TRANSCRIPT
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“U.S.-Canada Defense Partnership in a Dangerous World”

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FEATURING
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Chief of the Defence Staff, Canada

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Transcript By
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Seth G. Jones: Welcome, everyone. And a particularly warm welcome to General Wayne Eyre, who is Canada’s chief of the Defence Staff. General Eyre attended Royal Roads Military College, Victoria and Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston. Upon commissioning in 1988, he joined Second Battalion, Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, and has spent the majority of his career in various command or deputy command positions. He became the commander of the Canadian Army in August of 2019 and was appointed as acting chief of the Defence Staff in February 2021. And then General Eyre was appointed chief of the Defence Staff in November of 2021.

General Eyre, thank you very much for joining us here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

General Wayne Eyre: Well, Seth, thanks for having me. And it’s great to see you again here.

Dr. Jones: Yes, it is. It’s great to see you. I think the last time I saw you was in Ottawa. So good to see you now in Washington. I guess this means the next time I’ll have to come back up to Ottawa.

Gen. Eyre: Always welcome.

Dr. Jones: All right. Well, let me just first start off, the U.S.-Canadian defense relationship goes back generations. We fought together in World War II, after the 9/11 attacks. I know it’s been memorialized in a fantastic musical that’s not just on Broadway but here in Washington, come from away, the camaraderie between the U.S. and the Canadian populations after 9/11.

But the National Defense Strategy on the U.S. side outlines a very different and evolving security environment from that post-9/11 period. It’s one where, at least from the U.S. perspective, China is the main pacing threat, to use the defense strategy’s terminology. Russia’s an acute threat. And then there are others – Iran, North Korea, terrorist organizations, pandemics, climate change, which brings us to the Arctic and other issues. But how do you see the evolving security environment from your vantage point in Canada?

Gen. Eyre: Hey, Seth, that’s a great question. But I will go back to your first point about us standing shoulder-to-shoulder for a long time. And it goes back beyond – before World War II. In World War I we fought together. In fact, even before the U.S. was officially part of the war, you had thousands of your citizens who came north to join our battalions, our regiments, that were part of the Canadian expeditionary force. And since then, we’ve stood shoulder-to-shoulder in many, many conflict areas in the world. In the last quarter-century, I’ve been deployed on four operations where I had Americans above
me and below me in the chain of command. And I’ve had the opportunity of spending four postings down here. So that is – it’s a tight relationship.

The world, from our perspective, is becoming a more dangerous place. The world international security order is under threat. That rules-based international order that has underpinned our prosperity for the last seven-plus decades is increasingly under threat. And what we’re facing are a series of adversarial states, authoritarian states, who seek to sow disorder and discontent in Western liberal democracies. Not so much to convince those that are sitting on the fence, but more so to convince their own populations that, hey, their system is the best. And that’s because their existential threat is not from without. It comes from within. And so we’re seeing a lot of that.

And I believe, and certainly the rest of my career and probably the rest of my life is going to be one in the security environment characterized by confrontation. So we’ve got the changes in the geopolitical order, threats to the geopolitical order that we are facing. And we, collectively, need to stand up, deter, defend that order because our national prosperity is based on it. You know, I believe that the competitive advantage we have as being a group of likeminded – or, likeminded enough – friends, partners, allies, who see the world in a very similar way and can stand together. The other side, they don’t have friends, partners, allies. They have clients and vassals. And so that’s important, in terms of values and what we aspire to.

The other complicating factor in the security environment is climate change. And it’s not just the domestic emergencies, the natural disasters that are – that are causing us so much focus, so much attention, so much draw on our resources. But it’s also opening up, in our case, the Arctic to further exploitation. But it’s also causing human migration and conflict around the world as well. So that is part of the security environment that is nested on top of this great-power competition, this confrontation.

The other piece is the rapidly, you could almost say accelerating, change of technological development. Technology is just changing so fast. It’s changing the character of war and warfare and operations writ large. And staying abreast of that is super important. And I guess the final piece of the security environment that’s got me quite concerned are the upheavals in our societies. We see the polarization. We see the misinformation and disinformation that’s happening out there. And it’s tearing, in some cases, at the fabric of our liberal democracies, where the institutions of our democracies are under increasing threat. So those four aspects combined present a pretty dark future we have to be ready for.

