Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

Golden Dome and Strategic Stability

DATE

Wednesday, November 19, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. EDT

CSIS EXPERTS

Heather Williams

Director, Project on Nuclear Issues and Senior Fellow, Defense and Security Department, CSIS

Tom Karako

Director, Missile Defense Project and Senior Fellow, Defense and Security Department, CSIS

Kari A. Bingen

Director, Aerospace Security Project and Senior Fellow, Defense and Security Department, CSIS

Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
www.superiortranscriptions.com

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Kari A. Bingen: Hello. President Trump's proposal for a missile defense shield to defend the United States homeland, the Golden Dome Initiative, has sparked considerable debate. Is Golden Dome destabilizing, as Russia and China have claimed? How should we evaluate the expansion and modernization of their own arsenals on the strategic balance with the United States? How should policymakers think about strategic stability in an era of rapid technological change and great-power competition?

I'm Kari Bingen, director of the CSIS Aerospace Security Project. I'm joined today by Tom Karako, director of the Missile Defense Project, and Heather Williams, Director of the Project on Nuclear Issues. Welcome to HTK, a series devoted to the analysis of strategic forces issues of the day. HTK stands for "Heather, Tom and Kari." For defense wonks out there, you know that it also stands for "hit to kill." Here's a clip of a Chinese spokesperson speaking on Golden Dome.

(Begin Video Clip)

Ms. Bingen: (End Video Clip)

While some critiques have focused on the feasibility and cost of such a project, our colleagues Clayton Swope and Melissa Dalton, with the Aerospace Security Project, recently published a commentary on Golden Dome's role in strategic stability in an era of great-power competition, which I commend to you all to read. Our conversation today will unpack their arguments and consider how Golden Dome could influence the U.S. relationship with Moscow and Beijing, who have both decried Golden Dome as a threat.

So, Tom, let's kick off with you. Or, I should say, Professor Karako, let's kick off with you. You know, the concept of strategic stability, this is very much an academic term. There have been books written about it for decades now, largely throughout the Cold War period. So what is strategic stability? And what does it have to do with Golden Dome?

Tom Karako: Well, that's a good question, Kari. And I think it's, without being semantic, or perhaps by embracing being semantic, I think we just got to break the concept down, right? What does the word "strategic" mean and what is the stability that we're that we're talking about here? And, you know, it is – it's kind of a Rorschach test. Everybody carries around strategic stability, oh, that just means, you know, not big nuclear war, not big nuclear attack on the homeland. I'm struck, and I've said this before, just by the frequency that – you know, there's a lot of four-stars out there that still walk around with the idea that "strategic" means big nuclear attack on the homeland, as opposed to other things.

And so I think that, you know, strategic just means the art of the general or the science of war, something like that. But I think it's important to fundamentally disentangle it from a particular technology or from a particular weapon. And I think that kind of informs a little bit more intellectual clarity to get after it. You know, to some extent there is that Rorschach test, that idea that, oh, Golden Dome is, you know, this perfect – this perfect defense. It's going to make nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete, to use a phrase. And I want to read – I want to read a couple comments from this joint statement by the People's Republic of China and Russia. One of them is: Deeply destabilizing in nature, is the Golden Dome for America, a large-scale program designed to establish unconstrained, global, deeply layered, and multidomain missile defense system to protect against any missile threats. This means a complete and ultimate rejection to recognize the existence and inseparable relationship between strategic offensive arms and strategic defensive arms."

Well, first of all, there's a lot of scary adjectives in there – adjectives and adverbs. And, secondly, boy, they seem to have greater insight into the architecture than many of us do, than Congress does, frankly. And so I think there's a couple things going on there. One of which is, this is just their playbook. This is just their talking points. I sometimes wonder, you know, who's the audience for this kind of a message? And then I think, oh, I know who the audience is. It's the college professors who will, you know, dutifully assign this long statement to their classes and say, oh, this is right, this is what, you know, the Trump administration is doing, which is a little silly. And we'll get into that kind of, I would say, some of the hypocrisy, some of the contradictions about what they're saying as opposed to kind of what they're doing, and whether that makes sense, and whether it makes sense to say that this is destabilizing.

