

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Online Event

**“Maritime Security Dialogue: Force Design 2030 and  
Marine Corps Modernization Efforts”**

DATE

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FEATURING

**Lieutenant General Karsten S. Heckl**

*Commanding General, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, and the Deputy  
Commandant for Combat Development and Integration*

**Vice Admiral Peter H. Daly, USN (Ret.)**

*Chief Executive Officer and Publisher, United States Naval Institute*

CSIS EXPERTS

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Vice Admiral  
Peter H. Daly,  
USN (Ret.):

Good afternoon. I'm Pete Daly, CEO and publisher of the U.S. Naval Institute. And on behalf of the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Naval Institute, we welcome you to this continuation of our Maritime Security Dialogue series. This series is generously sponsored by HII.

Today's theme is Force Design 2030, Marine Corps Modernization. And our guest is Lieutenant General Karsten Heckl, U.S. Marine Corps. General Heckl is a career naval aviator who has commanded Marines at all levels, from squadron to wing to Marine expeditionary force, including combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Moderating today is Dr. Seth Jones, senior vice president and Harold Brown Chair at CSIS, also the director of the International Security Program and director of the Transnational Threat Project.

Over to you, Dr. Jones and General Heckl.

Seth G. Jones:

Thank you very much for that warm introduction. And thank you very much, General, for joining us here today. We really appreciate it.

I thought it would be helpful to start off by allowing you to give the audience a little sense of what you do. You know, what's the main focus of MCCDC? What do you do? How do you serve both the Marines and the country writ large?

Lieutenant  
General Karsten  
S. Heckl:

OK, so thanks for the question and the opportunity to be here today to talk about forces. I look forward to it.

So Marine Corps Combat Development Command and, slash, the Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration. The latter is certainly the bulk of my focus, combat development and integration.

Underneath that moniker are the two – there's three, but two primary directorates, the Combat Development Director, CDD; and then, of course, the big one is the Marine Corps – they're both big – Marine Corps Warfighting Lab. I say that now because where we're going on with forces on into very heavy, aggressive experimentation, our Warfighting Lab is very focused on that.

So I am essentially – we could talk about this for quite a while, but I am the requirements officer for the United States Marine Corps. So within each of those, we break down and, you know, within the various components of a MAGTF. And that's where we do all the fielding of concepts, and then it's passed over to the Warfighting Lab for experimentation and refinement, all in this cycle of something we call the Campaign of Learning.

Dr. Jones: Great. Well, thanks for doing it. We'll get into a little bit of what you just noted in a second. But let me start off with a question about the annual update. The commandant has said that Force Design is based on a campaign of learning, informed by war-games analysis, including the Warfighting Lab that you mentioned earlier. The annual update should be out next week.

So what can you share about what the Marine Corps has learned so far about Force Design, and what should we expect to see out of that?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Great question. The annual report will be out soon. Obviously, I've seen a document. I think it's going to be a very helpful document, I think for a whole host of reasons. I think, you know, what we've learned from Force Design over the last two and a half years – and just by way of noting something here, as a MEF commander basically from July of '20 to September of '21, I actually was part of the experimentation going on. And that's where I multiple times saw Major General Austin and Major General Watson, the two CDD and MCWL individuals, out in San Diego helping us, just as a point.

But what we've learned – I would say the most profound thing we've learned over the last two and a half years would be that the relevance and the unique positioning of a stand-in force to enable joint-force access and targeting, sensing, and making sense of the battle space, very critically closing kill chains quickly, and then applying lethal effects and, as required, deterring and defeating any adversaries that may stick themselves in front of our nation.

Another – there's a whole host of them, and you're going to read about them in the report. It goes into – it will start off, after the introduction of talking about what we've learned, and then we'll break it down through the rest of the report; the commandant does.

I would say another just general observation, from my perspective, I think we probably focused too early on just MLR to the exclusion of everything else, right – the Marine Littoral Regiment. We're very quickly coming around that. And then, within the MLR, I think initially we focused too exclusively on lethality, not so much on sensing, making sense, maneuverability, deception, you know –

Dr. Jones: ISR –

Lt. Gen Heckl: – recon, counter-recon, C5ISRT, countersea 5ISRT – all the things that – the true value proposition of stand-in force is the day-to-day deterrence, right? Being there with allies and partners, walking the real estate with allies and partners – that's real, tangible reassurance to our allies and partners. And in the course of doing that, gaining access, we start things like collecting and

maintaining custody of targets, every day and refining that target data, if you will, regularly, and we also establish pattern-of-life, our own, and then we may alter it as we see fit, and we're starting to collect on pattern-of-life of our pacing threat.

Dr. Jones: So you talked a little bit just a minute ago about forward deployment and the value of being forward deployed. There certainly have been efforts over the last several years to reduce the U.S. presence overseas in a number of regions. I mean, obviously, in the National Defense Strategy there is a particular focus on the Indo-Pacific, but there has been a push to pull back and withdraw forces from numerous regions. I think it would be helpful for you to outline specifically why a forward presence is important, any experiences you've had to really reinforce that, but I think it would be helpful for the American public really to hear that.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Well, so presence matters, right? So we've heard over the COVID period, you know, multiple times, you know, virtual presence is actual absence. There's something to that. Presence matters. And in this case – and I'm going to – always bring it back to the stand-in force. The stand-in force is the III Marine Expeditionary Force, right? They're there. They live, eat, train every day inside the PRC's weapons engagement zone. You can even be a JV student of history and know that if you're not there when a conflict begins or when a crisis begins, you're going to have problems, right? If you're going to have to fight your way in, that's not a good place to begin, right? So that's the whole – again, the value proposition of stand-in force – small, very – signature management is in everything we do with Force Design, so small, maneuverable, very lethal, but forward, stand-in, right? And they're there doing all the things and then they can rapidly escalate as things go to crisis and then, if necessary, into conflict. But being there is – this is me talking – 90 percent of the fight, you know. So a real challenge for me as a I MEF commander in San Diego, the biggest MEF in the Marine Corps, was the 7,000-mile physics problem I had, right?

