Moderator: Jennifer Griffin, Fox News

Moderator: Thank you for that kind introduction. I want to welcome everyone for joining us today for Training and Equipping the Joint Force to Execute the National Defense Strategy. I’ve often said this should really be subtitled, How to Shift From Fighting Terrorism in the Middle East to Great Power Competition -- China and Russia. It’s something we’ve been talking about for years, and yet the Middle East still keeps taking up so much of our time and effort.

Before we start, I do want to introduce our panel a little further. We have I believe 16 stars of the 20 stars who are at the conference today.

General David Goldfein, his call sign is Fingers. He was shot down over Serbia in his F-16. Has flown 4200 hours for the Air Force including in the F-117, which you will see there’s an old prototype that is going to now have a home here at the Reagan Library. It’s the first stealth fighter jet of its kind.

General David Berger, 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps. A graduate of Tulane University and a proud graduate of Fallujah and Afghanistan.

General James McConville, the first aviator Chief in the Army’s history. His Apache saved the life of General Mark Milley, the current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in a very vicious firefight in Iraq. And he grew up in Quincy, Mass, just one block away from the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Joe Dunford.

And then we have Admiral Michael Gilday who is Chief of Naval Operations. He grew up in Lowell, Mass. Massachusetts seems to be well represented on the Joint Chiefs these days. He’s a proud graduate of the Naval Academy.

I’m told we’re not going to talk about the Army/Navy Game. [Laughter].
I asked their staffs for some fun facts about the Chiefs. I was told that General Goldfein, you were on the six-year plan at the Air Force Academy -- [Laughter] -- and you left to become a roady for Harry Chapin. But when you realized that wouldn’t pay the bills you went back to the Air Force and we’re glad you did.

General Berger’s staff shared with me a nice anecdote about your first day showing up in front of your platoon sergeant after basic school. You stepped off of a step and you fell flat on your back, turning turtle in front of your platoon sergeant, making quite the first impression at that first unit. You’ve come a long way. We’re glad you’re here. We’re glad you didn’t fall on your face. [Laughter].

General McConville, you grew up playing soldiers, I’m told, with General Dunford, a proud Marine, one block away, young Joe Dunford. He tells a different story. He says you were playing Marines, but --

General McConville: We played Army.

Moderator: Admiral Gilday I have just learned is an accomplished Irish dancer. [Laughter].

Admiral Gilday: There’s a longer story to that.

Moderator: Before we get started with the topic of our panel I have to ask you about some braking news in the last two days.

Admiral Gilday, the shooting in Pensacola, Florida. We’re starting to see evidence that this may have been, well, it was a Saudi national aviation student who opened fire. There are some Twitter posts suggesting that he had been radicalized.

How did a sleeper cell manage to make its way onto a U.S. military base? Was this an intelligence failure?

Admiral Gilday: I’d first like to express my condolences to the family and the Navy together grieves for those families and our shipmates who have been so affected.

I haven’t seen that reporting yet. I would tell you that based on the fact that we had an incident the same week in Pearl Harbor at the shipyard and then subsequently 48 hours later in Florida, that we are right now approaching those investigations very, very carefully so that we’re consistent in terms of how we look at both of them so we don’t rule anything in or rule
anything out. So at this point, it is too early, in my opinion. Again, I haven’t seen the breaking news that you’re referring to to draw those types of conclusions.

**Moderator:** General Goldfein, there is more money being allocated in this defense budget to expand the training of foreign nationals at U.S. military bases. What would be the impact on the Air Force if you canceled those programs? There’s going to be a lot of questions about whether this is a good idea, and whether we’re able to screen well enough.

**General Goldfein:** I’d say that the biggest impact will be on our allies and partners and interoperability. Because that’s an asymmetric advantage that we bring as a nation. We have allies and partners and very often our adversaries don’t.

So my biggest concern would be that we would walk away from those key relationships, from folks that we know we need when we go into combat.

**Moderator:** And General McConville, we referenced the shooting in Hawaii. This could have happened on any base. It happened to happen on two Navy bases. But you have talked about your concerns about stress on the force. Is the force fracturing, breaking? Are you in too many countries?

Right now, there are 120,000 troops in 140 countries. They’re coming home, the deployments keep coming. Is the force fracturing?

