

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT
Online Event

**“A Conversation with Deputy Secretary of Defense Dr.
Kathleen H. Hicks”**

DATE
Friday, October 1, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. ET

FEATURING
Kathleen H. Hicks
Deputy Secretary of Defense

Candida Wolff
Managing Director and Head of Global Government Affairs, Citi

CSIS EXPERTS
Nina Easton
Senior Associate (Non-resident), CSIS

Beverly Kirk
Fellow and Director for Outreach, International Security Program, Smart Women, Smart Power Initiative, CSIS

Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
www.superiortranscriptions.com

Beverly Kirk: Hello, everyone. And a very warm welcome to our visitors – or, to our viewers here in the United States and around the world. Thank you so very much for joining us for a special Smart Women, Smart Power event this morning. I'm Beverly Kirk, director of the Smart Women, Smart Power initiative, and a fellow in the International Security Program here at CSIS. We are pleased to welcome back Dr. Kathleen Hicks, the Deputy Secretary of Defense. She is a former Senior Vice President here at CSIS, and the former Director of the International Security Program. Deputy Secretary Hicks previously served at the Pentagon as the Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and as Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Forces. This morning's conversation is moderated by CSIS senior associate Nina Easton. Our speaker series here is possible thanks to the gracious funding of our founding partner, Citi. And we are very grateful for Citi's continued support, now entering its seventh year.

It's my great pleasure to welcome Candi Wolff, head of global government affairs, to Citi. Candi.

Candida Wolff: Thank you, Bev. And thank you all for joining us online this morning for what is going to be another great event in the Smart Women, Smart Power series for 2021. And happy Friday to everyone. At Citi, we're proud to call ourselves the leading global bank, as we are present in more than 100 countries. We talk a lot about the distinct business advantage our global footprint brings. And we also believe it gives us a unique perspective on the challenges and the opportunities in myriad economic and political climates around the world.

Citi's been supporting this series for six years, I guess we're going on seven, to bring together women leaders in foreign policy and national security and the business community to convene a dialogue on the most pressing issues facing our world. And today we celebrate a homecoming of sorts with our distinguished guest. There have been many illuminating conversations that audiences have heard on this stage or on the podcast in the past six years that we've been doing it. And they've all been a tribute to the vision that Dr. Hicks has had, and that Citi's been proud to support since the beginning. And we want to thank her for her vision.

Kathleen, like all our guests in the series, embodies what Smart Women, Smart Power is all about. She's the first deputy secretary of defense and blazing new trails at the Defense Department. But I'd also like to note that she, like me, is a proud alumnus of Mount Holyoke College. And for those of you who don't know Mount Holyoke, it is an all-women's college located in western Massachusetts, sort of in the middle of nowhere. But a fabulous tribute to serving and supporting women.

Today I'm really looking forward to Secretary Hicks' perspective on these issues. I know she's busier than ever and we thank her for her time today. And with that, I'd pass it over to Nina to get us started. Thank you for joining us.

Nina Easton: Great. Thank you so much, Candi. And thank you, again, to Citi for your support over these years. I've had the honor of knowing Dr. Hicks for these many years really as one of the great intellects of national security. And so thank you so much for being with us and taking the time. You know, I can imagine when you walked into the Pentagon early this year, talk about homecomings, it must have seemed a

bit like a homecoming. I started adding up the number of years that you've spent inside the Pentagon from the beginning of your professional career to becoming Undersecretary Of Defense For Policy, and of course now too, and the top-ranking woman at the Defense Department.

Clearly this is a much higher-stakes role. Clearly this is, you know, big-time in so many ways, including the uncertainty and the difficult decisions coming your way. And I think back to – I realized you had written this dissertation when you were at MIT on change agents in national-security policy.

And I was wondering if you could just reflect, as we begin our conversation, on these last many months that you've been there, on how to make an impact in such a large institution, and just perspective for our audience that I'll throw to you. I mean, aside from being the home of the world's most powerful military and 1.3 (million) active-duty military people, it's 732,000 civilian employees and a budget of \$750 billion. I mean, the scope of that is breathtaking. Any takeaways on how to make an impact in that world?

Kathleen H.
Hicks:

Well, first, Nina, thank you so much for hosting me.

To Candi – and first of all, a great shout-out from Candi to Mount Holyoke. And I'll just say to her and the other alumna, yesterday was Mountain Day, which has special meaning for Mount Holyoke alums. So I'm glad she gave a shout-out today. And it's thrilling to be back, really, with this community of men and women who are very supportive of women in national security and international affairs.

To your question, Nina, it's very humbling, of course, to be here in this position. It's an incredible honor. And I reflect on that for sure every day of those eight months or so that I've been here.

I think my strategy has always been and continues to this day to ensure that I make my time allocation, the hardest and most precious resource for anyone, reflect the priorities. And the priorities have to reflect the vision and objectives from the Secretary Of Defense and the President.