You know, I also want to read another statement from this – or, a section of this long statement. Which is: The two sides, Russia and China are convinced that the destinies of the peoples of all countries are interrelated, states and their associations should not seek to ensure their own security at the expense and to the detriment of the security of other states. I mean, really? You know, have you – have you talked to Ukraine lately?

Heather Williams: It's laughable.

Dr. Karako: I have this flashback –

Ms. Bingen: Should not seek their own security to the detriment of others.

Dr. Karako: Yeah. I had flashbacks of Nicholas Maduro swaying and seeing singing "Imagine." You know, the same guy who's running down his own people in the streets. Do they think we're going to fall for this? And I think the answer is, yes. And I think some people – some people probably will. It's a little bit like what, you know, Angell called in over a century ago, the great illusion, the sort of – or, the deceitful dream of a golden age that we can kind of, you know, hang onto the security blanket to protect us from a much more complicated political and geopolitical reality. And that's why I'm a little bit of a curmudgeon on this. I think it's really important to disentangle whatever it is one wants to define a strategic stability from a particular weapon, from nuclear weapons itself.

And, you know, there's a – there was a report done a couple years ago, kind of a compilation of a bunch of analyzes about what does strategic stability even mean. And I think there's just some great essays in there, including by Colin Gray and Ron Lehman, that just really disentangle this and take it apart into little, small pieces. And I commend Clayton and Melissa for that fine piece really going after this. And let me just quote from that piece that they put out recently as well. Is that, you know, if the litmus test for strategic stability was whether anyone was engaged in a full-scale nuclear war, then, yes, the world is basking in a period of strategic stability. But then they also go on to say that if you mean by "strategic stability," stability, and not trying to upset the status quo, not trying to get new strategic weapons, this sort of thing, then actually, no. The actions of Russia and China – not just invading their neighbors – but the actions of Russia and China on a military basis, on a weapons system development basis, is very destabilizing.

And so I look at this and I think about Golden Dome as, again, an initiative that is long overdue. It is much needed. And that is stabilizing. And I've said this before, but you ask Ukraine do they think that national missile defense is stabilizing or destabilizing, relative to the, you know, effort of Russia to try to wipe them out and negate them. So I think that the way in which we talk about Chinese and Russian missile defenses and air defenses is illuminating. We tend to talk about them in a different way than when we talk about kind of SDI, or we talk about Golden Dome, and this sort of thing. It's sort of taken for granted that Russian and Chinese air and missile defenses, well, that may make sense. It's A2/AD, right, anti-access/area denial. But when we do it, when we treat North America as a region, and we try to create some A2/AD bubbles, oh, this is scary. This is destabilizing. I think it's just kind of incoherent, frankly.

You know, China and Russia talk about the United States weaponizing space. Like, are you kidding, right? This is all you, Kari, but, like, they're doing a lot in space. And this ridiculous statement about, you know, the

Golden Dome is going to weaponize space with, oh, my goodness, a couple space-based interceptors, it's just kind of ridiculous. And I'm going to get off my soapbox here and turn it over you guys, but I think really just got to call a spade a spade here, and not be – not be bamboozled.

Ms. Bingen: Well so then Heather, you know, Professor Williams, you're one of those academics that Tom referred to. (Laughter.) I mean, you did your Ph.D. in all of these areas. Is, you know, that arms control, nuclear deterrence, nuclear strategic stability – so I know you have a lot to say on what this concept means, but also how the conditions – you know, are the conditions that were present then, that led to those concepts, are they still in place today?

Dr. Williams: Hmm. I really like Tom's comment about how the term "strategic stability" has become this Rorschach test. And I feel like I'm now going to reveal my own nuclear tendencies and kind of predilections around this. (Laughter.) And so I do want to just back up even a little bit more in terms of how we might define strategic stability. I don't think there's ever been an agreed to or consistent definition. It's a very contested term. I'll put out three definitions that I have heard that are probably the most popular. The most popular are probably, among the nuclear community, is that strategic stability means survivable second strike. As long as you have a survivable second strike force, then you are able to retaliate against a nuclear first strike, and that that will strengthen deterrence, and that that will prevent nuclear weapons from being used at all.