**General McConville:** No, it’s not. I think our force is very, very strong. I have three children that serve in the force. They’ve all been deployed. Very, very proud. Are they working hard? Absolutely. But I’m very, very proud of the young men and women that are serving. We’ve been in combat for over 18 years and incredible young men and women still continue to raise their right hands and serve, and we should just be very, very proud of them.

**Moderator:** General Berger, this insider threat, it’s not something we’ve seen at a base in the U.S. before, but we have seen it in Afghanistan. Does this make you rethink sending U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia? We’ve been talking about building up troops there, using them for missile defense. Does this cause you to rethink the relationship?
General Berger: Not at all. All of us have forces in other countries and they’re in ours. These are incidents that you have to investigate. We’ll see what was behind it. But reservations sending Marines or service members to other countries or Saudi Arabia, not at all.

Moderator: Okay. Now let’s talk about the topic of our panel.

It’s been two years since the National Defense Strategy was produced. How do you shift from fighting in the Middle East? What do you need to do to win against China and Russia?

General Goldfein, I’ll start with you and then go down the line.

General Goldfein: Let me start out by going back to your opening statement about being shot down. You know, fighter pilots don’t take great pride in intercepting enemy missiles with our aircraft. [Laughter]. So thanks for that.

Moderator: No problem. It’s a friendly panel.

General Goldfein: I think one of the things you’re going to hear from all of us is how seriously we’re taking the National Defense Strategy when it comes to a framework and a guide for how we now build the forces we need to be able to fight and win.

We’ve done a series of war games. Not only Air Force war games, but with our joint teammates, and took a look at the challenges -- China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, violent extremism. They’re laid out in the National Defense Strategy. So for the Air Force, I will just give you, what we found is the force that we require to win is going to require some investment. I could spend a lot of time on each one of these, but to go quick I’ll just say that here are sort of the bins you’re going to see from us.

First of all, we’ve got to invest in connecting the Joint Force. We already fight as a team, but I will tell you that trying to get an F-35 and a Brigade Combat Team and a MAGTF and a Carrier Strike Group to actually share common date, have a common digital architecture, we’re not doing it at the speed that we have to.

So the first thing we have to invest in is connecting that Joint Force so we can fight at the speeds that we know we’ll need in the future.
Second is, in every war game we determine that if you move first in space you’re not guaranteed to win. Winning is not a birthright. But if you move second, you’re very likely to lose. So you’re going to see some significant investment in space dominance and being able to do what the President’s asked us to do.

The third is we fought inside forces, outside forces, and what we found is that we need to build a hybrid force to be able to operate and penetrate inside enemy territory, but also be able to operate on the outside. Precision fires is a big part of that.

The last one we determined is that we can no longer assume that logistics will not be under attack, and we haven’t faced that where we’re fighting our way into an area.

**Moderator:** Meaning a cyber attack.

**General Goldfein:** A cyber attack or if the Atlantic approaches were contested for us moving forces into theater in a European scenario, in a Pacific scenario. So we’ve got to be able to move to win. That’s where you’re going to see us doing major investment.

If there’s time in the panel I will tell you that we’re also making some significant movements in officer and NCO development to make sure that we have the force that we need to fight and win.

**Moderator:** General Berger?

**General Berger:** We are at an inflection point. I don’t know that you can always see that in the moment, but we are. The pace of change and the amount of change means we’re not on a linear path.

If you accept that, then a couple of things, you have choices. You can either make some fundamental decisions the way the Chief of Staff of the Air Force mentioned now, or you can delay. I don’t think we can delay.

If that’s the case, if we’re at an inflection point and we can’t delay, we have to make some fundamental decisions about our force now, then you can either elect to make the changes around the edges, sort of refinements. Our assessment, that’s not
going to cut it. We have to make some transformational changes to your military force.

And if that’s the case, to make a transformation happen, in other words the military you have today is fine for today. It’s not going to be the military we’re going to need seven, eight, nine years from now. Then you need a strategy, you need a plan, and you need a process. I don’t think that’s any different in the military or outside.

Moderator: What does that mean for the Marines? How are you planning to restructure the Marines after fighting for 18 years in the Middle East?

General Berger: We have a strong strategy and that you referred to, the NDS. Secretary Esper’s leading us through an implementation plan. So we have a very strong plan under development.