So for me, what I've tried to do really in these eight months is make sure that I keep coming back to that touchstone of what we are seeking to achieve as an administration and ensuring that I, as the COO in that DOD setup, am connecting those objectives to what we are actually able to concretely move forward on and execute.

So for me that's really three major areas. Of course, I do many things, like any executive in any place. But I really focus, first and foremost, on what are the military capabilities we need – the forces, the resources, the platforms, the connectivity – in order to achieve the national-security objectives for the country. So that comes through a lot, of course, in development of budgets and strategy.

And for me especially, I'm focused on concepts and capabilities, which, you know, we never have enough money. You can't get through the challenge set of defense or national security simply by applying resources. You have to apply intellect and be

more savvy than your potential adversary. So that's a lot about how we rapidly experiment, how we rapidly field the best, most capable military in the world.

The second major – oh, sorry. Go ahead, Candi.

Ms. Easton: No, go ahead. Go ahead.

Ms. Hicks: Sorry. I called you Candi, Nina.

The second area is really people, right, that workforce that we have to execute on those objectives. And that's an area that's been less focused on. It's been rhetorically very important, of course, throughout the Defense Department's history. And military leaders focus a lot on their people. But as you pointed out, we have not just members in uniform; we have a major civilian workforce and even larger contract base and connectivity to the innovation base of the United States. So how do we make this an attractive place for people to come work, both directly in DOD and working with DOD?

And then the third area is our business operations. How do we make sure we're as efficient and effective as possible so those taxpayer dollars are being well spent and that, when we go up to Capitol Hill or out into the small towns of America, we can confidently say, credibly say, that those dollars are being invested to good purpose and end?

Ms. Easton: That's great. And so much to dig into in this next hour, particularly with how to apply intellect. And we'll get into that in a minute.

First, of course, we have to ask you about things that are less able – or more of a surprise and less coming out of expected plans, and of course, that's Afghanistan. We can all agree that there were a lot of surprises along the way in the last few months. And I wanted to get your personal perspective on a couple things, and the first is the melting away of the Afghan forces so quickly. I mean, we've heard a lot from your superiors about this, but I'd love to get your perspective on why that happened.

Ms. Hicks: I think we'll be digging in for some time on the why. You know, it's been a 20-year war; it's going to take some time to understand what has occurred over the course of that, let alone in the last several months. What we have seen to date in these early indications are that the Taliban had been pretty focused for some time on developing their contacts and working to sideline key leaders in the Afghan community overall but, of course, the security forces specifically, and that the Doha Agreement, from that point forward, there had been a shift in how – we think at this point – how the Afghan security forces looked at the U.S. commitment and the viability of that commitment. And then, of course, if you factor in President Ghani's very surprising departure, literally overnight from after having assured U.S. officials that he was in it for the long haul, I think that sort of was the last point. But I do think you really have to reach back further to understand the dynamics that led to where we are today.

Ms. Easton: And, you know, I think the other question that's on the minds of a lot of Americans is why was so much U.S. military equipment, from communications equipment to armored vehicles, left behind? Was it, you know, you were caught by surprise as the Taliban advanced so quickly? I mean, what was the thinking behind that?

Ms. Hicks: Sure. I actually think there's – I think that's a very easy explanation. U.S. – specific military equipment for the U.S., we removed or we what we call demilitarized. We've made it inoperable. Equipment that had been the Afghan National Security Forces' equipment that was provided by the United States – so here you might be thinking about ammunition or guns, more low-level security-force assistance – that was provided over, again, 20 years to the Afghan military and security forces. And that was the property of the government of Afghanistan. So that's a little separate category. I would emphasize that there is not advanced equipment in that latter category. What Americans would think of as advanced equipment is on the side of what the United States either removed or demilitarized, and we have been asked by Congress for a full accounting of all of that and we're very prepared to provide that. It came up just earlier this week in the hearings and I know we're moving forward to provide that information.

Ms. Easton: So you're not worried about sensitive, secret technology falling into the hands of terrorists or China or Russia?

Ms. Hicks: I am not worried about – I believe the United States did a – the U.S. military forces and others across government did a very good job of securing materiel and, to your point, communications and information coming out of Afghanistan. We are going to learn more, of course, as I said. We don't know everything today, you know, about the course of those 20 years, so there could be things we don't know today, but I am confident about how we have left the situation with regard to our materiel and non-materiel support.

Ms. Easton: And, you know, one of the most crucial decisions early on was the closing or handover of the Bagram air base. Could you give some perspective on the thinking behind that?

Ms. Hicks: Well, there are really two points in time, I think, that are under discussion; they often get conflated. So if you think about the withdrawal of U.S. military forces, the withdrawal from Bagram as part of that drawdown of U.S. military forces was a very sensible approach to get to the full withdrawal. Again, the idea was the full withdrawal of U.S. military forces by the end of the summer, September of this year, and Bagram had to be part of that withdrawal. To secure Bagram over the long term would have been the opposite of the U.S. withdrawing forces.

