowing that that was something drawn from an intelligence report. So it's another case where intelligence was used to, perhaps, discourage that.

I think China is still walking a fine line here. I know the Xi-Putin visit seemed to go well and got a lot of publicity and they seem to be on the same page on many issues. At the same time, China really needs Europe and Europe wants to maintain a relationship with China so they've got to be careful not to – and if you look at the public opinion polls in Europe, China is not well regarded now among most countries. I mean, the disapproval of China is somewhere between 34 percent and 90 percent, depending on whether you are polling in the east or in the center. So it's a fine line that China has to walk here.

One possible advantage of China and Russia working together – if you can imagine an advantage – is that I think it diminishes the likelihood of Putin actually using nuclear weapons in this conflict because China has a no-first-use policy. And if Putin were to use nuclear weapons, China would have to condemn it. I can't imagine that China could do anything other than strongly condemn it. So, in a sense, Xi's embrace of Putin may discourage that tendency of Putin to think about it even.

Amb. Magierowski: In order to grow and to increase its international clout, China needs economic stability worldwide. If you look, for example, at the map of Europe and all those post-Soviet republics in Central Asia, this is where Belt and Road runs. So the more unstable the situation in that region, the more concerned the Chinese leadership will be.

And again, the worse the economic – the global economic situation, the less inclined China will be to prolong this war.

Rear Adm. Woods: Yeah, I mean, China's foreign policy is governed by the need for internal stability, so it's all about GDP growth so that you can continue to feed a good burgeoning and growing middle class. Anything that harms that means that you don't go down that foreign policy route. So I think the calling out of, don't you do this because we will sanction you, was very apt. And China would listen to that – in terms of the Xi-Putin link. I mean, you know – I mean, you've effectively got Moscow now being a vassal to Beijing in the same way Minsk is to Moscow, and I think that's more and more telling.

And at the same time, China are benefiting from discounted hydrocarbons –

Ms. Harding: Right, exactly.

Rear Adm. Woods: So, you know, which is good for internal stability.

Ms. Harding: That's quite the chain – from Belarus to Moscow to Beijing.

Anything else anybody wanted to add on the China relationship? We could go for hours on this one, I know.

Mr. McLaughlin: Well, I would just say that, you know, everyone makes a lot of whether we should be pivoting toward Asia and possibly at the risk of neglecting Europe. I think that's a bit of an artificial issue. The two things are so connected now. I mean, Japan has – the Japanese prime minister has visited Ukraine at the same time that Xi was visiting Moscow, so I think in Asia they are watching this very carefully; not just the Chinese but our partners in Asia, and we certainly cannot engage effectively in the Indo-Pacific region without a European – what is our force multiplier? Our force multiplier is our alliance structure. Where is our alliance structure centered? In Europe.

So I think these two things are connected in ways that are unprecedented in modern times, and I don't think we fully can map that yet.

Amb. Magierowski: Let me just add to this that Poland has just signed some very juicy contracts with some South Korean companies, and that's another connection.

Mr. McLaughlin: Yeah.

Ms. Harding: Exactly, yeah.

OK, so back into your continent for a second. There are a few questions about the security of some other European states that are on the periphery,

talking about the Baltics and then also talking about what this means, what Finland's accession to NATO means for Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova to potentially join one day. How do we see the security situation there developing?

Rear Adm. Woods: We've still got the NATO open-door policy – I don't think anything has changed there. I think we may have mismanaged expectations when that was announced, you know, back when it was, but that still remains NATO policy.

You know, it would be great – as we heard earlier – that Ukraine would be able to – you know, have accession to NATO, and Georgia, and Moldova, but I just think we do need to be very careful. There is a time and a place for that, and we don't want to sleepwalk our way into a NATO Article 5 situation that we wouldn't want, that would suddenly bring about the thing we don't want.

At the same time, Article 5 is the one thing that worries Putin, you know. It's the one reason, I think, that the Baltic states/Poland/Finland are safe, because NATO Article 5 is the bedrock of our collective security. And we need to protect that very carefully.

Mr. McLaughlin: Think about what Europe will be after this war. When this war is finally over, Ukraine will be the country in Europe with the greatest experience in war in modern times, since World War II. And the frontline states, stretching from the Baltics through Poland and south to the Czech Republic and perhaps even to Bulgaria – we have sent forces to Bulgaria – will be, in a way, the – how to put it –

Ms. Harding: Recipients of wisdom.

Mr. McLaughlin: – the heartbeat of NATO.

Ms. Harding: Ah, yes.

Mr. McLaughlin: The heartbeat of NATO. What does that mean? That's a fundamental change in the – what would you call it? – the balance of influence, not the balance of power but the kind of balance of influence and energy in the NATO alliance. And how do you keep Ukraine out? How do you logically keep Ukraine out after they've fought a war with Russia?

And before this war, I think the United States was, you know, hands off that idea of Ukraine in NATO. They knew it was too provocative. But after this war, how do you keep Ukraine out when it is the most experienced country in Europe in what NATO is all about?

Amb. Magierowski: It has been Russia's flagship policy for years to artificially create frozen conflicts in the most immediate neighborhood. We have examples of

Moldova, of Georgia, now Ukraine, in order not to allow those countries to get closer to our civilization, to the West, to the free world, also to some very specific political and military organizations and entities like NATO and European Union, because, again, I do believe that it is my firm conviction that Ukraine's membership in the European Union is much more important than Ukraine's accession to NATO, because Ukraine's prosperity, Ukraine growing economically, effectively cracking down on corruption, and decoupling itself irreversibly from the Soviet sphere of influence, and also from the Soviet mentality, is Mr. Putin's worst nightmare and primary concern also in terms of his foreign policy.