The second definition comes from Thomas Schelling, another great strategic stability thinker, who defined it in terms of arms race stability. So in a competition where neither side has incentives to do rapid strategic buildups, and also crisis stability, where you don't have incentives to do escalation. That's kind of where my – that's probably the one that I lean towards. The last one, that I think is a really interesting one is, but the Russians have never really accepted our definitions or our approaches to strategic stability. For them, it was always broader. It wasn't just nuclear. It had a deep psychological component to it. And I can see the U.S. strategic studies community starting to kind of catch on to how the Russians have thought about this for a while. I think where I might have a very nuanced different take than Tom is on I do think there is still a value in conceptualizing strategic stability as no incentives for nuclear weapons use. The goal here is that a nuclear weapon is never used in anger. And that creating that environment and those strategic conditions, that that is what stability really should be all about.

In terms of the Russian and the Chinese claims – so I'm going to add another – I have another quote here. This was from a Chinese statement at U.N. General Assembly First Committee, where they accused the United States of turning outer space into a war fighting domain, the continued military buildup in outer space, entitlement this to a Golden Dome. And, you know what, I went back and looked through the statement. I didn't see any mention about Russia potentially deploying a nuclear weapon into space. And so there is clearly a double standard and some double-speak going on for both China and Russia around this issue.

But my colleagues on the PONI team, Lachlan MacKenzie and Raymond Wang will have a piece coming out later today on Russian and Chinese perceptions. But to just hit some of their kind of main top points, the Russians and the Chinese are pushing back on Golden Dome. I think there's two big things going on here. One is that this is – from their talking points at least – this is just another U.S. tool to try to seek strategic supremacy. The Chinese love to point out, oh, the U.S. is in pursuit of strategic hegemony. And this just proves that even further. And for the Russians, the Russian have just always hated our missile defenses. Like, they've just always hated it – whether it's theater or homeland, this has been the bugbear of so many arms control agreements, right? Even in New START, which you guys have worked on, on the Hill, getting the language around missile defense has always been a real challenge for arms control agreements going forward. And I think that is still true for the Russians.

The second big point that they, that my colleagues are pointing to is that Russia and China have highlighted uncertainty around Golden Dome, and questioning can the U.S. actually deliver this? Do they have the defense industrial base? What is this? And so I want to – I want to really plug a fantastic piece, Tom, that you wrote, I think it came out yesterday in Breaking Defense, on what is it, stop the gag order?

Dr. Karako: Loosen the gag order and start talking.

Dr. Williams: Yeah. And in the absence of more information, not just our adversaries but also our allies are going to have a lot of questions about what is Golden Dome? What does it actually do? And, Tom, I would add to the audience on that not just college professors, but also the wider international community and the Global South, which have a tendency to pick up Chinese talking points and run with it. And so that U.N. First Committee statement, I can envision a lot of Global South or middle ground countries picking that up and saying, oh yeah, Golden Dome is the thing that's undermining strategic stability right now. You know, in my opinion, it's not undermining it any more than Russia or China's

massive buildups, and Russia's potential deployment of a nuclear weapon in space. But, I mean, from the strategic stability perspective, how are you thinking about it in the space context, Kari?

Ms. Bingen: You know, it's – I'm just very cautious about taking a nuclear concept and applying it to space. And so these ideas, like a survivable second strike, I just don't know that they – I don't believe that they hold water in the space context. I mean, that presumes that the other side values space as much as you do. So there's some – I think there's some differences there.