Dr. Jones: Well, we’ll talk about various components that you just outlined – talk about the Arctic, talk about some of the emerging technologies that we’re focused on, you’re focused on developing, but also we see a lot of competition
because we see the Chinese, for example, focused on a range of emerging technologies as well. One of the things that does strike me, and I take it as a glass half-full issue, is that despite the challenges certainly within the U.S. society and the polarization, we still share, the U.S. and Canada, a strong commitment, despite all that, to democracy and freedom of the press, freedom of information, freedom of religion, and an open capitalist system.

And I think even the challenges that the U.S. has faced domestically over the past several years, we're still there. We're still a democratic country. We still will have democratic elections. And I think my hope is that that continues to bind both of our countries together because, as you outlined, this is in part, maybe to a great degree, a competition of ideologies of different types of political and economic systems.

Gen. Eyre: No, I fully agree with you. And our two countries are joined by geography, history, culture that is far closer than it is different, and language. And so we're not going away from each other.

Dr. Jones: Well, one issue that has – that has definitely changed this year has been the Russian decision to invade Ukraine. It has certainly created a major stir, but we’ve seen across the NATO alliance – including both the U.S. and the Canadians – a response to provide assistance to the Ukrainians in their hour of danger. So can you talk a little bit about Canada's role in providing assistance to the Ukrainians? I know you've been dealing directly with this issue. How would you characterize it from types of systems provided, to training, to other activities?

Gen. Eyre: No, that's a great question, Seth. And let me give you some background, first of all. So Canada was the first country to recognize Ukrainians independence back 30 years ago. In 2015, after the Russian invasion, seizure of the parts of the Donbas and Crimea, we started a training mission called Operation Unifier, where we focused on developing junior leaders, developing an NCO and office corps, developing combined arms skills and specialist skills, such as medical, and engineering, and military police. And that has been a successful mission, which continues to this day.

Now, why is it important to Canada? We have the third-largest Ukrainian population outside of Ukraine itself or Russia. So we have, you know, a sizable diaspora in the country. So there is that tie. But there’s also shared values of democracy, of wanting national sovereignty. And so this has been pretty natural for us. And since the invasion back in February, we have continued with Operation Unifier. And right now, I believe we’ve got seven lines – eight lines of effort happening in seven or eight different countries.

You know, just last Friday I was over in the U.K. watching our training of Ukrainian recruits in conjunction with the British. Fantastic to see. These
Ukrainian recruits, they’re motivated. They’re extremely absorbent of the lessons, the skills we are imparting. We’re just about to start engineering training with our Polish colleagues. We have another – a number of other lines of effort that are ongoing.

In terms of donations, I believe we’re the – we rank number five in the world for what we’ve donated, both in terms of lethal and nonlethal aid. We’ve donated small arms, artillery systems, ammunition, armored vehicles, and –

Dr. Jones: One-fifty-five millimeter, for example.

Gen. Eyre: One-fifty-five millimeter, plus training. In fact, we trained Ukrainian gunners on Canadian, American, and Australian guns that were donated, the M777s. The training is something we’re particularly proud of. And is something that we will continue to look for opportunities to deliver.

Dr. Jones: Great. One of the issues that certainly has come up, and it has led to a range of communications between U.S. and Russian leadership, is the statements that President Putin has made about nuclear weapons use. How significant of a development would the Russian decision to use a nuclear weapon on the battlefield be? It would be, obviously, the first time any country since 1945 were to use a nuclear weapon. What would the broader implication be?

Gen. Eyre: Well, as you imply, this would be extremely serious and a gamechanger. But that being said, we cannot allow nuclear coercion stop us from doing the right thing. And the right thing is supporting Ukraine in its time of need because, let’s face it, other countries are watching as well. And if nuclear coercion works this time, well, it’ll work the next time. And so supporting Ukraine throughout this, we cannot lose our resolve.

Dr. Jones: To what degree – we are starting to see and have seen over the last couple of weeks what I’ll call sabotage and subversive operations. I’m thinking of Russian operations. There’s been a threat also to transatlantic cables. Certainly, a threat off offensive cyberattacks. To what degree are you also prepared to defend against these kinds of irregular, asymmetric attacks against Canada, in response?