Then I think there is a second issue that has been raised by those who are concerned about the noncombatant evacuation operation that was begun in August and whether the United States should have come back in and secured Bagram as an exit point for U.S. citizens and Afghans. I think, again, the issue there is pretty self-explanatory. Bagram is far removed, relatively speaking, from Kabul. The vast majority of U.S. citizens that we wanted and, of course, embassy personnel that needed to come out in that NEO probably 70 percent plus were in the Kabul area. HKIA is right there in the city. Much harder to secure for sure but, logistically, much easier to get folks out.

Of course, our NEO planning did have as the backdrop – not the only consideration, but it's a backdrop that there would be Afghan National Security Forces present for that withdrawal. And, of course, that is one of those pieces that changed overnight. But Bagram as an alternative, I think there will be lots of opportunity for folks to look at that. I'm not concerned that in looking that

there will actually be a lot of momentum behind the view that that was a viable alternative for the NEO.

Ms. Easton: Hmm. OK. So enough forcing you to backseat drive. Let's move forward. A lot of questions about the U.S. military's over-the-horizon campaign against al-Qaida, ISIS-K, and other terrorist threats coming from Afghanistan, and a bottom line for your average American how is the military poised to protect us from terrorist attacks? I mean, can you give us some – what is that over-the-horizon strategy?

Ms. Hicks: Sure. So, first of all, there's a misconception, I think, that the United States has a very specific approach to Afghanistan in what's called over the horizon than it does elsewhere in the world, and most Americans will know we don't have military personnel on the ground most places in the world where we're worried about terrorism.

So you can think about Yemen. You can think about areas in North Africa where we know al-Qaida, al-Shabaab, other groups operate from – ISIS – and we are not reliant, largely, on U.S. military personnel to execute counterterrorism operations there.

So what we're really talking about in Afghanistan is a normalizing of how the U.S. pursues its counterterrorism missions. So you could think about the U.S., you know, at one extreme of what an over-the-horizon might look like. You can look at what the United States was able to execute against Osama bin Laden, which I think all Americans are quite familiar with. Well, that's an over-the-horizon operation. So that's at one level.

The other reality, though, is that most of what the United States does in counterterrorism is not at the pointy end of the spear. It's about our collection capability, most of which is not necessarily even airborne assets. You could think about space assets. You can think about human intelligence networks, particularly when you're looking at ISIS or al-Qaida and their attempts to be global movements. A lot of that is happening across computer networks. It's not happening, if you will, in cells that are meeting just on the ground.

And then the last thing I think I will say is just, very clearly, the president's goal here, very well stated already to the public, is we are not in a place where we're trying to stop everything that happens in Afghanistan. We don't need an over-the-horizon capability that's eyes on everything happening Afghanistan.

What we're focused on with regard to Afghanistan is preventing terrorist attacks that are focused on U.S. citizens, whether there or at home, and protecting ourselves from those kinds of attacks, and that's a much narrower subset of the counterterrorism threat spectrum.

Ms. Easton: So just one more on that, a little follow-up on that. I mean, you know, CSIS analysts are concerned that we don't have the partnerships, the significant intelligence infrastructure, that we have even in places like Syria and Iraq and Libya and even Yemen to make this a successful strategy. So you would say to that?

Ms. Hicks: Well, two things. First is they have to be able to get out of Afghanistan, by and large, in order to affect U.S. interests. So I'll just leave that there. And the second is the United States has partners throughout the world. We have a variety of approaches that we use as a national government to develop out those human networks. If the focus – it sounds like the focus of that criticism is on the human networks. I would stress again, it's not the only – human networks are not the only tool, nor necessarily in many cases the primary tool, when we're looking at preventing threats to approaches here at home. So we will keep working on all of those. And, you know, I don't think there is any attempt to take the eye off the ball of looking at violent extremist organizations and their ability to affect Americans.

Ms. Easton: So it sounds like you're pretty confident. You know, of course this week we all heard from General Milley concerning – concerned that al-Qaida and ISIS could reconstitute in Afghanistan in 2022, next year. But you feel confident in our capabilities at this point to combat that?

Ms. Hicks: I'm reasonably confident that ISIS will not have any interest or capabilities to have a physically manifested threat that comes against the United States. ISIS threats emanate globally. So our biggest toolsets there are, again, things like computer network operations. Here at home, it's the FBI and local law enforcement working closely with federal authorities on the national security side. That's the ISIS challenge set.

For al-Qaida, I think we will keep a laser focus on ensuring that they cannot undertake efforts to attack U.S. citizens. And, of course, holding the Taliban responsible for their agreement, which they made under Doha, to not allow any such organizations to reconstitute that would be focused, you know, against our interests. That's also very important in how we proceed with Afghanistan.

Ms. Easton: Great. That's a good explanation. Thank you.

So I think the – all the complications out of the Afghanistan withdrawal also heightened your focus there on data collection, examining data, using AI-driven technologies, which you are at the forefront of, correct? Could you talk about that effort?