The other piece that I think is really interesting is on this strategic stability. It also presumes symmetry. It presumes rough symmetry in nuclear – in one side's nuclear forces and another side's nuclear forces. What have we seen China in particular do over the last two decades? They have pursued asymmetric capabilities, particularly in space and in cyberspace. And I'm glad you both raised what China and Russia are doing in space, because we, every year, put out a space threat assessment on just the range of weaponization or counter-space weapons that both China and Russia are pursuing and, frankly, have been pursuing for decades. So let's not kid ourselves that Golden Dome is just something new with respect to space weaponization. They've been doing it for a long time. And they demonstrated – FOBS is a great example, right? Fracture orbital bombardment system.

Dr. Karako: Space is a war fighting domain. I don't know if you've heard this, by the way.

Ms. Bingen: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. And it was – it's been militarized from the get – from the 1950s. Let's not kid ourselves there.

But, you know, on this asymmetric piece, I think there's a really interesting dimension here that needs further scholarship and exploration. Is we're now at a point where you have, with these new technologies – and space and cyber come to mind – where you have this class of weapons short of nuclear that can create mass strategic effect. So space, you know, targeting, say, GPS, and having GPS go out, say, potentially worldwide. Cyberattacks, like the Volt Typhoon that targeted critical infrastructure in the U.S. homeland, I mean those things are quite escalatory and significant. So how do we think about, maybe, rather – maybe not strategic stability as a concept, but deterring those kinds of acts?

But let me – let me go back to – I mean, I think this all comes full circle then is, OK, do the Russians and Chinese – you know, it sounds like – well, do the Russians and Chinese have a point here? What are your

thoughts on Golden Dome undermining strategic stability? I think I know your answer, but I'll throw that out.

Dr. Karako: Yeah. So, look, I think it's important, especially for kind of the American strategic forces discussion, is to keep in mind our particular political conversations. And a couple years ago I had over Representative Doug Lamborn and Representative Seth Moulton. I think it was the 40th anniversary of SDI. We did a little thing with the two of them. And, you know, I want to – I want to quote Representative Moulton, in particular. And, you know, he kind of says there's different layers, or different levels of missile defense. You got your rogue missile defense, rogue state missile defense, to kind of contend with those guys. You've got kind of your regional – your regional missile defenses against, kind of, shorter range stuff over there, from regardless of who it is. And then you've kind of – you know, your accidental launch things, like that.

And then you've kind of got this other thing, this sort of big strategic missile defense, to defend against everything. Kind of what the Russian and Chinese statement, any kinds of missiles, global, deeply layered, you know, to defeat everything. And I think Mr. Moulton was kind of pointing to something that is an idea more than a feasibility. And if that is the thing that we don't want from Golden Dome, well, the good news is it's not possible, all right? That's just not going to happen. And I think that when they get around to start talking about Golden Dome, that I predict that what you're going to see is something that is far more, to use a word, limited, both in terms of the number of threats that are feasibly able to be stopped and also in terms of the area, the defended asset list, that is no kidding able to be defended against especially aerial threats, for instance.

And so I think when the information gets out there, that I think we're going to see this for something that is far more tractable, and far more doable, and far less fanciful, than I think a number of the commentators who, in the absence of information, folks are having to speculate in the think tanks and these sort of stuff, about what this might mean. So I think – again, I go back to the Ukraine thing. No. I think what this is, it's a long-overdue effort that is going to prove stabilizing. Contrary to the – you know, the Chinese FOBS, or all this other Russian and Chinese, you know, Dr. Evil weapons that they've been ginning up over the past decade or so. So my answer is, no. It's not destabilizing. Turn that on its head. It's going to be stabilizing, if we actually do even most of what we are expecting, that they may do.

Ms. Bingen: Well, and on that point, and both Clayton Swope and Melissa Dalton wrote this in their piece. Is they said, hey, there's no sign that Beijing is interested in balance. And so even – I keep going back to, is strategic

stability really a nuclear concept? And how do we think about it in this evolved world that we're in?

Because, Tom, to your earlier points, Golden Dome is – and we need to see the details, but it is supposed to be this architecture to defend the homeland – yes, against nuclear threats, but also this range of conventional threats. And we talked about this at our last episode when we were talking about House of Dynamite, is, you know, if you see ballistic missile, cruise missile, aerial threats, underwater, do we know – are they nuclear? Are they conventional?