Gen. Eyre: Well, this is something that we need to be increasingly concerned about. Horizontal escalation, as otherwise undefended assets are targeted. We’ve got to be very concerned about those single points of failure for our societies. You know, whether it’s in the energy sector, the communications sector, the transportation sector. And so identifying and protecting those critical assets is critical. But at the same time, you know, eliminating single points of failure. And so building redundancy and, thus, resilience into the system. You know, deterrence by resilience, if you will.
Dr. Jones: One of the issues you mentioned earlier, General, is the Arctic. The U.S. National Defense Strategy highlights the Arctic and climate change more broadly. You mentioned it briefly in your opening remarks. Can you talk a little bit about, from the Canadian perspective too, how important the Arctic is from a defense standpoint too. And where do you see competition headed in the Arctic? Because, you know, there’s been growing concern that, for example, the Chinese present a threat. The timelines could be debated on whether it’s immediate, more immediate. But that, you know, they are preparing to send some of our nuclear-powered cruise submarines. What’s your extent – first of all, how important is it to you? And then, what does competition look like? And how do you help them manage that?

Gen. Eyre: So this is another area of focus for – of increasing focus in the changing world security environment. You know, the Arctic is becoming increasingly important, especially coupled with the geopolitical situation and climate change, which makes it more accessible. So we don’t have a threat to our sovereignty today, tomorrow, or next year. But, you know, that may change in the decades ahead, as it becomes more accessible. And so what that means for us is we have to invest in those long-lead capabilities, infrastructure is one prime example, to ensure that we’ve got the platforms to be able to project capabilities from the south to the north, to be able to ensure that sovereignty.

And what does competition look like? Well, I think it’s going to be more of a competition over resources. Because, let’s face it, that’s one of the world’s last untapped frontiers – unexplored frontiers. And as resource challenges hit the world, this is one place where it could come under competition. So being able to protect our sovereignty and collectively protect our sovereignty is important. You know, I will say, for the first time since 2013, in August 23 hosted the Arctic Chiefs of Defense Conference. I hosted it in Newfoundland, less Russia, of course.

And for the first time in nine years, we were able to discuss some of the common security challenges we face. And we had broad agreement about what those security challenges are, and broad agreement that we have to work together to not only ensure the Arctic is secure but do our part to ensure that it doesn’t become an area of tension. How can we keep the tension down in that area? How can we avoid miscalculation and not turn it to a zone of conflict, I think is going to be top of the priority list as well.

Dr. Jones: And to what degree do you see growing cooperation between some of the key partners and allies on Arctic issue? There is – there’s always been some tendency for countries to operate in their own self-interest, but this area – partly because it’s a global commons – I think there’s an important aspect of this that needs to be cooperative in general.
Gen. Eyre: Mmm hmm. No, I agree. With our part, we have an annual exercise called Operation Nanook. And we're seeing growing allied international participation in that exercise from a range of countries – either full participants or observers. And we welcome them. We welcome the ability to cooperate, to work together in that part of the world.

You know, going back to the U.S.-Canadian relationship, we've just announced the modernization of aspects of North American Air Defense, NORAD. And for our part, that's a significant component of what we call continental defense, with emphasis on the Arctic.

Dr. Jones: Well, let me – let me jump on this for a second. So I think it was June, Prime Minister Trudeau visited NORAD headquarters in Colorado Springs. And then the Canadian minister of defense subsequently announced that it would spend roughly $5 billion over the next six years to upgrade the north warning system, including the over-the-horizon radars. We've talked extensively to the U.S. NORTHCOM commander, General VanHerck, who's highlighted, from the U.S. perspective, concerns about long-range Russian cruise missiles and other aerial threats coming from the high north.

So I've got two questions, but I'll start with the first. Which is, can you talk us through what you see as the threat in the high north that is driving this kind of investment, and some insights into what you're planning to spend that money on?

Gen. Eyre: So, firstly, for clarification, it's – you know, as you mentioned for six years, but for 20 years, it's about $38-39 billion. And so NORAD modernization focuses on a number of areas. You know, one is domain awareness – air domain awareness. So over-the-horizon radars, polar over-the-horizon radar, working in conjunction with the U.S. as we – as we map out the sites to ensure that these detectors are – these sensors are integrated and have got overlapping coverage. Command and control is a key aspect of it. So ensuring that we are networked. We've got the latest technology that can help us – help us affect command and control and link with our allies as well.