The last part you referred to, the process. Our Marine Corps is built ideally for another Desert Shield/Desert Storm or counterinsurgency. It is not the force we’re going to need based on the vectors that China and Russia are going to. We need to get rid of, we need to shed weight and become a naval expeditionary force.

So the things that paid off for us in Iraq and Afghanistan and the counterinsurgency mode, we need to take what parts of that apply going forward.

But there’s another set of capabilities and a way, to Dave Goldfein’s point about how we train, how we educate the force. There are some fundamental changes we’ve got to make.

Moderator: General McConville?

General McConville: We talked about the inflection point and what we’ve been doing for the last 18.5 years, and I would suggest this. It’s really not about fighting the last fight better, it’s about winning the next fight.

In order to do that we’re developing new ways of how we’re going to fight. New doctrine. Multi-domain operations. We’re developing new organizations like the Multi-Domain Task Force that will have long-range precision effects that can operate below the level of armed conflict and above the level of armed conflict.
We’re developing new training centers because we’re going to have to fight in cyber. So back in the ’80s we developed our Combat Training Centers where we actually fought in the dirt. Now we’ve got to be able to fight in cyber and be able to train our forces to do that.

We’ve got six modernization priorities starting with long-range precision fires. We didn’t use long-range precision fires to the degree that we’re going to need in the future.

We’re developing the Next General Combat Vehicle that’s going to be manned and unmanned.

We’re developing two aircraft, the Future Attack Reconnaissance Aircraft, a future Long-Range Assault Aircraft.

We’re working, as General Goldfein said, with a joint C2 capability. Data becomes very, very important.

Air and missile defense, we’re going to Directed Energy. We’re concerned about the proliferation and swarming of unmanned aerial systems.

At the end of the day, our Soldiers are the centerpiece to everything we’re doing, so we’re giving them the lethality that they need. And we’re putting in place a 21st century Talent Management System that’s going to allow us to compete for talent and make sure we have the right people in the right job at the right time.

**Moderator:** Admiral Gilday?

**Admiral Gilday:** Thanks. Batting cleanup, I would say that the key message is that the time we are in right now is really transformational for all of us, and for the Joint Force in particular. So in terms of the Navy, the force that we have today, 70 percent of that force we’ll have in 2030. If we want to get after this problem quickly in a way that leverages the Joint Force from the seabed to space, across all domains simultaneously, not only in day-to-day operations but also across the spectrum in a conflict, our biggest challenge is speed. It’s speed in closing near-term capability gaps that we have now, leveraging industry in order to do that including some dual-use technologies.
In a longer term, I think that we look at bigger programs that allow us to come together and design a different force of the future.

Separately I think all of us are paying a considerable amount of attention to people. At the end of the day the real asymmetric advantage that we think that we have over peer competitors is our force, our people. So everything from personnel programs, to how we promote them, to how we train them in the 21st century, education and training system, live virtual construct and those types of things remain absolutely central to the way we think and the way that we’re making our investments.

Moderator: But all of the services are still, you talk about people, you talk about future capabilities. But you all are still having mechanical problems with old platforms. So Admiral Gilday, you have the aircraft carrier, the Truman. It was delayed going to the Middle East because of mechanical issues.

To what degree do those aircraft carriers and why is it so hard to keep them operational? Are we going to move to a situation beyond aircraft carriers? You’ve talked about how China now has missiles that can threaten those carriers. What comes next? And how much do these old platforms and the problems that you’re having with them delay you in the current fight?

Admiral Gilday: I have to deal with the reality we have, and that is, as I mentioned a moment ago, 70 percent of the force that we have now we’re going to have in 10 years.

So one of the things I’m focused on, really focused on in the near to mid term is how do I develop processes to better sustain and maintain that force so that I can in time of conflict generate that force quickly in a predictable, reliable kind of way?

As an example right now, my biggest challenge is getting ships out of shipyards. We’re hitting about maybe a 40 percent success rate. We have delays 60 percent of the time. That’s not sustainable in terms of how we spend our money, in terms of how we generate the force.

Truman’s a 30-year-old aircraft carriers. We’re going to get 50 years out of that carrier. So we have a responsibility not to just, in the Pentagon we tend to look ten years down the road, but we have a responsibility and the nation expects that we should be able to field the force that fights tonight.
So to your point, we have a focus right now on understanding what our process problems are so that we can maintain and sustain the force that we have today in a better way.