Dr. Williams: Exactly, we don't know.

Ms. Bingen: So should we not have an ability as well to defend against those aerial and conventional threats against the homeland? Because, to your point, the Chinese, the Russians have a whole array of air and missile defenses protecting their mainland.

Dr. Williams: Mmm hmm. I think this was a – but Melissa and Clayton are hitting on such an important point, which I think needs to be getting a lot more attention. We seem interested in strategic stability. We seem interested in risk reduction and avoiding escalation. I'm not picking up that Russia and China are interested in the same things. They seem to be interested in manipulating risk. And so, to your question, you know, is Golden Dome going to be destabilizing, I mean, my answer to that is I don't know, because I still don't really understand – I don't know what Golden Dome is. And, again, that's why I think Tom's point about how we just need more information. This information vacuum I do not think is helping the program or the administration whatsoever.

Dr. Karako: It's letting Russia and China fill the vacuum with their narratives.

Dr. Williams: It is letting them drive the narrative, exactly. And so if we can get a bit more information about it and find out, you know, in what ways might this be destabilizing. And I want to make a little bit of a plug here for potentially creating opportunities for arms control. To be clear, I am not going to push for arms control for the sake of arms control right now. But historically, when you have these types of build ups and competitions that we're seeing, some ways to try to manage them have been arms control tools. The problem is, we have zero leverage right now for arms control. You know, if we wanted to have a negotiation tomorrow I don't know what we would put on the table.

But also, we don't have willing partners. The Chinese are just stonewalling any sort of arms control conversation. And so once we have a bit more information about Golden Dome, I'm wondering if that

might create some incentives within Beijing to finally start talking to us, to provide some transparency about what their arsenal is. Now, I would not suggest building up just to create leverage for arms control. No. You build up and you do these things because it's the right thing for defense, deterrence, and national security. In the process, you might be opening – creating some opportunities for dialogue and risk reduction. But, again, to Melissa and Clayton's point, I don't see any interest in risk reduction coming from Beijing or Moscow.

Ms. Bingen: So there's a great question here from the audience that I want to weave in, because it builds exactly off your points. And it's: Will Golden Dome or any significant missile defense likely promote an arms race between the United States, Russia, and China? Or will it lead to greater escalation risks in a crisis?

Dr. Williams: So I would say Russia and China have been building up for at least a decade right now. We have not. If you look at, side-by-side qualitative, quantitative expansions, you know, China's building their nuclear arsenal at 20 percent a year. Yes, they still are not near our number, but that's a pretty rapid rate of buildup. If you look at the number of platforms, we had that discussion about China's military parade where they showcased all these new capabilities, which are – their new capabilities are as many as we have total. And you look at the expansion of Russia's dual capable intermediate range systems, Russia and China have been building up. We haven't.

You know, our nuclear modernization program dates to 2010. The world is very, very different since then. And so even if we were executing our nuclear modernization plan – which we have not been particularly successful at doing thus far – even if we were doing that, to me, this is not an arms race. Or if it is, we aren't racing. They are building up. You know, what's that famous phrase? We build, they build. We stop, they build. And –

Dr. Karako: Yeah. Harold Brown.

Dr. Williams: What was that?

Dr. Karako: I think it was Harold Brown.

Dr. Williams: I think it was Harold Brown. And we're still seeing – I think that is the dynamic right now.

Dr. Karako: Yeah. No, I think that's exactly right. Takes two tango. Takes two runners to race. And, as you say, we're not really. And, you know, I still think of strategic stability as not just about nuclear weapons. You know, I think

about deterring nuclear use as nuclear deterrence. And I think of strategic stability as possible both with nuclear use and as broader than nuclear use, to comprehend, as you said, Kari, the non-nuclear strategic attack thing that I'm always going on about.