Investments in things like infrastructure. So we've got the forward operating locations that can handle increased requirements based on new aircraft, increased tankers, air weapons. And then an R&D component, because of the evolving nature of the threat. You asked about the threat. Well, it's - number of threats through the Arctic. So missiles, cruise missiles, hypersonics, and technology continues to advance. And thus, it's important to get those sensors in place, but it's also important to have an R&D component so that we can continue to evolve our own capability at pace with adversaries.
Dr. Jones: So on the R&D side, how much of this effort – because this is a big discussion in the U.S. as well – might include active defense. So, you know, the ability to defend against these missiles, in addition to just the sensing and warning?

Gen. Eyre: So I don’t think that’s been defined yet, as part of the overall R&D plan. That being said, it is a very, very important aspect of it. You got to be able to detect. You got to be able to decide. And you got to be able to act.

Dr. Jones: Yeah, because I think one of the issues we certainly see from the Ukraine war right now is the threat posed by long-range stand-off weapons. Not always precision-guided ones, but certainly long-range weapon systems.

Gen. Eyre: But also shows the plethora of different threats that are out there.

Dr. Jones: That’s right.

Gen. Eyre: You know, aircraft, missiles, drones.

Dr. Jones: Right. Drones, UAVs, loitering munitions, all the smaller ones as well. One of the issues that I know our Army, our Air Force, our Marine Corps, and our Navy had had to deal with are recruiting and retention challenges in this environment. The Canadians have felt – have dealt with some similar challenges with recruiting and retention. So what – how would you characterize the challenge that you face right now. How are you dealing with it? And how does it impact things like readiness right now? Because I think those are all issues that we’re certainly struggling with right now.

Gen. Eyre: And I think many of the militaries across the West are struggling with this right now. It’s a very tight job market. And every industry, especially in Canada, every industry is looking for workers. You know, coming out of the pandemic, we’re facing challenges. As our recruiting was down, we’re seeing what’s been called up north resignation. I think you’re calling it the great retirement here in the U.S.

Dr. Jones: The great retirement, yeah.

Gen. Eyre: Where many are looking at different job opportunities. We’ve got to take a very close look to see what our offer is. There is no way as a military that we can compete with private industry solely on financial compensation. But what else can we offer? And I call it quality of service. And a number of components to that. Purpose. Hey, there’s no greater transcendent purpose than defending your country, than serving your country, and serving it with a group of likeminded teammates. You know, secondly, meaningful work. You know, going off, traveling to different parts of the world, seeing tangible results from what you do. You have meaning, each and every day.
Part of that, with the new generation also, is working in work-life balance. And so we got to make sure we’re mindful of that. You know, thirdly, a respectful, inclusive workplace. Like your military, we’ve been wracked with sexual misconduct allegations, charges, which we’re working extremely hard to address to make sure that everybody is welcome in this organization. Very, very important for us is 22 percent of Canadians, 23 percent I think at the last county, are foreign born. And so the demographics, the face of Canada is changing. And we got to make sure we’re an organization that can attract and retain that talent from wherever it might be.

You know, financial security is another one. You’re not going to get rich doing this, but you’re going to be rich enough so that you’re not worried about your family’s security. And then finally, modern enough equipment to be able to operate on. You know, given the pace of technological change we’re not – perhaps not going to have the most – the latest piece off the – off the assembly line. But modern enough. And I think, you know, those aspects, in combination, can make a pretty powerful argument. But we have work to do on all of those.

Dr. Jones: We’ve also had to deal with not large numbers – they’re actually quite small – but we’ve had to deal with some domestic extremism within the U.S. military. Where that’s probably quantitatively we’ve seen a jump is as a percentage of total terrorist plots and attacks. We saw a jump last year, 2021, from about 1 percent or so of all terrorist attacks and plots involving active duty of reservists – and the number of veterans isn’t even counted here – up to about 7 percent.

The numbers of actually active duty or reservists in the U.S. military are still – it’s a tiny fraction. But it jumped in terms of plots and attacks. I don’t know to what degree that’s been an issue that you’ve had to deal with as well. I mean, all militaries in the West and elsewhere have had to deal with the sexual assault issue and other things along those lines. I don’t know to what degree you’ve had an extremism issue you’ve had to at least keep an eye on.

Gen. Eyre: Yeah. We’re facing the same challenges. You know, the numbers are small. But that being said, it is – we’re a reflection of society. And if this is out in society, especially as we have footprint across the country, there are going to be influences both before one joins and after one joins to radicalize with some of this extremist beliefs and behavior. And so it’s something that we need to be constantly on guard for.