Dr. Jones: Especially to do it quickly.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Yes, sir. So, you know, so we were – and as you know, that's part – some of the byproduct of Force Design now. Marine Rotational Force-Darwin is now under I MEF. We've got 5th Marines forward now experimenting, doing things in conjunction with Force Design and being forward.

To your point about pulling back, I get the sense – this is me talking, OK? I get the sense that a lot of our allies and partners, particularly in Indo-Pacific – and I think Admiral Aquilino has certainly helped this with his leadership at INDOPACOM. They're beginning to sense the change with – we're seeing without any veneer what the CCP is all about, right, the Chinese Communist

Party, and I believe that may change some of the calculus and offer us some opportunities to come in and be good allies and partners, so.

Dr. Jones: So let me just ask a question along those lines because when I look at CCP, PLA, in particular and PLA-navy power projection, there certainly is an important component of that in the Indo-Pacific, but we also see the use of naval bases in Pakistan, Gwadar, Karachi. We see Djibouti. I mean, I've seen that multiple times on visits deployed there. The Chinese have been interested in developing the bases in UAE, west coast of Africa. So when it comes to presence, how do you think about what looks like it's increasingly a much more interested Chinese global power projection capability?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Sir, that's a great point, and there have been articles just in the last week, numerous articles, about that very thing. I mean, again, as you and I talked about in the green room, the Solomons.

And to your point, when you look at – and, you know, I've been to Djibouti multiple times. I've gone by it on ships, I've flown ashore. Djibouti didn't happen – the Chinese, that didn't just happen by accident; it's right on the Bab al-Mandab, right, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea – one of our absolute vital sea lines of communication to be able to aggregate fleets and for the Navy to be able to do the things they must do. So it's no mistake, right? And I think the global projection of the Chinese has probably been one of if, not the most, stark realities of the last decade, I would say. And they're not stopping there, just to your point, right? What they're doing down in with – in Gabon, on the west coast of Africa impact UAE, again, another swap, right? The Strait of Hormuz. I mean, so these are – these should all cause alarm bells to go off.

Dr. Jones: So part of the question for how you – how the Marine Corps thinks about this, one of the challenges, of course, is that with a focus – and it's, you know, the way the NDS envisions it as well, physically on the Indo-Pacific, it means that the Marine presence has shrunk in a number of areas. And one of the things we saw was the special purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force depart from the Middle East. We do have a Chinese presence in that area. We do have Iranian activity, including Islamic Revolutionary Guards Quds Force activity. They have naval activity. There's amphibious activity. We've got the Russians in Syria. And for people that aren't paying attention to Syria, the Russians have conducted multiple air strikes in and around Idlib. So they're active. They've got the naval base in Tartus. So how does that impact your ability to project when you've had the – when we've withdrawn from some of these areas?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Yeah. Well, so, first of all who – right? Who would have thought in our lifetime we'd see a Russian port in the Eastern Mediterranean, right? I mean, it's staggering to understand that and let it really sink in for a little bit. So Special Force MAGTFs, speaking bluntly here, not a big fan. I'm a V-22 guy

from way back when. As you know, some of the Special Forces MAGTFs changed. We now have this North African – I think it's still called the North African Response Force, the East African – and it's in Djibouti. So it's still there.

But basically, what you have is you have a Marine aviation combat element, pieces of it, right? Because a MAGTF can be anything based on task and purpose, the mission given. We can tailor out of the resources of a MEF, cobble together this MAGTF. In this case, it's not really a MAGTF. It's an ACE in support of Army units. So but we're still there. And again, things like Special Force MAGTFs and projection don't concern me as much. The real ability of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force to project is off of amphibious ships, where we can bring the full weight of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force, flight deck, fifth-gen fighters, well deck, 2,500 bloodthirsty Marines, right? I mean, that's the real projection, to me. Not – and in large part the Special Force MAGTFs that we have – that we have had were to be able to have some forward-deployed presence in that sense of a MEU.

Dr. Jones: Yeah. You mentioned Russia and Ukraine, and who could have envisioned the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I wonder if we could circle back to that for a moment because, you know, just setting aside the Marines for a second, one of the interesting discussions we had with the commandant a couple of months ago was on – he's written about this too – was on the combat we had seen between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Everything from the use of UAVs conducting kinetic activity. So from your perspective on the Russian invasion, and lessons you take for how at least some of our adversaries are conducting modern warfare, what are the lessons at the strategic, operational, and tactical level you're looking at for how the war is evolving in Ukraine?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Well, obviously still very early. So we're not – certainly not drawing any firm, fast conclusions yet. We're obviously watching very, very closely. It was one of the very first things the commandant tasked several of his DCs with, is to make sure we're, you know, harvesting the appropriate lessons from this thing. But I think to me in conversations with other officers across various services, clearly the ubiquity and the proliferation of sensors, and then the abilities to close kill chains accurately, precisely, on any target, is a major lesson to take away. In Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenian and Azerbaijan, clearly demonstrated that, right?

So that – and oddly enough, that is one of the routes that forces went down early, was the loitering munitions, right, organic precision fires. And we are pursuing that in various forms, and we can – I would love to be able to talk more on a – on a different classification level.