And there's this beautiful quote from Colin Gray, the late Colin Gray. Nuclear weapons change the grammar of deterrence, not its character. And so, you know, I kind of put that together with Margaret Thatcher talking about the monuments all over England being – the war memorials all over England being monuments to the failure of conventional deterrence, for example. And deterrence happens between the ears. And it's a phenomenon that is separate, of course, from nuclear weapons.

But, you know, going back to, you know, the beginning, I think it was Albert Wohlstetter's 1958 article on "The Delicate Balance of Terror," who talks in there about, hey, we've got to do all these things. We've got to have that secure retaliatory capability. And then he goes on to say, but you also might want to have missile defenses to protect your cities in case deterrence fails. Like, that's been there from the beginning. And I think what's interesting and fascinating to me is that, yes, strategic stability does have a very close association with nuclear weapons, especially in the 1960s onward, this kind of thing.

But it's also become so cramped and unimaginative. And we kind of recite these incantations, you know, from Thomas Schelling from yesteryear, and all this sort of stuff, without, I think, sufficient thought about them. And we've riffed on, Heather, about the lack of imagination, the lack of new ideas. Yes, in arms control, and I would just say in strategic thought broadly. Where's the new thinking, no kidding, that is coming up with something new and different, given the massive technological changes that, you know, all the emerging technologies and this kind of stuff that aren't just about nuclear weapons.

Dr. Williams: I mean, just in the course of this conversation we've been quoting Brodie, Wohlstetter, Schelling, Colin Gray. I – you know, who –

Ms. Bingen: Who is the 21st century version of them?

Dr. Williams: Exactly. And, I mean, you know, in the arms control community, arms control ideas and policies and concepts are still being driven by a book written in 1960. We need – we really need, fresh ideas. And I know that all three of our programs try to do a lot to bring in early and mid-career folks. And this is an appeal that I think we all can keep making to people who are thinking about coming into the field. We really need new ideas. We need people who are not totally – like, I want someone who is not

yet indoctrinated into Schelling's way of thinking. I want somebody who can think creatively. I mean, eventually we'll get them to Schelling, because everyone should read Schelling at some point. But this really is an important moment and opportunity for some fresh thinking on these issues.

Ms. Bingen: Yeah. Well, and, you know, back to this question on would something like Golden Dome or other missile defenses lead to greater escalation risk during our crisis, I mean, I – you know, heck, if Russia or China decided to launch several hundred nuclear weapons at the United States, and given – even though we don't know the details of the Golden Dome architecture – you know, that's going to be – that will be hard for missile defenses to stop. I mean, let's not get ourselves there, right? But if you can take off the table and remove that class of coercive threats, other types of threats of nuclear use, or even some of these exotic or novel conventional capabilities, that's what you want to take off the table and defend Americans, you know, critical assets, infrastructure against.

You know, in some respects, if you take those off the table, you're forcing your adversary to – you are forcing them to escalate. That's not a bad thing. I'd rather increase the cost to them and force that leader to decide, if I'm going to launch these weapons I can't just get away with a couple. Although, I mean, that's still really, really bad day. But I'm now forced to make an even worse decision of launching hundreds. I'd much rather them be in that position and complicate that decision than to give them these coercive opportunities. And it's not a bad thing. Escalation isn't a bad thing.

Dr. Williams: And that's what – it's not. And that's what the – I mean, that's basically the Chinese strategy right now, right? In Fiona Cunningham's book she's outlined how China's strategy is putting the escalation onus onto the U.S., where they are forcing us onto the escalation ladder. And the only option is for us to go up. It's not a – it's not a bad strategy. Like, it's deeply uncomfortable as we're all still trying to figure out new deterrence and escalation management strategies in the Indo-Pacific.

But, Kari, I think you're really onto something, which is what are some strategies and tools that we can use to put them on the back foot, put the escalation onus onto the other side?

Ms. Bingen: Exactly. Exactly. Well, so there's a couple other questions here on Golden Dome in general. So let's take the opportunity to tackle that. And, Tom, I'll look to you here, particularly questions on how allied capabilities can contribute to Golden Dome. Particularly involving the Japanese but other NATO and other allies as well.