Ms. Hicks: Sure. Afghanistan, I think, was a good example of where having interconnectivity inside the U.S. government on data, being able to share data, being able to in real time to action on data, I guess is how I would put it, was well-displayed. Within DOD, we have been focused on this data challenge for some time. And the way I would explain it, which I hope is most translatable, is being able – there's immense amounts of information, everyone knows, looking at their phone every day. More information than anyone could take in reasonably.

What AI can help us do, and ensuring data that we can share, is draw all that information in and allow decision-quality approaches, pattern recognition, speeding and understanding of is that object you see coming a threat, not a threat, friend or foe? That's a lot of the promise of being able to access all the data and then, through AI and machine learning, be able to analyze all that data. So it's really about decision advantage and speed of decision advantage. So we're very focused on that as a way in which the U.S. military can contribute to deterrence, to create stability, to be able to see, for example, as I use the friend or foe example, prevent escalation, but also to be able to demonstrate to adversaries – potential adversaries – that we are prepared to respond swiftly where we do see threats.

Ms. Easton: So, it's interesting, a lot of – in corporate America, there's a lot of focus on – particularly in more visionary companies – a lot of focus on reading the future versus just drawing on the past and using AI. And it sounds like you are doing that very much. And you – what are the five data decrees that you issued?

Ms. Hicks: Yeah, in sum – without walking through them – in sum the idea here is that our data has to be at a certain standard. We have to be able to share it. It needs to be transparent, what's in that data. And again, if you take the data decrees and the responsible AI principles together, I think you start to get a sense of how we're trying to build out the – this is just the foundation on which we will build capability to ensure that data that comes in is structured in such a way that it can be shared, we all understand what the data is trying to – you know, it's translatable, and, again, that it can plug – you know, think mechanically – can plug – you know, the pipes can plug across systems, and the data can flow through it. And then on the AI side, that we have responsible approaches that we're the leader – which I think we are, frankly, even ahead of industry – in terms of the principled approach to how we think about applying AI and machine learning in ethical ways, so that we can then take that data and use it for the security of the United States.

Ms. Easton: Great. So a couple more Afghanistan questions, and then we'll move on. But how concerned are you about U.S.-trained Afghan pilots, personnel, and aircraft being held in Tajikistan? And what steps are being taken to ensure that they're not returned to the Taliban?

Ms. Hicks: Yeah, I'm not going to comment on the latter half. Obviously, we have a lot of concern to ensure that those Afghan pilots are safe, that their families are safe, and there's ongoing efforts that the State Department's leading in that space.

Ms. Easton: And another question – and this I'm going to wrap in an audience member question with this – how is the DOD continuing to work with partners and allies to evacuate people from Afghanistan? And Dr. Gayle Nelson asks: What's the status of U.S. plans for rescuing high-risk Afghans, including former defense ministry and general staff officials, from Kabul? What is the status of special immigrant visas?

Ms. Hicks: OK, they're – let me – let me pick pieces. There's a lot in there. The ongoing evacuation of American citizens, that is absolutely the case. You see even since we have departed from U.S. – the U.S. military securing of HKIA you've seen a number of U.S. citizens and green-card holders, those with documentation, and Afghans at risk departing Afghanistan. That is through the extremely good work of the U.S. State Department-led efforts. They are using U.S. military facilities, for instance, in the Middle East and in Europe to help facilitate the flow of those folks. But DOD is really just in support in that case. And what you're seeing, again, is more of an ability both to bring folks through the State Department process for providing documentation, securing – ensuring that the documentation is accurate. You have a DHS-led process on vetting and review to ensure that the right people are coming out. And then DOD is providing some of the backdrop. We're not the ones lifting out.

The other major thing I would flag is the standing up of the commercial side of the Kabul airport. And that's an effort underway that third countries are working on with the State Department, to try to get that airport up and operational. And that – again, if you combine the ability for commercial aircraft to come through and move – without coming to U.S. military facilities, for instance, just going through commercial air traffic, and the ability of the State Department to provide continuing support for the visa process and for the, you know, validation of those who are on U.S. passport, that all becomes – you can see already – you're starting to see the ability of that process to work without the U.S. having, if you will, boots on the ground or even lift involved directly in that process.

Ms. Easton: Great. OK. We'll leave Afghanistan now. Let's talk about very broadly, what's your personal role in nuclear modernization at the Pentagon?

Ms. Hicks: Sure. Well, as I said before, you know, as the COO it's really about connecting the objectives to the resources. And in the case of nuclear modernization, those resources take the form of our nuclear command and control enterprise, the cyber and space-related aspects of the security of our nuclear – strategic nuclear deterrent, and then what are those actual programs that we have for nuclear deterrence. So in that regard, I am assisting the secretary. And, again, the president has a Nuclear Posture Review underway now that's up at the White House level. So I'm assisting the secretary in looking at that – particularly that backend piece. With nuclear policy being made from the White House, what are the implications of that policy for how we bring forward the capabilities in support?