But clearly, I think one of the things that stood out to anybody, you know, I learned early in Amphibious Warfare School, you know, as a pilot, you know, amateurs talk tactics; professionals talk logistics. Something happened to the Russian army, clearly.

And on that point I simply bring up logistics because I will tell you right now the pacing factor in Force Design right now is logistics. We're not, you know, trying to just sugarcoat this thing. The logistics is going to be hard, there's no doubt. But we've already done multiple experiments. We're going to continue. We will get it right. But that is our pacing effort right now within Force Design, is logistics in a contested environment.

Dr. Jones: So what does that look like? Because I think in the Indo-Pacific – and you can see a little – a little bit of it with the Russian strikes against fuel depots and we've seen them strike targets in the west. But the Indo-Pacific we've got much more significant Chinese capabilities to strike targets, so that bubble extends much further. You've got F-35s you can fly in. The Navy can bring submarines underwater. How are you thinking about operating, then, in a contested environment, if you could unpack what logistics looks like then?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Well, so I'll start off with this. You know, the cathartic event for the Marine Corps was when we got rid of tanks. Tanks are – as you saw with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, any armor is a massive consumer of fuel. We learned long ago in Iraq and Afghanistan that fuel trucks on the road immediately became the target. And that is why I believe in 2009 the commandant stood up the Energy Office in the Marine Corps. We got to find ways to lessen our dependence because it is now a weakness, right? It has become a significant vulnerability.

So, from a – from a standing-force and a force-design perspective, sustainability is – just like signature management, is first and foremost in every thought. It's all – through all our studies, analysis, experiments, exercises, all this campaign of learning, the analytical rigor that underpins every – it's the analytical rigor that underpins every decision the commandant makes on Force Design. And logistics is not going to be easy.

But making them sustainable, having less of a demand for things, I envision – and what we see in Force Design, the light amphibious warship is an example of what would be a major contributor to logistics. We intend to, whenever we have these expeditionary advanced spaces, that they maintain some level of sustainability, right? So as indication and warnings are coming in, we would – we would use the LAW to provide a quick dump of sustainment supplies and then back out as things escalate. What we should be focusing our sustainment efforts on are lethality – rearming and keeping Marines so that they can perform the missions they're there for.

So I don't know if that answers the question, but hopefully –

Dr. Jones: Yes, it did. Yeah. Well, one of the things that becomes important for sustainment, then, in – particularly if we're looking at the Indo-Pacific is the ability to get access to allies and partners.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Right.

MR. JONES: So can you talk a little about how you're thinking about sustained access to ports/airfields in the region and how – you know, we've looked at past conflicts. What you see sometimes is allies and partners that you have some days. Particularly with Chinese pressure when there's investment from Belt and Road Initiative and there's significant Chinese money, there may be significant pressure; you lose access that you once had –

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Right.

Dr. Jones: – once the situation escalates. So how is – how are you working through those issues?

Lt Gen. Heckl: Well, a big – a big piece of that, sir, I would, obviously – and all the instruments of national power. I would say the diplomatic piece is critical here, right, because we can't get any access. Although I will – again, from my experience as a MEF commander, we did this Exercise Koa Moana, sent some Marines over on the City of Bismarck, an expeditionary fast transport, T-EPF, and they went to Palau. Absolutely 100 percent successful. Even at the rage of COVID, no COVID cases. And we went over and did a bunch of unexploded ordnance stuff, we cleared a runway, and now we're – I think we went back in '21. So the country of Palau is more than welcoming.

Now, there's varying degrees of access, right? Now, I think it was Admiral Aquilino when he was PACFLEET when I was a MEF, and he said, although our partners and allies may not necessarily fight shoulder to shoulder, access is critical.

Dr. Jones: Yeah.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: So there are varying degrees of access. But to your point for – specifically I think what you led you into this was the logistics, right; ports. So that's – but remember, for Marines, for the stand-in force, the LAW, the light amphibious – really the landing-ship medium – is a shore-to-shore connector. It's a beachable ship, does not require a pier. So that's where we're going. That way we avoid some of the – and remember, you've got to acknowledge some of this, right. Ports, big long runways – what do you think is going to get hit

first in a conflict? So that's part of the reason why we're thinking of this from a survivability and a sustainability –

Dr. Jones: Hardening the targets for –

Lt. Gen. Heckl: You betcha. And again, sir, we're kind of back to yesterday. You know, if you want a new idea, open an old book. We're back to doing – and all, like, our MWXs out in Twenty-Nine Palms, we're back to using camie netting and really – you know, the Marine Air-Ground Task Force Training Command out there, they're focusing on things that we used to do all the time, that after two decades of sustained operations ashore in Afghanistan and Iraq, we kind of got away from, right; big, heavy FOBs. That's not going to be the case here, right, clearly.

Dr. Jones: Right. I mean, it's one thing to have leatherneck in the middle of Helmand where occasionally you've got concerns about suicide bombers. But anybody with standoff capabilities, that's a very different situation.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: You betcha, sir. You betcha.

Dr. Jones: You've talked a few times about stand-in forces, the kind of lightly – highly mobile forces. Can you talk a little bit about how exercises and experimentation have worked to validate or evolve or inform the concept?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Yeah, absolutely. So one MEF just did an exercise using Catalina Island to simulate a SLOC; you know, a sea line of communication. So we're literally – virtually every exercise we're doing now that we're involved in, we insert some component of forces on. And that's under the overwatch of the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab.