And not to steal too much of your time, but if I just could add that training, that exercises and experimentation play a key role here in terms of looking at alternative concepts and how you get more out of the force you have today, how you use it and how you experiment again with the stuff that industry’s bringing on-line.

**Moderator:** You had two very serious ship crashes in the last two years. Are you training differently in the wake of the USS McCain?

**Admiral Gilday:** We absolutely are. In terms of standards we are. But a lot of that is, some of it’s standards, some of it is relying on better training methods -- think live, virtual -- in order to place our people in more realistic scenarios when they’re not at sea so that glide slope going back out and becoming operational is much easier.

Then I think keeping ourselves, holding ourselves accountable in terms of our professional standards has been a key piece of it.

**Moderator:** General Goldfein, there have been two serious T-38 training crashes of late. A series of problems with the T-38. Is there a problem with that platform? Or is it the training of your pilots? Are they not getting enough training? Why are we seeing so many crashes?

I was out at Ellsworth Air Force Base two years ago and half of the B-1 bombers couldn’t fly. The pilots were saying they were getting half the number of training hours that they used to. What’s happening with these aircraft?

**General Goldfein:** On the T-38, I would just tell you it’s actually had, tragic accidents, we’ve lost pilots very recently. But if you take a look at in total, the T-38’s actually been a pretty safe airplane. I’ve got about 1500 hours flying it as an instructor pilot and it’s done great. I’m excited that we’ve got a T-7 now that’s going to come in to replace that.

The challenge we have with an aging weapon system and keeping it in the air, we have incredible civilian magicians I call them in our depots that keep these airplanes airborne.
But you asked about the age of the ships and the age of the aircraft. I will tell you, if you were to as me what does the future Air Force look like in 2030? Is it old or new? Manned or unmanned? Penetrating or standoff? Conventional or unconventional? Attributable? I want them to know it’s me. Unattributable? I want them to guess. The answer actually is all of the above.

So if you’re going to have a force that looks like that in the future, then the fundamental question that we’re asking is how do you connect it in ways that it can be used to be able to fight a new kind of warfare? Multi-Domain Operations that General McConville referred to.

To me, I actually don’t know sitting here what’s going to go in the bay of an 80-year-old B-52 or a two-year-old X-37 or a, you name it weapon system. Or more importantly, what goes into the tube of a long-range precision Army fires or an F-35B or an Aegis cruiser.

Here's what I do know. We’ve got to connect them. We’ve got to connect them so we can share data. We’ve got to connect them so that all the sensors can be fused. And we’ve got to build artificial intelligence at the tactical edge. And if we can do that, then old and new is not going to be as big an issue.

**Moderator:** General McConville, you’ve said that General Milley when he was Army Chief was the readiness Chief. You’re the people’s Chief. How do you recruit for the Army with unemployment so low? What are you doing about that?

**General McConville:** What we’re finding with the young men and women today is what’s motivating them to serve is they want purpose. They want to be part of something bigger than themselves. They want to belong to a team, and quite frankly as we see the polls, we’re the most respected team in the country right now and they want to belong.

The other thing is their parents want a pathway to success. Kids that are hard-working kids can come in the military and get a great education and get ahead. And we are competing for their talent. We need to do a better job of showing them what the military’s all about.

Many of our officers have children that serve because they are familiar with the military, but we don’t want it to be a family
business. Seventy-nine percent of the young recruits that come in the Army had a family member that served so they’re exposed. But we want to give everyone an opportunity to be successful.

A great example of that is a lieutenant who just came in the Army, Marshall Plumlee. Marshall was an All-American basketball player at Duke and he played professional basketball and precisely for those reasons, because he wanted to be part of something bigger than himself, he joined the Army. He just went through Ranger School. If you see the picture, he’s seven feet tall, and I’m not telling our adversaries that our Soldiers are ten feet tall, but they’re pretty damn close when you see Marshall. [Laughter].

**Moderator:** General Berger, General McConville, are you telling your new recruits not to use Huawei products, Chinese technology? TikTok, the Chinese social media app. Because you are concerned that China is stealing data or taking their data and it could be used against the military in the future. What are you telling those young people?