So I look at that through a number of different mechanisms. The budget is the one most people are used to, but I assure you there's no shortage of meeting types in which we talk through many of the nuclear modernization challenges that we face.

And, you know, I think the key takeaway, really, is that the strategic nuclear deterrent for the United States is fundamental to our ability to secure – has been, you know, since the dawn of the

nuclear age at the end of the Second World War. It's a cornerstone of how we secure Americans here at home. The president has stated the same, and he's also looking for ways to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. security. So we're working in support of those goals.

Ms. Easton: And what about space defense? Can you kind of give us an overview of where efforts are going on that realm, moving into 2022 and beyond?

Ms. Hicks: Sure. So I'm sure folks will be familiar that we've stood up a Space Force. It was stood up under the last administration, so it's often affiliated or people think of it as aligned to, if you will, an administration. But I think it's important for people to know that there was a strong congressional, bipartisan viewpoint to bring forth the Space Force. So that bipartisan viewpoint on Capitol Hill continues. And so we are continuing, of course, to build out the shaping of that Space Force and its capabilities.

Again, like I said on nuclear issues, that is in support of an overall White House-driven, presidentially driven perspective on how we think about space, about civil uses of space. The vice president is very engaged in this space.

Sorry for that.

And also, what are the military contributions to defense of space or what we often call space resiliency?

So we have a lot of commercial capability here in the United States, a lot of innovators in the space sector, that put us at an advantage of our competitors, the Russias and the Chinas of the world, who are also doing a lot in space. And a lot of where we're trying to go in terms of space defense is working closely with those partners on the civilian side, commercial side, while retaining some very unique, specific, and high-quality capabilities within the U.S. government, making sure we're focused on keeping our edge there to defend the United States.

Ms. Easton: And let's come back to earth and focus on the Pacific now. President Biden, of course, announced the Australia-U.K.-U.S. deal, which included sharing U.S. nuclear-powered submarine technology. Can you describe how this fits into overall military strategy and China's strategy?

Ms. Hicks: Sure. So AUKUS, as it's called, the agreement that you're referencing with the U.K. and Australia, does include a consultation effort on nuclear propulsion. It's not for – a rush to add it is not to provide Australia with the capability to launch nuclear weapons, which is also not in the interest of – the Australians, least of all, are not interested in that. It's about helping them consider what the approach would be, what efforts they would have to undertake in order to establish a nuclear-propulsion capability inside Australia. So the United States and the U.K. cooperate very closely on that issue set.

This brings the Australians into a consultative mechanism to start working through what that might look like. So it's an 18-month consultation period. And also there are some other areas that are – the president announced quantum computing, cyber, a couple of other areas, that will be working in this trilateral format of AUKUS to look at how we can advance capabilities together.

So there are a lot of reasons why that's helpful to Australia itself in terms of its defense. Nuclear propulsion allows them to think about how they stay undersea longer and more quietly, less detectable. That's the advantage of the nuclear propulsion. Why is that advantageous to us in the context of China, which is how you raised the question.

The Chinese are advancing their capabilities at a remarkable clip. Those capabilities include, of course, undersea capabilities. But even beyond what they're doing in the undersea, it's a very clear pattern of expanding out the geographic capability, the range of their capability to deny

other interested parties, whether that's around Japan, whether that's around, in the case of the United States, Guam or even Hawaii. And if you're Australia, it includes, of course, spanning out now, getting closer to Australia, the ability to threaten their interests.

So the fact that the United States and the U.K. and Australia are coming together around this issue set I think just demonstrates how the opinions in the region, in the western Pacific, are shifting, and, honestly, in Europe, how the positions are shifting with regard to how serious this Chinese challenge is, and the rhetoric of President Xi is as aggressive, frankly, as his actual capabilities. So in past years we might have said we see their capability growth; we're not sure what their intentions are. Now they're being pretty clear about their intentions and we're seeing their capability growth, and I think the lights are going on in many places, and I think one of those places is Australia.

Ms. Easton: How worried are you? And what do you mean by China as a pacing competitor? You used that term.

Ms. Hicks: Sure. Yeah, sure. I am worried. I think the United States and China and the globe have a significant interest in maintaining peace and stability in the western Pacific and throughout the world. And it takes a very careful approach to – given what I've described as the rhetoric and the capabilities – to make clear that we can credibly deter any such efforts against our interests. I mentioned Japan, a treaty ally. I've mentioned U.S. territory, even a state – (laughs) – in the United States of America includes Hawaii, so we have real reason for concern ourselves, let alone those treaty commitments we have, The Philippines and others.

What do I mean by a pacing threat is that they are developing capabilities in certain areas that are beginning to compete very effectively with what the U.S. could bring to bear to defend those interests. And so we now look increasingly at where China is going in certain capability areas as the bar, the mark on the wall that we need to ensure we can credibly deter against. That doesn't mean, necessarily, that we're doing an arms race in any particular area. It just means that that mark on a wall is something we have to be able to credibly overcome with our own capabilities. And by the way, the U.S. has a huge advantage in that those capabilities are not just ours – back to AUKUS – they're about what the U.S. can bring as a global power and with a lot of other countries who are now increasingly concerned about what China's trying to do.