But quite frankly, sir, now we're at a point – so we're in heavy experimentation, phase three, and we're getting a lot of bottom-up feedback from the fleet, which is exactly what you want. So that comes in through me, through the warfighting lab, comes into our Integrated Planning Teams, or IPTs, where we pull – it's not a bunch of staff pagues like me. It's a bunch of fleet Marines and sailors, along with joint force. And we – it goes into the big gonkulator and we make refinements to our forces on plans going forward. And we've already made changes.

So the experiments – now, as you know, we've recently stood up the 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment. It should go out to sea sometime next year. And we're looking forward to all the experimentation with that and how it's going to inform Force Design.

Dr. Jones: Great. Speaking of Force Design, we would be amiss for not at least – you've got a lot of comments coming from the bottom up. There are also a lot

coming from outside the arena and from the top down. So, I mean, it doesn't take a lot to see the op-eds from people like Jim Webb and general officers, particularly retired ones, that have been vocal in opposition.

So what do you say in response to those critics that the Marine Corps in particular is no longer America's crisis-response force?

Lt. Gen. Heckl:

Well, sir, first, let me start off with putting some of the responsibility for that where it belongs; probably on me for not doing an articulate enough job, which I've been doing a lot lately, of explaining Force Design. I see no – I don't believe there's any malice with – I know most of these general officers; grew up underneath them. And so I clearly, as the requirements officer of the Marine Corps, did a poor job explaining this.

And as you know now – for those of you who don't know, we have a Force Design 2030 link on our – the Marine Corps webpage. I use it all the time. It is our – it is really a good piece of gear. I encourage anybody to go there. If you have a question, you'll find an answer. If you don't find it, call me. So start off with that.

Second of all, NDS '18, which drove Force Design, as well as 2022, confirms China as the pacing threat. We always, always build to the worst-case scenario, which in this case clearly is China, from a whole – not just militarily, right. I mean, when you're – you know, the commandant thinks much bigger than just – so, you know, economically, right, their ability to influence and project economic power, right. So this is much worse than the 70-year Cold War with the Soviet Union. This is much worse. And that's where we are; so just openly acknowledging.

So, you know, but the MAGTF still exists. As I said earlier, the stand-in force is the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force. They're there now. We are – we are giving them tools. We're going to give the commanding general of the third Marine Expeditionary Force more tools to deal with the pacing threat, that will have application across theaters. For instance, I was at Sea Air Space and had lunch with the chief of the Swedish Navy. And we were having a conversation at the table. And she's talking about forces on – knew an amazing amount about it. And she goes: Do you know how many islands there are and archipelagos off Norway, Sweden, and Finland? And I'm, like – you know, because I'm a dumb animal. I'm a Marine. Like, no. And she goes, thousands. Thousands. And I'm like, wow.

So she wants us to come up and exercise up in – they had a name for it – God, I've already forgotten it. Nordic something. Anyways, so the point is, we're building specific tools. And all the modernization that we're doing with Force Design is going to make the rest of the MAGTF that much better, right? So the MAGTF remains. It's never gone away. We have – the Marine Air-Ground

Task Force. We have three Marine Expeditionary Forces around the globe that we're going to make more capable through the modernization efforts of Force Design. It's just that simple.

So, you know, and let me just be honest with you. So I'm a V-22 guy. I was there in some of the dark days, right, back when we had some accidents and lost a lot of good Marines. We never lacked our perseverance, and we stuck it out. But some of this kind of smells like that to me, right? Some of the just blatantly false allegations about the V-22. It's not maneuverable. It can't do this. You know, it rips Marines' clothes off when they run out of the back of it. I'm like – and it drove General Jones, then the commandant before he became, you know, supreme allied commander Europe – drove him crazy. A lot of this smells like that to me, sir, to be honest with you. So we're just going to – we're going to be good teammates. We're going to – I'm going to correct myself and do a better job of informing. And we'll get through this.

Dr. Jones: So one of the things that has come up, and you mention it a little bit too, was the tanks, for example. So and you gave an example that's interesting here. There's been a lot of criticism about moving on from tanks. We see the Russians deploying tanks. They've been hit, and their fuel depots have been hit. They still are using tanks along that southern and eastern access points right now. So they're part of the ground fight right now. So where – so but you would still argue pretty strongly that at least the future of the Marine Corps, it is a feasible way forward without tanks?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Absolutely. I mean, even in our heyday our tank force was dwarfed by the Army. Remember, this is a joint right, right? I think the commandant is – you know, he – for instance, when the commandant came off the II MEB JFEO, right, for amphibs, that's never been featured in any OPLAN, anything like that, right? So the commandant actually acknowledged something that we all knew for decades was just kind of hot air, right? He also openly acknowledges that within a joint force, how does – how does the Marine Corps fit? And I wholeheartedly agree with him that tanks isn't part of it.

And, look, hey, you know, you talk to – and I'm not a grunt, right? So I'm – but when you talk to infantry officers, several have told me that you really want a tank in an urban fight. OK. Blows holes in walls, right?

Dr. Jones: The Israelis have done this in the West Bank and Gaza.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Right. Right. So again, if we get into a scenario like that, again, within the joint force, when armor is needed it'll be there.

Dr. Jones: You've got the Army.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Right. And remember, one of our programs of record going forward is the combat of – the amphibious combat vehicle, right? The ACV. That is, you know, replacing the AAV. The ACV is much more – very survivable. You know, very mobile. We’re looking into the possibilities of making something called a mod 30, with a 30-milimeter cannon on it. I think that will blow a pretty good hole in walls. And we’re also fielding something, long-range precision fires, right, that we can use to strike and, in an urban environment, could change the calculus a little bit.