**General Berger:** Before Boot Camp, get ready for Boot Camp. [Laughter]. I’m not making light of it.

I think they actually have a probably clearer view than most people give them credit for. That said, as was mentioned this morning, I think I’d give us a C- or a D in educating the force on the threat of technology. They view it as two piece of gear. I don’t see what the big deal is. That’s not their fault, that’s on us.

Once they begin to understand the risks, what the impact to them is tactically, in other words in what they’re doing in their job, then it becomes clear. But I don’t blame them for that. This is training and education we have to do.

**Moderator:** There’s perhaps no greater national security mission than to protect next year’s elections. The Air Force just set up a Cyber National Mission Force. How do each of you plan to protect the U.S. elections from disinformation operations that have already begun? And are you already engaging Russia ahead of this election?

General Goldfein, I’ll start with you.

**General Goldfein:** First, I’ll tell you that we’ll all be in support of General Nakasone because that’s the mission that he
has, so we’ll all contribute. We all contribute Cyber Mission Teams to his force.

And one of the things that we’ve done in the Air Force is we’ve been looking at this business of information warfare, the non-kinetic side of our business. From competition to open conflict. We were organized in stovepipes where we had cyber, ISR -- intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, electronic warfare, and information operations. We were doing all of those in siloes.

We recently stood up a single numbered Air Force dedicated to information warfare. Put one of the smartest cyber operators in charge, Lieutenant General Tim Haugh, who came out of CYBERCOM, and we reorganized our Air Staff to align cyber operations and ISR or intelligence to actually marry up with the Navy because our A-2-6 and the Navy’s N-2-6, we are operating together every day in the global commons.

So we’re looking at the business of information warfare as one of the key pillars of how we fight going forward.

**General Berger:** I’d just add to General Nakasone, who’s in here, this partnership didn’t exist probably six, seven, eight years ago, but between General O’Shaughnessy at NORTHCOM and General Nakasone, we support them. In other words, the Joint Chiefs’ job is to support the two of them, beginning not just at the elections in the fall but actually in the conventions that precede them.

So we provide support to both physical security and through the electronic magnetic spectrum, the cyber security. But we’re supporting General Nakasone and General O’Shaughnessy, beginning all the way back in the Democratic and National Conventions, and Republican before then.

**Moderator:** Are you already seeing signs that Russia is probing and attempting to interfere?

**General Berger:** If there were, I’m not aware of them. And if there were, even if we were aware of them it probably wouldn’t be something we’d be talking about.

**General McConville:** I’d just like to touch on the point that General Goldfein said. We’re all recognizing the confluence, information operations and cyber and electronic warfare. But the thing I like to talk about is we are competing hard for
young men and women that are coming out of schools, you may know one, that decided to join the Army. And what we offer them is not the money that industry can, but we offer them the opportunity to do things that no one else can do legally in another organization. [Laughter].

So if you want to serve in cyber and you want to be part of something bigger than yourself and you really want to make a difference and you want to do something that no one else can do, come join one of the services here and you can work for Paul Nakasone and do some great things.

**General Goldfein:** We’re opening a uniform change in the Air Force. I’m bringing on hoodies. [Laughter].

**Moderator:** Admiral Gilday, what is the U.S. Navy doing to protect our elections?

**Admiral Gilday:** Of course we’re supporting General Nakasone with the cyber forces that we have.

If I could just make a comment about mindset and I think the nefarious activities of the Russians in particular, we tend not to think of that as part of traditional warfare, but it really is. We tend to think about troops crossing the line of departure, or the first kinetic shots fired. Those shots are already flying. We are already in conflict; however, you want to characterize that, with the Russians and others.

The way that we look at that competition and that conflict with those peer competitors is critically important. The mindset thing, it’s changing. It’s changing the way we think about the threat, but it’s also changing the sense of urgency that we all have in getting after capability gaps we know that we need to close.

**Moderator:** I’m just wondering if there are any things that we are not doing in cyber? And is it time to start thinking about international treaties to deal with cyber as we did during the Cold War with the nuclear threat? Why is that not happening right now, Admiral Gilday?