You know, what we did several years ago was, first of all, define it. What is it? We called it hateful conduct. And there’s a spectrum of it. But being able to define something I believe is the first step to take action. And then educate with leaders of all levels what are the signs, symbols, actions, lexicon we need to be on the lookout for. But like you, this is a concern, but one we need
to stay on top of, because it’s a threat that also constantly morphs. And when you illuminate aspects of it, it just – it changes its symbols, its ways of operating.

Dr. Jones: Yeah. I think it also – it changes the perception, or can change the perception, of the military as a good for society. So we’ve been involved in climate surveys and then efforts particularly as individuals are either being recruited or, after they’re exiting or while they’re exiting the military, to keep an eye on some issues.

But one of the – one of the comments you made before, when we were talking about retention, got me thinking to some degree about a challenge that we face, and you do as well to some degree, is on the general industrial base, including the defense industrial base. As we look at the taxation on the defense industrial base from the war in Ukraine, it’s created some stress on the availability for us of Javelins, of Stingers, of 155 mm howitzers, and ammunition. When we look at the – and we, at CSIS, have run repeated iterations of a Taiwan Straits wargame – we run out of long-range precision strike, LRASMs and JASSMs for example, in less than a week.

I would characterize our defense industrial base as largely being one that’s on a peacetime footing. When we have a war in Ukraine right now – and we certainly have tensions in the Taiwan Straits. When you add to that also foreign military sales, and some ITAR, and no foreign restrictions on technology sharing, I think there are some broader questions about whether we’ve got to shift the industrial base – defense industrial base – to one that’s more conductive to the environment we’re in. So how do you see it from – your position from Canada? How confident are you right now that the industrial base that you’re seeing is adequate to where we’re at right now? And if not, how do you change it? Or how do you start to change it?

Gen. Eyre: Yeah. So I’m very concerned. I don’t think the defense industrial base, for my own country, is where it needs to be to be able to support conflict that – of any duration. And if we take a look at history, great-power war is not short war. It’s long war. So what does industrial mobilization look like in the 21st century? We’ve got some real challenges. There’s just not the capacity there. The supply chains are much more complex than they were before, especially when we get involved in some of the higher tech component.

Dr. Jones: Microelectronics, for example.

Gen. Eyre: Yeah. And the rare earths that are – that are required. Who controls those? The chips.

Dr. Jones: I can name you the country that controls them.
Gen. Eyre: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Beginning of last week I visited two of our ammunition manufacturing plants just for this very reason. Hey, what can we do to increase production? How can we get more production lines open? The challenge is, it's going to take time. And it's going to take money. And it's going to take commitment – long-term commitment for them to build new infrastructure, hire and train new – and retain – new staff, develop that expertise. And so that commitment is needed as well.

Dr. Jones: How do you think about collaboration across U.S. and Canada? And, more broadly, about NATO countries? Because I think one of the things we're looking at – and it's certainly true across the Indo-Pacific as well – is how do we think about more efficient industrial bases, not just national ones too?

Gen. Eyre: Well, I think our defense industrial base between our two countries is pretty tightly coupled. You know, the ammunition plants that I referred to, I was surprised how much of what they were producing was going down to support U.S. forces. And so that's – and much of the equipment we buy is from the U.S. So that's pretty tightly coupled. I think, though, especially from us as a smaller military, we've got to be very careful about making our military requirements too unique. We've got to think of interoperability right at the top of the list.

In fact, you can almost go to interchangeability as the next step where we field the same type of equipment. M777s is a case in point where it's the same system. We can swap it back and forth relatively easily.

Dr. Jones: So one follow-up question along those lines.

We've talked about industrial bases. One of the things that's been interesting as we look at a resource-constrained environment both from a financial but also a human capital perspective, is what do you – at least from your vantage point, what do you require? What do you think is important to regain, sustain, and maintain strategic and operational advantages over our adversaries? What are you particularly focused on?

Gen. Eyre: For me, it's readiness, because we can buy the latest piece of equipment off the shelf but if you don't have the other components for readiness – and what I'm talking about are the people, the sustainment, and the training – it's going to be worthless.

And so investing across all four of those pillars – the people, the equipment, the training, and the sustainment – so that you can actually produce that readiness to be able – the ability to respond at speed and at scale. That's the important piece. That's the important piece that will assist in deterrence, you know, the ability to show that, yeah, you can be there and you can be there – you have endurance to be there.
But we talked about ammunition stockpiles. You know, same thing. That’s all part of strategic readiness. That talks about your ability to endure and – over the longer term.