Our goal is not to have any conflict, armed conflict, with China. It is to reduce tension and demonstrate a credible deterrent so they are not tempted with this rhetoric and this capability to overreach.

Ms. Easton: So on the same program just a few weeks ago I interviewed Senator Duckworth – and I encourage our audience to watch it; she went into a lot of this military and intelligence strategy in exactly what we're talking about. And one of the things that she raised concerns about was a potential invasion of Taiwan, particularly given the chip technology there. How concerned are you?

Ms. Hicks: It's something we watch very carefully. If you're out, the Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii, you're watching it day to day, we have a significant amount of capability forward in the region to tamp down any such potential. We have good relations, of course, with Taiwan. We have commitments to Taiwan that are enduring since the 1970s. And central to that is helping the Taiwanese with their self-defense capabilities. That's really important. The Taiwanese, their ability to defend themselves effectively is a game-changer in terms of that deterrent calculus for China. And so that's an area we want to have a lot of focus on, as well as our own – and, as I said before, with allies and partners – our own credible demonstration of interests in, frankly, a democracy with an advanced economic – and to your point on the chips, semiconductor industry – yes, that's sort of a business case, if you will, but also the Taiwanese people have demonstrated an ability to have a democracy. And we have an interest in ensuring democracies can flourish.

Primarily that's expressed through the self-defense of Taiwan, but the United States works closely with partners throughout the world on that.

Ms. Easton: So, Kath, we have a whole rash of audience questions to ask you and we haven't even talked about you. Your dad was a rear admiral. Tell us about him, his work and his influence on you.

Ms. Hicks: Oh, my gosh, that's so nice; no one's ever asked me that question! Let's see, my – yes, my dad was a submariner, speaking of submarines, and spent more than 30 years in the United States Navy. I grew up across the U.S. on the coasts and Hawaii.

Ms. Easton: In Hawaii, right?

Ms. Hicks: Yes. And, you know, never expected myself to be working in the Defense Department. But, of course, if you sort of take the long view, you can sort of see how it all played out. But a tremendous influence and incredible focus on public service, both him and my mother, who was very focused on military families. Did a ton – is a psychologist and did a ton of work as a counselor and psychologist with military families.

And we had one of those dinner tables – I have a very large family. I'm the youngest of seven children. So we had one of those dinner tables where the conversations were always around current events, news of the day, and a strong focus on education and service to others. And that's an enduring influence that I hope I can pass on not just to my own children but to those I work with.

Ms. Easton: And what drew you to the Pentagon –

Ms. Hicks: Yeah –

Ms. Easton: – early on? You were, clearly – I mean, you had – you went through your Ph.D. at MIT, but you started early on at the Pentagon.

Ms. Hicks: I did. I actually – I went back to MIT for my Ph.D. while a Pentagon employee. So I actually went to the Pentagon first after my master's degree, and coming out of college I was sort of trying to decide between did I want to go be a history professor or did I want to go do something more in the public realm. And I had, you know, strong mentors in college who helped me think through that challenge set. I decided to go on to the public policy route and to public policy schools.

And I think I was just really drawn to foreign policy, foreign affairs, overall throughout my college years. I came out of college at the time that the Berlin Wall came down, at the time that the Soviet Union dissolved. Those were – it was fascinating, the – sort of the hope of a new approach for the United States, a new generation. And so it was very natural for me to look at the national security realm and public service for all the reasons I've just described.

The Defense Department had, then and now, a particularly compelling program. It's called – it was called at the time the Presidential Management Internship, now called the Presidential Management Fellows Program, and DOD was well known to have one of the best programs. I hope that's still true today, people – that people view it that way today.

You had a lot of opportunity to move around, try different things – essentially, a two-year training program – and to be able to join the civil service and be used really well. No matter what level you were, the reputation was you could be brought in and just do great work. And that's how I came into DOD and, honestly, as a career civil servant for those first 13 years that's what I found at DOD.

I found, you know, even though I was young and female and did not come myself with an operational background, meaning I had not served in the military, there was a lot to overcome. I'm not going to – I'm not going to whitewash that. But, you know, if you could demonstrate your merit, if you could show you could do good work, chances were people were – they needed your good work and so you could do really interesting things and advance, and that's what brought me to DOD and kept me here for so long.

Ms. Easton: So it was – it wasn't easy being a civilian moving up?

Ms. Hicks: No.

Ms. Easton: Can you describe, like, in just a couple sentences?

Ms. Hicks: Sure. I think they're – most of the uniformed members who are here in the building, they're coming either at a capstone or very late in their – when they're coming here to work on substantive issues, they're coming here, let's just say, as a colonel or a Navy Captain level, or maybe just slightly under that.