**Admiral Gilday:** We do have international norms in the maritime, to draw a parallel. We don’t have those in cyber. It makes it very difficult to enforce standards that don’t exist, right? And to therefore hold nations accountable for nefarious behavior. It is a challenge. I don’t have the answer for you.
I think those types of agreements take time. Unfortunately, sometimes they follow a catastrophic event. However, I think over time that is a possibility.

**Moderator:** But General Goldfein, are we pursuing those treaties? Or have we not even begun to attempt those international treaties? You just hosted a number of Air Defense Chiefs at the Cyber National Mission Center.

**General Goldfein:** Sometimes you’ve got to step back and remember that we’ve been fighting on land for hundreds of years. At sea the same way. Air power, about 100 years. This domain is less than a decade old in terms of conflict.

So I’m looking at General Nakasone here, so I’m going to watch your body language, Paul, and see if I start seeing you nodding. But I think one of the things that I think we’ve really got to get General Nakasone is increased decision authority. There’s been a lot of discussion about how do you operate at the speed of relevance if decisions are held to a very high level? Again, it’s a rather immature domain for a conflict, and we’re still working our way through that. And I will tell you, that now as we look at bringing on a Space Force there’s a lot of parallels too. We took a look at fighting in space and the decision authorities required, that’s one area that I think we’ve really got to work on for General Nakasone.

**General Berger:** Just one follow-up. I think the progression he’s talking about, in other words the initial, ten years ago it’s not our problem, to it is a problem, to it’s your problem but not mine. I won’t speak for General Nakasone, but we talk with our counterparts. We know it’s a collective issue.

The documents are one thing, the agreements are one thing, but clearly there’s a lot of discussion happening right now that didn’t happen five, six, seven years ago. That’s very healthy. Internationally, in other words.

**Moderator:** One thing I’ve noticed in the last eight years or so here at the Reagan National Defense Forum is that we used to talk about or hear a lot of talk about near peer competition. Now the language has shifted to peer competition. What capabilities have China and Russia developed in this last decade that have you concerned? I’ll just go down the line.
General Goldfein: I’ll just start off and tell you in space we’re watching that very closely.

Moderator: What specifically?

General Goldfein: Not only increased space awareness, what they have going on, but also capabilities that they are fielding that are potentially threatening.

Moderator: Which? China or Russia?

General Goldfein: China and Russia. China more so than Russia. China has the economic base to be able to get in that in a larger way than we’re seeing in Russia.

So we are in the process of going through really three simultaneous lines of effort. First of all, we’ve got to defend what we have because we’re going to be relying on it for a long time. It’s rather exquisite. We all rely on it. We rely on it for GPS. We rely on it for communications. We rely on it for a lot. So we’ve got to protect what we have.

At the same time, we have to transition into defendable architecture that we can defend. But you know what? It’s not good enough to just take punches in the ring. At some point you’ve got to be able to punch back. The adversary, if you want to deter, they have to know you can punch back. Because I’ve not seen a single scenario play out where if a war starts or extends into space, I haven’t seen a winner come out of that. Everybody loses.

So we’ve got to be able to deter, which means we have to field capability.

The third thing we’ve got to do is to transition our force into a warfighting force. That’s not something that we’ve been focused on in a domain that’s been rather benign.

So I think the President’s exactly right on this one. We have to move forward on a Space Force, and we’re going to do so.

Moderator: General Berger, what capability in China and Russia have you seen develop that threatens your Marines?

General Berger: The biggest change in China, and it reflects their publicly stated strategies. They have pivoted to the sea. Their Belt and Road Initiative and the reasons behind it have
launched them on a growth of their naval and now marine forces in a pretty rapid manner.

So for us, that means they’re not just a homeland defense force anymore, close into the shoreline. They are clearly stretching out. When you build along a Nine-Dash Line features in the ocean and basically try to extend your fence line out into the commons, that should tell you something.

So for us, that means the competition day to day is in the cyber domain, and in space. It’s also physical. It’s where they want to stretch their military forces out into what was common areas, and we want free and open. The distance between is close.

**General McConville:** I just want to set the stage with great power competition does not necessarily mean great power conflict, but it could if we don’t have a strong military.

So when I look at the Russians, they’re an existential threat because of their nuclear weapons. They have a vast capability there, so that concerns me greatly. And when I look at the Chinese, historically their economy’s developing, but they’re really starting to develop their military with long-range missiles and really create an Anti-Access Area Denial capability in their region. And they’re also spreading out to the rest of the world.