Dr. Jones:
What about on the technology or platforms or weapon systems side? You know, we, certainly, see a growing use, first, in the Armenia-Azerbaijan war in Nagorno-Karabakh, certainly in the Ukraine war both from the Russian and the Ukrainian sides, a heavy emphasis on various types of UAVs. And, you know, when we were both, collectively, in Afghanistan and I was involved, certainly, from a special operations standpoint, we used, say, the MQ-9s for a lot of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance ISR and occasionally for strike purposes. But as we’ve seen the evolution of UAVs or UASes or RPAs, whatever acronym one uses, we’ve seen them much more integrated in the combined arms. We’ve seen them used for strike. But we’ve also seen them used for spotting, for artillery strikes, for information operations, taking the feeds off of the videos and pushing them out onto digital platforms, seeing them used for electronic warfare, for bomb damage assessment, for domain awareness, as you highlighted earlier. How do you see the role of UAVs kind of changing in this emerging environment?

Gen. Eyre:
So I think you hit the nail on the head by the use of the term combined arms. And so the ability to integrate UAVs into the other arms that are on the – in the battle space is going to be of increasing – is of great importance.

So we’ve gone from infantry armored artillery engineers to adding other arms – electronic warfare, air, UAVs. But it’s the ability of the commander and the staff to be able to integrate those capabilities to produce that synergistic effect that combined arms is known for or, you know, bump it up a level joint warfare is known for.

And so continuing to train and develop, the ability to integrate is super, super important. But the use of UAVs in Ukraine has got me thinking about something else and it’s about the type of weapons we invest in.

You know, many of the weapons we invest in are very expensive. They’re high-tech but they’re millions of dollars per round, and I saw this in Afghanistan – using a $2 million missile to kill somebody with an AK-47.

You know, where’s the economics? Where’s the tradeoff in that?

And so, perhaps, you know, two tracks of investment. You know, the high-tech exquisite weaponry but also lower-tech but more of them. Lower cost but effective munitions, and loitering munitions. UAVs seem to be filling some of that niche.
Dr. Jones: Well, we’ve, certainly, seen in the case, for example, of the Houthis with Iranian-supported technology in Yemen in the strikes that have been conducted against both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. I mean, they have used some land attack cruise missiles.

But some of the UAVs that have been used are relatively inexpensive, and some of the weapon systems that the Saudis have used to conduct counter UAS or UAV have been very expensive.

So there are also some tradeoffs on the counter UAV or UAS side.

Gen. Eyre: Yeah, and the counter UAV fight is of increasing importance in investing in that technology but low cost technology as well. And this is another truism of warfare. It’s adaptation, counter adaptation, you know, back and forth – you know, who can adapt the fastest.

Dr. Jones: So on the future of warfare, one of the issues that has – you know, has been discussed as part of the U.S.’ joint warfighting concept is the role of emerging technologies and it’s, certainly, something that we see the Chinese, in particular, looking at.

But how do you see the role, for example, of artificial intelligence or quantum computing, some of these issues? How important are they to the future of warfare, I mean, not just for precision strike but for sensing or for communication or for a range of other aspects that are important to the warfighter?

Gen. Eyre: So very important for all of those aspects you talked about.

But I think even greater significance is decision support, so the ability as you’re formulating the plan, as you’re going through the operational planning process, to help you develop courses of action, to pull out hidden nuggets that you wouldn’t have otherwise considered.

So the way that humans make decisions could be fundamentally – in war, could be fundamentally altered by AI, improved by AI. And so I think that’s where it has the greatest potential.

Dr. Jones: On the future – staying on the subject of the future of war and warfare, what are some things that you have found interesting or surprising watching the war in Ukraine unfold?

I mean, there are a range of things that probably aren’t that surprising – the importance of logistics, particularly in a contested environment. The Russians struggled with that, including on that famous Kyiv assault where they ran out of spare parts, fuel, a whole range of things, ammunition.
Probably not surprising the importance of long-range strike in an industrial style war, which is a little bit different from the counterterrorism.

But we’ve also seen other things – you know, private sector get involved. Microsoft in cyber defense. We’ve seen SpaceX and Elon Musk get involved in Starlink and providing Starlink to the Ukrainians.