Dr. Karako: Hmm. So, first of all, the most obvious – or, two of the most obvious pieces of that are, first, the U.S. and Japanese cooperation on Standard Missile-3 Block IIA. That's been going on for over a decade, and that is now – we've added to that with the cooperative development of the glide phase interceptor, the hypersonic missile killer, for instance. That's great to see. But I think the former prime minister and President Biden, a couple years ago, announced that the United States and Japan would be cooperating on space sensors. That's all for the good. Sensor is attribution, so you don't miss where something was launched from, and that sort of thing. That's hugely important.

Space sensors, the HBTSS Program, was explicitly called out in the executive order. We need to get after that. And to the extent that we can work with our allies, whether it's focal-plane array production, or launching the stuff into space, information sharing – look, we are a little bit cautious about sharing SBIRS data, you know, day to day. And that makes sense. But on a bad day, in a time of conflict, we would want at least domain awareness, at least early warning of various missile trajectories. And so that space sensor piece is important.

But the other thing, and this is why I keep abstracting from the nuclear to talk about deterrence and to talk about stability more broadly, the thing that the Japanese are doing that is historic, that is, I think, impressive, and that is just conventional strike. You know, the fact that they go out and get, what is it, 500 or so Block IV Tomahawks. And why did they get the Block IVs? Because they didn't want to wait for the Block Vs. I put up the flags over the – you know, the Japanese flag over that. That's just dang important to me, that if you want to not get to that point of the nuclear escalation, first you need to deter at the conventional level. That, to paraphrase Clayton and Melissa again, you know, they need to wake up every day and say, today is not the day to pick a fight with Japan and the United States. And at the very least, that they're going to have a conventional response that will make it unpleasant.

So I would say, on that front, the Japanese – the counter strike, or what we would just call strike capability, is dang important. And I'm looking forward to some of our other European friends getting such capability. I am delighted to see – we are far from the 1980s, let me put it this way, when the Germans are out there saying, we want some ground-launch Tomahawks, I'm like, nice. (Laughter) Thank you very much. I'm glad to see that you are – you know, you figured out what time it is in terms of what Russia's up to, for instance. And a lot of other countries are pursuing that. It just makes sense. It's a positive development. And so I

think about the missile offensive strike capability as super important for this cooperative deterrence stuff as well.

Ms. Bingen: Yeah. One of the messages I keep conveying to the Japanese, is you are very well-positioned to contribute to Golden Dome, exactly in the areas that you mentioned – in space sensors, the missile detection and tracking architecture, PWSA, Proliferated Warfighting in Space Architecture, was explicitly mentioned in the president's executive order. You mentioned SM-3, Aegis, which they already operate. There's co-development programs in the work as well, so they're very well-positioned to contribute, as well as the ISR – intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance – relationships.

It was encouraging that the initial executive order on Iron Dome, now Golden Dome, had an explicit call out to allied cooperation in this area. I suspect it's – you know, I think that the program office is probably so focused on getting the architectural details and the strategy in place, the allied peace will come here. So there's probably a little bit of patience required. But I'd also just mention, with Secretary Hegseth's acquisition reform announcements earlier this month, you know, there was a nod to, you know, greater engagement with our – with our allies, FMS, foreign material sales, reforms. So there's a lot of pieces I hope that this administration is putting in place to enable that cooperation.

Dr. Karako: Yeah. Well, two things, real quick. One is that that executive order called for an allied in theater missile defense review. It was due May 15th, right? The homework is a little overdue. (Laughter) I suspect that – you know, look, we're probably going to get the National Security Strategy soon. Then we'll get the National Defense Strategy. And so it will probably be nested under that kind of package of things, which kind of makes sense. And that's fine. But I have two beefs. One, none of the allies that I've talked to have even talked to OSD about this allied theater missile defense review. I think it would be a good idea to, you know, check in with them, talk about what we can be doing more on the allied and theater missile defense piece. They've got some ideas. I've got some ideas about, like, no kidding, programmatic, and reducing barriers, and things like that.