So again, the tanks, I don’t – I just don’t see any need. And when you look at an – when you look at an operating environment like the Indo-Pacific, where do you see tanks playing out? Taiwan? OK. Where else? It’s a – and remember, I come back to my earlier point about sustainability and signature management. And you want to talk about a theater with just sensors everywhere, right?

Dr. Jones: Yeah. Yeah, that’s right.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: So that’s why I think it fits.

Dr. Jones: So you mentioned earlier the Force Design built in part on the 2018 National Defense Strategy and then also updated, evolved, with the 2022 National Defense Strategy. At the heart of the National Defense Strategy – only about two pages have been publicly released, but at the heart of the National Defense Strategy is the concept of integrated deterrence and, at the very least, there’s a deterrence focus on the National Defense Strategy. So – and as well as on the Indo-Pacific. I think the secretary and the deputy have referred to China as the pacing threat, to use their words.

So what are the implications then for the Marine Corps of – what does deterrence mean today? It is the ubiquitous word within the National Defense Strategy. Whenever the publicly released versions of the posture review they get released or the Nuclear Posture Review get released, integrated deterrence is all over those, all of the main documents which have been submitted to Congress.

So this does lead to this question then, well, how are you interpreting it for the Marine Corps? What is – how are you positioning yourselves under that broader concept of integrated deterrence?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: It’s a great question. So you and I kind of briefly talked about this in the green room, right. So integrated deterrence on one end, you know – and so the nuclear triad, right, and various components of it, and in our case, the Navy – Columbia, right, the nuclear submarines – the most survivable, the most effective, you know, component of –

Dr. Jones: The most expensive –

Lt. Gen. Heckl: The most expensive. But that's – so in integrated deterrence that's to the far right of the spectrum, right. We're talking about, like, nuclear warfare. Integrated deterrence goes all the way through all the way to day-to-day operations, right, competing – I don't really care what you call it – being forward inside the weapons engagement zone with allies and partners, reassuring them every day by walking the real estate with them, is deterrence and that is the true value proposition of Force Design to simply make the leadership within the CCP wake up in the morning and go, today just ain't it, right – to intentionally interrupt their decision calculus in whatever form, right. I'm going to get back to maneuverability, deception. We're going to make it – we're going to make it damn hard to draw a conclusive decision about – on our adversaries' part about today being the day to take action. That's deterrence and that's our piece.

And then the Marine Corps continues, right. We will escalate up through crisis and then into conflict. We're going to have very lethal – you know, we've distributed – we've demonstrated multiple times the Navy and Marine Corps expeditionary ship interdiction system with the naval strike missile, very, very effective. And, as you know, we've demonstrated a ground-launched tactical Tomahawk off a rogue, out of a single VLS Mark 41.

So those are all things that would go into the Chinese calculus about whether they wanted to kick it off today.

Dr. Jones: What do you think the Chinese – what do you – or what do you think the value for the Chinese of continuing to operate the way the U.S. has supporting Ukrainians right now? What does that – what message – there have been a whole range of activities the U.S. have done on reinforcing, working with partners and allies to aid Ukraine – the sanctions, the diplomatic pieces.

But does that give you some hope that with – if you were to move from phase zero up the escalatory ladder on the conflict continuum that the Chinese better be mindful that the lesson – one lesson that they should be learning from the Ukrainian crisis is that the ability to work with allies and partners on, you know, space assets –

Lt. Gen. Heckl: You betcha.

Dr. Jones: – air, ground, that all those things, I would think, have to deter the Chinese or least they would have to keep it in mind?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Sir, I totally agree. And, again, kind of back to my comment about the diplomatic piece of gaining access in the Indo-Pacific. Same thing here, right? I mean, this has been a whole-of-government effort across. And I think – I think without question – I mean, when you think about – when you think about what happened – and there’s conjecture as to whether Xi and Putin talked before, delay until the Olympics are over – the bottom line is Xi took the stage – took the global stage with Putin and they essentially declared an alliance, right? I mean – I mean – and then just a few weeks later Putin illegally invaded a sovereign nation.

So I certainly think Putin and Russia miscalculated. I think they’re probably – on multiple fronts, right: the will of the Ukrainians to fight and the reaction of the global community.

I think from the – from Xi’s perspective, you got to see things like the Queen Elizabeth, right, with a bunch of American fifth-gen fighters, British, and they went out and did a global deployment. That’s got to make you think, right?

Dr. Jones: Or the introduction of AUKUS.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Right. You betcha.

And so I – again, back to my earlier comment about, you know, there’s a book called “The Hundred-Year Marathon” written by Michael Pillsbury, just a phenomenal book, and I reread it not long ago. And in there he talks about this thing called never – he says it’s an old Chinese saying from the warring period – warring states period: “Never ask the weight of the emperor’s cauldrons,” meaning it reveals your intention, right? So back in the day, you know, how much gold’s in that thing? Is it worth – is it worth me invading or not, right?

I think the Chinese have asked for the weight of the emperor’s cauldron. When you look at things like what’s happening in Hong Kong, when you look at we’re not going to militarize those islands in the South and East China Seas – that was a lie – people are now seeing exactly what the CCP is about.

Dr. Jones: What lessons are you learning about with Solomon Islands right now?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Yeah. Well, you know – (laughs) – Marines have a history there, right? It’s a bit concerning, right? That is a critical slot, right? It was then. It is now.

And I think the big takeaway from that is – has been to watch the reaction of New Zealand and Australia, right? So, obviously, two great partners of ours. You know, the Marine Rotational Force Darwin, I hope we can work with Australia and expand that in the future in light of current-day events and where we’re going. So we’ve got great allies and partners there.