We’ve seen the Russians fumble on offensive cyber, not able to take down Ukrainian command and control systems for, at least, lengthy periods of time.

So what – as you look at the way the war in Ukraine has evolved, this is less about Ukraine per se and more about kind of where you see things evolving. What are some lessons that you take from that war?

Gen. Eyre: Well, I think one of the most important ones is the use of information – you know, the Ukrainians’ very skillful use of the information environment to help gain and maintain support for their cause and the failure of Russian disinformation, especially in the West.

You know, that being said, their disinformation is more successful in the Global South and that’s an area of vulnerability that we need to be very cognizant of.

I think it’s also interesting to note what has not changed: the enduring nature of war, if you will. So it’s a contest of wills. And you can see the importance of the will of the Ukrainian people, that will to win, which is just so, so important. The uncertainty, the fog, the friction – it’s still bloody. You know, that’s not going away.

The importance – as we’ve evolved and we’ve thought about the changing character of war and thinking it’s one of high-tech and precision, we’ve seen the continuing importance of mass and so larger numbers spread out across the battlefield. That is important.

Spread out is important. Dispersion is important because the signature that many capabilities, groupings, units, may put out makes it a target. So dispersion is increasingly important.

Being networked very, very important as well. So the Ukrainian use of, you know, through Starlink, of the internet, and being able to use that for their command and control.

So lots relearned but lots learning as well.
Dr. Jones: So one aspect of that war which has broader implications and, I think, it, certainly, was a challenge from all of our collective intelligence and defense agencies was – you know, I’m generalizing a little bit here but I think there’s a general conclusion in the analyses that the Russians were likely to perform reasonably well when the invasion began and the Ukrainians – it was probably just a matter of time.

Now, part of the reason may have been we looked at capabilities, largely, in the Russian systems as we’ve taken them off the battlefield, for example, following the Kharkiv offensive and we’ve looked at some of the Russian artillery.

They’re not bad. But the challenge has been how do you then also from a military perspective when you’re looking at adversaries assess their qualitative components – morale, readiness, training, command and control, initiative, at a lower level?

And so, I think, as we look at adversaries now how do we look at some of these harder to measure factors? Because it’s pretty easy to look at Chinese capabilities, for example, and to look at their fourth- and fifth-generation capabilities and to assume a significant danger.

But as the Russians taught us – and I’m not necessarily saying the same goes for everybody – that there is a qualitative dimension to this, which is a little bit more difficult. How do you see that?

Gen. Eyre: Yeah. That’s an excellent point and it speaks to the enduring nature of human will and that will to fight just being so, so important at all levels.

So I went over to Ukraine in December and I wanted to – I had one question as we saw the intelligence, as we saw the buildup. You know, will they fight? And you get the answer from the chain of command. Yes, they’ll fight.

But more importantly, I talked to our own troops who were there training as they had been for the last seven years and, absolutely, as they engaged with the NCOs, as they engaged with the junior officers. And when I’ve got our NCOs, our officers saying, yeah, they are invested, they’re going to fight, yeah, that confirmed it.

So that was not a surprise. You know, what was a surprise was just – and hard to determine what that will to fight is going to be like on the other side.

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Gen. Eyre: Mmm hmm. Well, I think of deterrence in terms of national prosperity, and so the logic trail here is our national prosperity is predicated on stability in the international system – the rules-based international order. So how do we maintain that stability?

Well, it’s being strong, and we’re dealing with a strategic culture that views compromise as weakness, that views the willingness to sit down and negotiate as weakness as well, that views weakness is something to be exploited.

So you’ve still got to coexist but you can do that from a position of strength.

How do you do that? Well, you engage responsibly. You’re transparent about your actions. You stand shoulder to shoulder with your friends, partners, and allies. You call out bad behavior when you see it and you constantly uphold the norms and expectations of that rules-based international order.

So you avoid that gradual erosion of those norms, and so call out bad behavior when and where you see it. And it’s a thousand points of contact and you got to make sure that you address each and every one.

Dr. Jones: Well, we are at time, General Eyre.

Thank you very much for your time and coming to the Center for Strategic International Studies. We’re often confused because our acronym is CSIS with CSIS. We are not Canadian Intelligence.

But thank you very much. The Canadian-American relationship runs deep for our countries collectively, for me personally. My family is Canadian.

So I appreciate your time here. Thank you very much for coming, and good luck.
Gen. Eyre: Thank you, Seth

(END)