Ms. Harding: This is an important point, I mean, your point about how, before the war, the U.S. was a little standoffish because it would be provocative. Also Ukraine had some internal problems with corruption, with highly penetrated services by the Russian intelligence services. There were some actual practical reasons as well. And some of the steps that Zelensky has taken to try to root corruption out of those services, I think, is going to be a selling point for a closer tie into the EU and a closer tie into NATO as well.

I think we have time for maybe one more – readiness. Let's talk about readiness. That will be a good transition to the rest of our day. We're going to talk about things like how well prepared NATO is to continue fighting in a long conflict. We had a couple of questions about whether or not required military service is going to be a thing for NATO going forward. I suspect the answer is no, but that's an interesting question.

What do you see as the key elements of NATO readiness when it comes to the European theater? And I'm going to start with you on that one, sir.

Rear Adm. Woods: So I think, in terms of readiness, we've seen definitely a strengthening of the southeastern and the eastern flank since early 2022 because of basically egregious actions by Russia. It will be very interesting to see what comes out of Vilnius and the commitment of percentage of GDP to defense spending, because we need – I think we do need to see an increase in all of our countries.

You know, the U.K. just committed an increase up 2.5 percent. You said, I think, 4 percent for Poland. You know, the U.S. has just announced a massive $842 billion budget for the forthcoming year. You know, I think we need to see that across the alliance, because that's the way we're going to increase our readiness and our interoperability and our capability in the face of very real threats, not just within Europe but across the world.

We've also seen sort of the kickstarting of the industrial base. I was at something where Bill LaPlante was speaking recently, and he was describing the brilliant way that the U.S. now recognizes the need to start producing

more stuff. So we can increase our own stockpiles. We can increase our own readiness.

And now we've just announced that in the U.K. as well on the back of our integrated review refresh, the need to actually just kickstart industry again because you can't keep providing new for old for Ukraine. You know, we've got to generate our own stockpiles. We've got to improve the way we do engineering support. So we're increasing our readiness across our capabilities, both, you know, land-air-sea and in C5ISR. So there is a lot to do. But I think we're hearing the right noises at the moment, that we recognize amongst the alliance that that's what we must do. And it will be really good when we get to Vilnius that we see that unity of all nations committing to increase their defense budgets.

Mr. McLaughlin: I think it's a mixed picture. I mean, no question NATO's in better shape than it has ever been. On the other hand, I think only about seven countries have actually gone to 2 percent. And they are the ones you would expect, the frontline states and the U.K., and Greece which is always high because of other issues.

Amb. Magierowski: Because of Turkey.

Mr. McLaughlin: Because of Turkey, yeah. But so that's an issue. On the other hand, I say mixed picture. On the other hand, there are two new F-35 squadrons in the U.K. There are two new destroyers in Rota. There are four – as you were indicating – the frontline states – there are new deployments to the frontline states. So I think it's a mixed – it's a mixed picture. And also, stocks are depleted. So all of those things are issues that can be worked on. They're not unsolvable, but they are – they require attention.

Ms. Harding: This is something we're going to talk about for the rest of the day, the empty bins question. Are we ready to continue fighting in a high-tech, high-turnover war when it comes to weaponry and equipment?

Mr. Ambassador, I'll give you the last word.

Amb. Magierwoski: Very concisely. Of course, I fully agree with the admiral that the industrial-military complex is of fundamental importance in terms of our military effort in a future hypothetical major conflagration, not only in our part of Europe but also elsewhere. But I would add another factor to this, namely the existing and upcoming cyber threats, where we haven't touched on this issue in our conversation. But I think that we are – if we are unable to effectively safeguard our interests and ensure that our critical interest structure works properly in times of war, then we would have a – quite a serious – we would face quite a serious problem.

And, last point, I think that one of the very few things Russians excel at nowadays is disinformation. And I think that this particular factor has been somehow overlooked by NATO and by the European Union. For example, in – we are, you know, somehow addicted to this Eurocentric view of what is going on in Ukraine and how compromised Russia's reputation is on the international stage. If we think that we are winning that battle of narrative, we are totally wrong. In Latin America, in Asia, in Africa, all those Russian arguments about the war and its origins fall on a very fertile ground.

Also because, I don't know how many of you are aware of that, but around 100,000 young people from the so-called third world countries, or nonaffiliated, in the '70s, in the '80s, and also at the beginning of the '90s, just after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, received scholarships in Moscow, in St. Petersburg. They are – they graduated from Soviet and Russian universities. Now in their '60s and '70s, they are heads of state, presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, lawyers, architects, opinion makers, celebrities.

In Africa, in Latin America, in Asia, thousands of them speaking Russian. And thousands of them much more vulnerable to Russian propaganda than us. So it is, again, a phenomenon a little bit under the radar. But we also have to focus on this if you want to be well prepared for all those, you know, future confrontations with Russia.

Mr. McLaughlin: There is a kind of separation developing between global south and global north. Not quite north-south, but roughly along those lines, as the ambassador suggests. I mean, for countries in Africa and Latin America, the issues that we are talking about here are superseded by other issues that to them are more personally compelling at this moment, coupled with the fact that Russian diplomacy has been pretty effective there, along with Chinese diplomacy.

Ms. Harding: The implications of global food supplies based on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, I'm not sure why we're not talking about that more. We do ignore the Global South at our peril, and I think that's going to be a continuing feature of these discussions.

Well, thank you so much. Before you all make a run for coffee for our 15-minute break before our keynote with Seth Jones and Admiral Grady, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, please help me in thanking our panel. (Applause.)

(END)