I think we're all beginning to very rapidly understand the intent of the – of the CCP, and that is to be a regional hegemon and to end the rules-based international order that has existed since World War II. And so we can make up a decision – you know, make our own decisions about is that where we want to go and eliminate self-determination. And so – but clearly, Xi is watching this and is taking lessons away.

Dr. Jones: So one of the – one of the comments you talked about earlier was operating inside of the bubble, including in the Indo-Pacific. One of the issues that the types of emerging technologies that Force Design 2030 highlights is the – is the use of UAVs, including ones with longer range; intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance capabilities; electronic warfare; lethal strike. There have been some that have argued that Marine Corps purchases of UAVs has been relatively small, at least compared to the Army or the Air Force. So where do you see that evolving? How do you integrate UAVs into the Marine Corps?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Well, we're going to – as you know, we're going to – we're going to have three MQ-9 squadrons. We've got one fully up and running now doing missions all the time. I think – and we are very aggressively pursuing not just UAVs, but all things UAV – unmanned, right? Surface, sub.

Dr. Jones: Underwater, yeah.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Because, again, we – to be that fleet Marine force in support of a numbered fleet and the joint force, we have to be able to sense and make sense in all domains, to include sub. So we're pursuing avenues on all of that.

And you know, it's advancing so quickly, right? You have to be – you have to be careful of, like, programs of record, right, because by the time you get one inked there is a new technology. So we need to stay nimble and agile so that we can maximize the technology and keep up with it. But at the end of the day, the UAVs are definitely – we're looking at everything from using them for resupply to making them fires platforms, so we're aggressively pursuing.

And the other piece – particularly like with the MQ-9s because it's here now – it's not necessarily about the UAV; it's what we're hanging on it, right, to go out and sense and help us establish –

Dr. Jones: And strike if you need to.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Absolutely. You betcha.

Dr. Jones: One of the areas you talked about earlier was – or you alluded to was the Chinese activity in the Spratlys. And that's kind of an interesting case because for Fiery Cross Reef and any of the islands that the Chinese operated

in, they didn't – they didn't use PLA Navy ships; they essentially used dredgers. The idea was these were – certainly, these were going to be – these were atolls or reefs that were going to be turned into islands that were going to help local fishermen.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Right. (Laughs.)

Dr. Jones: So when you look at the satellite imagery over the course of the shift from atolls to what are now military bases, you see a rough approximation to what the Russians did in Crimea, which is essentially annex or create territory through irregular or gray-zone means. Force Design talks a little bit about that as well, but part of the question here is, how are you thinking about operating in the gray zone, particularly with adversaries and the Chinese doing a lot of it in the region?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Well, OK. So really, really good point. Gray-zone activities, this – I mean, what Putin did in Ukraine – Donbas, with an illegal annexation of Crimea in '14 – was basically boil the frog, right? We just got snap exercises, right? (Snaps fingers.) They would show up, and we just got so used to it we no longer paid attention.

I would say the important thing with gray-zone activity if you have to be there, right? In order to counter malign activity/coercive behavior, you have to be there – again, to the point of standing forces. So you know, the Spratlys, the Fiery – you know, clearly militarized. Clearly, the CCP lied to the entire globe, just like they did to the Brits about, you know, Hong Kong. So we've – but I think the key to the gray-zone activities, and in particular I think one of the major components of gray-zone activity with the CCP is their maritime – the maritime militia, right, their coast guard, which now is allowed to – you know, based on Chinese law is allowed to take lethal action, right?

Dr. Jones: Right.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: So, again, I think for the – for our allies and partners, we need to be there to help deter that coercive behavior.

Dr. Jones: We'll come back to some of those in a moment, but I want to –

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Well, and sir, and you know, so you got to capture them doing it and then you need to be ahead of them on the information-warfare piece and get the stuff out there to expose it, right?

Dr. Jones: Well, that's part of it, is identifying and then responding.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Right. Exactly.

Dr. Jones: Because part of the Chinese mode of operations is a heavy information operation – what they call the three warfares approach. So there’s a heavy information operations component to that.

I did want to read – we’ve got some audience questions. So I’m going to intersperse some of the audience questions in with this. Let me go to Peter Ong, who’s got a question on large amphibs. So he says, the U.S. Navy wants to do away with large amphibs, such as the LPDs, small boats, such as the Mark IV patrol boat, and patrol coastals. How would these retirements effect Marine Corps littoral and amphibious warfare? And can the Marines convince the U.S. Navy to field both large ships and small boats in the future.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Well, OK, good question, and thanks. And I don’t – and I don’t – I don’t think the Navy intends to get rid of big deck amphibs. They’re just – there have been a lot of external pressures – I think you and I talked about this earlier – that are bearing on the United States Navy. And, you know, the Marine Corps is in the Department of the Navy. I mean, there’s a lot of external factors bearing down right now that are – that have caused the dip in readiness. We’ve overused assets, right? We ride these things hard and put them away wet. We did that over the 20 years in Afghanistan and Iraq with airplanes, and then we were all befuddled when airplanes weren’t ready. Well, you know, there’s decision and consequence. You make decisions or have utilized deferred maintenance, blah, blah blah. (Audio break.)