If you're starting here, as I did at 23, with no operational background and you're coming into the office of the secretary of defense and you're there to, you know, hold forth and provide guidance, my very first job was developing guidance for the secretary to sign in a variety of different very operational areas.

You can imagine that's pretty off putting for people, and what I found worked – again, I'd, certainly, had my challenges over the years, but what I found worked best was really always being clear that you respect the operational insight that those in uniform were bringing but that you brought something to the table and that you had been brought on as a career civilian, in my case with a very specific set of expertise and knowledge and that – over the years, that knowledge base only grows relative to those who are rotating in and out of the Pentagon. You really have that institutional understanding of how Washington works, how the interagency works, how to work with Congress, how to develop in the case of a place like the office of the secretary of defense guidance that sticks. What are the incentives organizationally? Those who are out in the field, they have tremendous knowledge sets that I will not have. But I have something they need too. And I think when you can come forward on a very frank basis about that, very professional basis, most of the most with most of the people that will work relatively well.

Ms. Easton: Those are really wise words, especially to young people coming up the ladder. And I wanted to ask you, you, like Smart Women, Smart Power, we're all champions and supporters of women in national security. Do you see the women – the same way that you were shaped by the era of the fall of the Berlin Wall and that optimism, do you see young women today going into national security shaped by something different?

Ms. Hicks: I think –

Ms. Easton: I mean, obviously it's something different. But what are they shaped by now?

Ms. Hicks: Sure. First, I think we had a significant influx of young professionals after 9/11. That happened in the military services, and it also happened on the national security civilian side. So that's now a full generation. Twenty years later, that's a full generation past –

Ms. Easton: Including my son going into the Army, yes.

Ms. Hicks: There you go.

Ms. Easton: A 9/11 baby, yeah.

Ms. Hicks: Yeah. Now I think what we see are people who are looking at a globalized world, is what I see in young people coming in. They are looking at national security tied very much to how we think about our security here at home. And by that, I mean, they're thinking about what does the United States – how does the United States strengthen itself from within? They look very much at how the – what the work is that the United States needs to do in order to be a credible, you know, beacon of freedom, if you will, in the way that we would have thought of it in 1989 or 1990. They're very focused on how to weave the story of America really at home and abroad together. That's what I see. And they're much more diverse. I think we have a long way to go, but much more diverse than we used to be. And it is true that we see many more women than we used to.

Ms. Easton: Boy, that's – I just love that imagery, like, lifting out the American story around the world through national security. That's very powerful.

OK, we are going to go to audience questions. I apologize to all of you. There's a lot of them, so I'll try to get through as many as I can.

Tyler asks: How does DOD foresee overcoming the current domestic political climate in order to obtain the next generation of warfighters that are not only technologically savvy to meet the future needs of warfighting, but also adhere to larger diversity, equity, and inclusion goals? That's a lot. Go ahead.

Ms. Hicks: OK. That ties very much to, I think, what we were just talking about. This is a straight-up business case issue. There is a lot of politics in Washington – (laughs) – and on cable news. And, you know, my job is the business case. And the business case is this: Any organization, corporation, university that wants to compete effectively in the 21st century has got to get the formula right on tapping into the immense talent base here in the United States. Huge advantage over the Chinas of the world, if you will, and their statist approaches, is the innovation that we can bring forward. And I don't just mean technology. I mean creative thinking that goes after practical problems and brings new ideas.

That requires us to tap that talent base. And that talent base is increasingly diverse in all its – in all its measures. So that means not only can you recruit effectively against, you know, that full talent base, but can you retain – attract and retain? And a lot of that is, are you a workplace that people want to come to? Can you make a compelling case for mission? So, you know, in many generations in the past the mission, if you will, was enough. It was very clear what the United States military offered in terms of the ability to, again, defend the United States itself, sort of a recognized goal to pursue.

Now I think we have a lot of work to do to make that case that's credible, which is the military's a place where you can be safe from sexual harassment or assault, that you are going to be – there's a social contract all the way through your veteran years with regard to your mental health, to your physical health, to your family, that we are bringing in those most innovative and technologically advanced and we're not going to – we're not going to completely consume you or bring you down with bureaucracy. These are all major challenges to attracting the kind of talent we need for the future. And they are at the heart of when we talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion. It's really – more than anything else, it's about making sure we bring the right people in. We let them advance through our system. We demonstrate that you can make it to the top of our system and throughout our ranks, not just in a token way but in an enduring way, so that we are a place people want to come to. They give their best while they're here, and we take care of them on the other end.

Ms. Easton: Kishla from Global Bridge Health Strategy asks, how is the department measuring the risk that climate change places on operations? Particularly interested in current impacts on operations and long-term resilience of force readiness.

Ms. Hicks: OK. So I always like to start this back in 2008; again, an issue that's been over-politicized in recent years. Back in 2008, the National Intelligence Council put out an agreed IC, intelligence community, assessment that climate change was a national-security risk. The intelligence community and the Department of Defense, including on the uniformed side, has never wavered from that viewpoint. So there's no question, over more than a decade, that we have a national-security risk from climate change.