Second thing, you mentioned the Hegseth acquisition speech. And I was a little bit surprised that he was, you know, calling Golden Dome as moving out on a wartime pace, a wartime footing. I'm, like, hmm, not quite. I wish that that were true. But, second, he called out that, in general for acquisition, the contractors are guessing rather than building right? So that's where we need to get out more information about Golden Dome, about all kinds of stuff, because companies and allies, they're sitting there and they don't know what to invest in.

Hundreds of millions of dollars – hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent by contractors ginning up, getting ready, spring loading. And nothing has been put under contract yet.

Ms. Bingen: Yeah.

Dr. Williams: Uh-huh.

Ms. Bingen: Exactly. And we'll dive more into those topics tomorrow at CSIS at a space event on delivering space capabilities for the war fighter. But we'll also have a panel diving into Hegseth's acquisition reform announcements and what they mean for the industrial base, how do you send a better demand signal by the government, et cetera.

So I'd like to end on this. If we can queue up – we came across a Reagan-era image. He was holding a bumper sticker that said: SDI could ruin a nuclear bomb's whole day. I think we'll have to figure out – we'll have to update that bumper sticker for Golden Dome and start passing those out. (Laughter) But, you know, I want to end where we started, with Clayton Swope and Melissa Dalton's piece. And there's a quote – they include a quote there from General Earle Wheeler, who served as Army chief of staff from 1962 to 1964. And the quote goes, "I know of no way to design parity of military power. It certainly is contrary to any military precept that I know of because you try to design superiority."

And just, you know, as I think about China and Russia, you know, they've – where they lacked superiority, they went asymmetric. So they are clearly developing these advanced capabilities to try to gain a strategic advantage in areas, you know, at the expense of us. And it's our obligation, it's our American interest, to protect our citizens, our homeland, to also develop our own strategic advantages. So I guess, bringing this back, you know, full circle, you know, is there a way to design strategic stability going forward? What do you think?

Dr. Karako: Well, I'll answer that. And I'll pose it back to you all with, you know, what is the thing, not Schelling, that you would assign in your classes to help people think about this. And I'll tell you what I usually – or, used to put first in a reading list. And that's "Federalist 6" by Alexander Hamilton. And I paraphrased it earlier, that is it not time to awaken from the deceitful dream of a golden age? I mean, that's good old-fashioned American realism. And he kind of talks in there about how the confederate – or the Articles of Confederation is not going to work. We need a different form of government. And I think there were just so many deceitful dreams, to the Wheeler quote that you say there, about a security blanket or something like that.

So I would just kind of leave it there. I don't think it is possible to design. That's in the – that's in the nature of things. It's in the nature of human history that we're going to have this offensive-defensive thing. Until you, as I think the Strategic Posture Commission from, what, 10 years ago said. You know, until you fix the underlying problems of human nature (laughs) you're not going to be able to get rid of nuclear weapons, or the need for nuclear weapons, for instance. So I guess that's how I think about it.

Dr. Williams: Hmm. I would also pick a reading assignment. I would pick Therese Delpech's "Savage Century," which looks at the conflicts of the 20th century and says, are we being a little hubristic and thinking that the 21st century won't have the same challenges? And thinking about – you know, I think you guys might be convincing me a little bit that maybe we should talk about strategic stability beyond nuclear. So I don't quite have an answer to what should it be and what should be the reading assignment. Maybe the three of us have to do more episodes and have to write that ourselves. But it is thinking back to there was an era when there weren't nuclear weapons. That wasn't so stable either. And thinking about stability beyond capabilities, and more to those types of relationships. So, again, all to say, I think there's some really important strategic thinking to be done here.

Ms. Bingen: Yeah. I think that's well said. Well, on that note, I think that's a great place to end. Thank you for tuning in. Thanks to our Missile Defense Project Team, our Project on Nuclear Issues, PONI, team, and our Aerospace Security Project, as well as our streaming and broadcasting team. Keep your radar frequencies tuned to this channel so you don't miss future HTK discussions on strategic forces issues of the day.

(END.)