Dr. Jones: (In progress following audio break) – I’ll ask you – these are Mallory’s words: How are the Marine Corps’ digital interoperability efforts for its platforms going to plug into the naval fleet and the Pentagon’s JADC2 efforts? So it might be helpful to explain what JADC2 is a little bit, and then answer the question.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Yeah. So Joint All-Domain Command and Control is exactly what it says. It’s within the joint force, everything plugs and plays and talks, right? Which historically we’ve not –

Dr. Jones: In theory, anyway.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: In theory. But I – so I will tell you, as a someone coming into this endeavor skeptical, one of the very first things I went to was Project Convergence ’21 with Army. I was blown away. I mean, we’re – and I got to be careful about classification, right? Because this stuff – this whole topic hops over very quick because, as you know, the Navy is pursuing Project Overmatch.

Dr. Jones: And we have had Real Admiral Small here as part of this.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Right. But I will tell you, from firsthand experience, this is not PowerPoint. It’s not fairy dust. It really happened, where a host targets, and we launched

Navy strike missiles and hit a maritime target, all within the joint construct. And a lot of the – like, our G/ATOR, our Ground/Air Task-Oriented Radar, is doing some simply wonderful things. It's exceeding expectations.

So right now the joint – there's a lot of joint focus on this, right? And I am seeing very positive output. And we are going to participate in Project Overmatch. And we're already involved in Project Convergence '22, where we're going to take this to the next step. Project Convergence '22 is going to open the aperture a little bit. We're going to try to bring in Five Eyes, just to give you an idea of where this is going. So to answer Mallory's question, I think we're looking good.

Dr. Jones: One question that comes out of it, it's –

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Just can't do it fast enough, right?

Dr. Jones: Right. Never fast enough. One challenge that this raises is in the European theater. You've got a range – I mean, you already have a construct there. You've got NATO. You've got Link 16. You've got an ability to communicate. Plus you have deployments like Afghanistan and Iraq, but particularly Afghanistan was an ISAF mission. And I mean, having had to deal with some of the joint operations and the joint intel there amount allies and partners, you figured it out as you went along. The Indo-Pacific is a very different area. So how do you – as you've conducted war games or exercises with allies and partners, how are you finding it is challenges in communicating quickly off of your platforms with allies and partners? Whether it's Australians, or Japanese, or South Koreans, or whomever?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Yeah. Well, you know, fortunately we have some Five Eye partners in the Indo-Pacific. But I would say it's – that's going to be one of the areas that we're going to be challenged most. Because, you know, I did two years in NATO as a one-star. We don't do super well in NATO. We struggled in Afghanistan, right? I mean, when I was the J-3 for U.S. Forces Afghanistan, I had, like, five different – you know, CENTRIXS and, you know, within NATO you have Mission Secret, you have – I mean, it's a – it's a mess, right?

So we're starting off without that construct in Indo-Pacific. So it's going to be a challenge, without question. And right now, I would say we've got the order of priority right. We're focusing on joint. Let's get the joint piece as solid and as redundant and resilient as it possibly can be. And then we'll – then we'll begin incorporating allies and partners based on how much access they're giving us.

Dr. Jones: Yeah. Because part of this, I think, is if you look at most of the – at the war games, some of the scenarios, the challenge is as you move outside of the

Five Eyes community, then you're dealing with Japanese, or Koreans, or the Philippines. And that makes it a little more challenging.

Lt. Gen. Hechl: You betcha. I read an article not long ago about – I didn't know this – there was apparently an effort for it to become Six Eyes. The Japanese were talking about that. Did you see that?

Dr. Jones: Yeah.

Lt. Gen. Hechl: They're bringing it up again now, apparently. So we'll see.

Dr. Jones: Yeah. (Laughs.) I think there are going to be a lot of – I think there has to be consensus among the Five Eyes for that.

Lt. Gen. Hechl: It does.

Dr. Jones: One issue – this is another question from Curtis Anderson, retired Navy.

Navy Seabees have had significant roles with the Marines for 80 years. What does the future look like?

Lt. Gen. Hechl: Yeah. Well, I hope as good as the past. You know, all my – all my time growing up, every time you went off the boat – you know, I was a 46 guy. If I flew ashore for any period of time to take care of Marines, I always wanted to be near the Seabees, right? Because I would live like a – you know, I'm not a savage, right? I'm a pilot. So I always stationed myself near the Seabees, right?

So I think Seabees going forward, that's not going to change. And, you know, the Naval Expeditionary Combat Command, the NECC, out in Indo-Pacific, working with those when I was a MEF commander, that hasn't changed. I think that linkage is just like, you know, a corpsman in an infantry battalion. I think that's going to be good.

Dr. Jones: Good.

Lt. Gen. Hechl: Exercises will bear that out. We will certainly employ Seabees as we do that.

Dr. Jones: OK. Another question; this does go back to the Force 2030 discussion, Major General Matt Caulfield, retired Marine. Putting the substance of Force 2030 aside for a moment, did headquarters take advance actions to ensure its constituency, made up of active duty, retired, congressional, media and others, were on board or at least aware of Force 2030?

Lt. Gen. Hechl: No. And again, I'll come back. I think – so some of this is COVID-related. I think the – as you know, the Marine Corps is very active. We have multiple

organizations that – I mean, my goodness, I just went to dinner at the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation, where we met with industry and retired, active duty, across the board, of all ranks, flavors, and even joint.

So I think that contributed a little bit. I don't think – and again, putting it back on me – that we did a good job communicating. We're fixing that very quickly. So hopefully that will get better.

Dr. Jones: OK. I want to go to modernization briefly. There are a couple of questions. And then we'll see if we have any additional questions from the audience.