It comes about in a number of ways. It comes about because, again, back to just dollars and cents, our installations, our facilities, our operations – so, for instance, our use of fuels, our ability to maintain our equipment, which is using capabilities that not only do they happen to be climate-challenged, but they are decreasingly of use in the commercial sector, so paying to upkeep them takes more money. There's a lot of dollars invested just in staying static, where we are, because – when we don't take into account climate implications.

The readiness issue, similarly, we have days we can't fly our aircraft because there's increasing wildfires. You know, these numbers are going up. So you can look at wildfires. You can look at drought. You can look at sea-level rise, all of these aspects that affect our readiness.

And then there's the fact that military forces, especially our National Guard forces, get called up more and more frequently to deal with climate-related instances of adverse weather – hurricanes, wildfires again, and international crises. You can think back to the tsunami, for instance, in Asia, where U.S. military forces are called on more. All of these are ways that climate change is manifesting as increased demand on and requirements for dollars from DOD. So we have a big interest in going after it.

What are we doing about it? First we're getting a better approach inside our own budgeting process for how we account for what we're already doing on climate. It's not a good accounting today. It is my expectation, in the fiscal-year '23 budget that we put forward in the spring next year, we'll have a much better handle of what DOD does with regard to climate today.

Second, we are very much focused on making sure that our – we're taking advantage of green technology; again, most of it not exotic, most of it well used in the commercial sector. So you can think about electric – small things like electric-vehicle fleets. We rent a lot of cars in the U.S. Department of Defense. A lot of those cars are now electric. Do we have charging stations for those cars? If we're buying vehicle fleets for, you know, your typical run-around-the-base kind of operations that we use our vehicle fleets for, should those be electric? That's one of those examples that's small, but I think most people can connect with. It's just sensible ways to spend our dollars.

And then I'll just finish with this. There's – I could talk climate all day, as you can tell. I'll finish by saying we have a climate-risk assessment tool now that we are using we have deployed – the secretary's directed – across the department for all facilities and installations so we can actually have some data and analysis to show us where we have the greatest climate-change risks – sea-level rise is a good example – and how we can prioritize our dollars in order to mitigate those challenges.

Ms. Easton: Great. So Dave offers a follow-up to your answer on what we left behind militarily in Afghanistan, that we didn't leave sensitive high-end military equipment. And he says could you please clarify your equipment, specifically the Taliban – or could you please clarify your statement? Specifically, the Taliban flew a U.S. Black Hawk helicopter during its victory parade in Kabul. Do you consider Black Hawk helicopters to be high end or low end in military

equipment? How many other military aircraft were provided to the ASF or otherwise left behind in Afghanistan?

Ms. Hicks: I do not have any – I have never heard that the – that the Taliban flew a Black Hawk. I could be wrong. I have not heard that before.

Ms. Easton: OK.

Katherine from DIU asks: How are you –

Ms. Hicks: Can I just add one thing to that?

Ms. Easton: Oh, sorry.

Ms. Hicks: Which is you also, then, need to be able to fuel and maintain a Black Hawk. Even if you flew it once, you need – you need to be able to maintain it over time. So I'll just leave it at that.

Ms. Easton: OK. Let's see. Yukari from Albright Stonebridge Group asks: Japan's new ruling Liberal Democratic Party president was selected on the 29th. How do you plan to promote your policy toward China and the Quad with Kishida and the Japan together?

Ms. Hicks: I think what I would answer that with is we have a very enduring and durable alliance with Japan and we are, you know, both – on both sides quite used to shifts of power inside our democratic processes. And we fully anticipate having a very positive relationship, including through the Quad – which the Quad references Japan, the United States, India, and Australia – but also bilaterally and in other venues with the Japanese. So I think we're – we feel very confident in that.

Ms. Easton: OK. We've got four minutes left and this is a perfect note to end it on. Katina from Georgetown said you've broken a lot of glass ceilings in the DOD world and national security spaces. Congratulations to you, Dr. Hicks. Women voices and skills will be critical in resolving our future challenges. She asks: Is DOD doing enough to encourage and promote female leaders? I'm going to take that a little bit differently. What would you say – what's your piece of advice to women who want to follow in your footpath?

Ms. Hicks: I think my piece of advice is expect challenges and be passionate about the work you want to do. It's the passion you're going to need when you have the challenges. And you know, you have to be able to step forward confidently and be ready to demonstrate that you bring value. And if you're confident you bring value and you present that forward to the world, again, there's always going to be challenges, but I think you can – you can – with a passion to do what you want to do, you can go pretty far.

Ms. Easton: Great. Any final thoughts, Dr. Hicks, as we close?

Ms. Hicks: No. Thanks, Nina. It's been a pleasure.

Ms. Easton: Great. It's wonderful to have you. You've been so insightful. We've learned a lot. And thank you for your patience, for your deep analysis, and always your great intellect. We really appreciate it. Thank you so much.

Ms. Hicks: Great. Thank you.