One of the assumptions for force development was that Congress and the department would allow the money the Marine Corps saved from divesting tanks and personnel, for instance, to go to modernization. So has this proven to be an accurate assumption? And how are you doing it?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Absolutely, guys. Absolutely, guys. As you know, we're stepping off on POM-24. And from my level, we're already – I will be releasing some guidance about POM-25 coming out here soon, going forward. And we just did a bunch of budget reviews. I'm not the budget guy. That's Lieutenant General Mahoney. But we are – we clearly have modernized. The money – and I believe Congress and the Department of Defense held true to their word. We never – you know, money wasn't swept away and given to anybody else or, you know, given to the Boy Scouts. We've got our money, and we're making appropriate investments.

Dr. Jones: What are the focus areas you're making investments in, then?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Well, you know, we use – there's a lot of – there's a couple of levers a commandant can pull on to generate resources, right. At the end of the day, manpower ended up being the one. And I'll just point out, for a data point, on September 30th, 2001, 19 days after 9/11, the United States Marine Corps was under 173,000. We were 172,934. We grew to over 202 (thousand) during our sustained operations ashore over the course of two decades, acknowledged by the commandant's predecessor, by General Neller, and even before him, that we had gotten – that it was unsustainable and that we had a Marine Corps that was not organized, trained, equipped, or postured for the pacing threat.

So the focus areas have been on – so we have use of manpower, rightfully so. We're probably going to – right now we don't know the end state. Remember, 2030 is a waypoint. It's not a destination. But we're looking at probably around 175-ish (thousand). We'll see. But the only lever the commandant had, in the course of his, you know, move to – within our top line; not asked for additional resources – was manpower; and again, rightfully so, based on how much we had grown.

So we used that. And our number one priority was – initially was – right now for this budget is NMESIS, right, the Navy-Marine Corps Expeditionary Strike Interdiction System. And then it goes down from there; organic lift; LAW, which is not ours, but KC-130s, right. We're going to have a fourth active-duty VMGR, which has never been acknowledged in some of these – in some of the criticisms that have been coming down. And right now the plan – again, could change – is five VMUs, based on where we're going.

So you can see how we used money for one thing and then applied it to another. And that's exactly what's happened.

Dr. Jones: One issue, just to step back as part of Force Design, is – I mean, there have been some that have wondered whether Force Design represents a loss of combined-arms capacity. So what does combined arms look like in the 21st century? And has the character of combined arms changed?

Lt. Gen Heckl: Probably one of the biggest things. So, you know, Liddell Hart said that, you know, the only thing harder than getting a new idea into a military mind is getting an old one out, and a predecessor – a mentor of mine – a guy named Lieutenant General Mike Howe, who had a big influence on me as young field grade, said, it's just old think, Hazel, it's old think. And in this case, combined arms is much more than towed cannon artillery, tanks, and aviation.

I will tell you it starts in the information environment, which is often where we don't do so well, and then cyber, space. I always liked the thing – like, as a MEF commander, people would be, like, well, we're going to be this number of days left of bang. Stop saying bang. What is that? Again, old think. Well, it's Marines. It's when I shoot stuff and kill things.

No. Information environment, cyberspace. Bang is happening now. So that is illustrative of your comment of how dramatically it has changed. Combined arms – and now with – again, one of the primary drivers of Force Design was the proliferation of long-range precision weapons that can hold us at arm's length.

Dr. Jones: Which we are seeing right now with the Ukrainian fight.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Right now. Right now. That we saw in the attack in Saudi Arabia on the oil, that we see – that we saw in Armenian – the Azerbaijan conflict, case and case and case, right. The Houthis do it now. So, absolutely. The whole concept of combined arms has changed fundamentally.

Dr. Jones: Last question before I wrap it up is General Berger has described Force Design as an iterative process. So this then leads to – you talked a little bit about this, but what does the next year look like and what are your priorities

going to be over the next year as part of this iterative process, to use his words?

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Yeah. So and it is, certainly, iterative and we have – even before I got to the current billet the – based on the analytical rigor that goes into the campaign of learning the commandant made decisions and changed, right. You know, we – the infantry battalion, for instance, from it's – you know, when we started Force Design average infantry battalion was 896. The lowest number we've played with so far has been 735.

We think it's probably going to be in there somewhere. We don't know. That's why the fleet right now, all three MEFs are involved in infantry battalion experimentation, right – IBX. Each one has a dedicated battalion – it started when I was at I MEF – that is focusing on a specific aspect of Force Design, and then that's coming – being fed back from the fleets into headquarters of the Marine Corps to make the appropriate iterative adjustments.

So what I would tell you, sir, is that the next year we got a lot of experimentation going on, a lot, on both coasts, the MEF – you know, Major General Frank Donovan with the recon/counter recon, his background. And by the way, some of the things that we've already – that are going to be fielded, that we have fielded with forces on, are already in demand by combatant commanders, right, II MEF, and we stood up Task Force 612, right. We have G/ATOR radar. We're doing things right now in conjunction with what's happening in Ukraine.

So all that stuff, sir, all of it, like, and how the 2nd Marine aircraft wing in conjunction with operations in Norway and Cold Response, all that's being fed back into the Force Design gonculator, if you will, as we iterate on this thing and make changes over the course of next year.

But I would say priority number one is going to be experimentation and getting those lessons and feedback from the fleet back into the process.

Dr. Jones: Well, we are at time, General Heckl. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk through a range of questions, to field questions, the – some of the frank questions we're hearing from retired Marines and others. On behalf of USNI and HII, I really want to thank you for coming to the Center for Strategic International Studies. Thanks for the great work that you and your team do in the Marine Corps, in general, and have a wonderful day.

Lt. Gen. Heckl: Sir, thank you. I look forward to coming back. Thank you, sir.

Dr. Jones: Great. Thank you.