So those are my concerns.

**Moderator:** Admiral Gilday?

**Admiral Gilday:** If we go back to the first Gulf War, that’s where the Chinese really began to take a deep look at the way we were manned, trained, equipped, the way we operated and fought and they purposefully designed the Chinese military to go head-to-head against us across all those areas.

In the maritime, they put significant emphasis on missile technology. The ranges of their missiles continue to grow as well as the signature of those missiles continues to reduce which makes them difficult to see. Hypersonics are of course in play or will be in play as well. Along with increasingly high numbers of ships. So they’re on a very steep trajectory in terms of capabilities and numbers.

**Moderator:** Part of the National Defense Strategy is discussion of allies and how to build alliances. I’d like to ask each of
you your personal opinion. What would be the effect on your force, on the U.S. military, if the U.S. pulled out of NATO?

Admiral Gilday?

**Admiral Gilday:** I think it would be significant. I think our role as Chiefs and all of our commanders out there spend an enormous amount of time working with our allies and partners so that we can have that, we can have a great relationship with them in good times and in bad. No matter what the political atmosphere or environment might be, we consider ourselves to be a shock absorber, if you will and kind of a steady hand.

**Moderator:** Could you fight without NATO? Without being a member of NATO, General McConville?

**General McConville:** I was just in Europe and we had a Chief of Staff of the Armies Conference. I met with 34 of the Chiefs in Europe. They are committed partners. I think we are stronger together and stronger united. I think we need to work hard to keep those relationships.

**Moderator:** What would happen to you and your force if the U.S. pulled out of NATO, General Berger?

**General Berger:** NATO is more, like all of us know, it’s more than just a collection of nations. They look to the U.S. for leadership. And we have provided that.

In other words, one country pulling out of any organization probably has a certain impact. The U.S. pulling out of NATO, way outside. They look to us, lean on us for leadership. A world without us in NATO would look significantly different.

**General Goldfein:** I align with all these comments. I’ll just tell you as another part of this, building partner capacity is a two-way street. And we should always remember that we need to approach alliances and partnerships with the appropriate level of humility. We do bring the most, but we have a lot to learn from our allies and partners. Our way of warfare is to fight forward. They have the best understanding of the cultural, political, economic environment that we’re deploying into.

So I think one of the greatest losses we would have is the loss of that understanding and that interoperability. And I think if we approach building partner capacity as a two-way street then we’re going to optimize our forces.
Moderator: I want to end our discussion on a moral question for each of you. There’s increasing evidence that China has interned one million Uyghurs. Muslims, in internment camps, reeducation camps in the west of China. This is not 1939. You have satellite imagery and intelligence that you know this is happening. You can’t say you didn’t know.

What should the U.S. do? Is the country’s National Security Strategy still concerned with human rights?

General Goldfein: I’ll tell you honestly, I’m not going into a policy aspect of it, but let me just tell you that as military leaders, we go to war with our values. It’s what separates us from others.

I’ll just tell you one story that I’ll never forget. We were at Bagram Air Base, we had a mass casualty event. I happened to be there as the CFAC and folks were lined up to give blood. And every operating room was double stuffed, so head-to-head, two patients, two OR teams working feverishly to save these folks that were injured and it was pretty horrendous.

So I’m walking through sort of the ORs and talking to the folks there. In one of the rooms was the shooter and the victim. Head to head. And people lined up to give blood for both of them. And one would ask, why would we do that? Why would we invest that kind of passion in our enemy? It’s because that’s who we are. That separates us.

Moderator: General Berger?

General Berger: I would agree. The policy decisions, we provide advice, of course, but they’re not made by us. But we believe ourselves, and just as Finger said, internationally people see that values matter to us and it makes a huge difference. In other words, it’s not just how we view ourselves. In a partnership and alliance construct which is so valuable, they look to us and they sense values matter to us, and they do.

Moderator: General McConville, what should the U.S. do about these reports of internment camps of a million Muslims in China?

General McConville: I think I have to agree with my counterparts here. That’s a political action, but as far as a force, we’re a force that does the right thing the right way.
I’ve been to the Indo Pacific, and I’ve met also all the Chiefs of Staffs who are competing right now, China’s competing for their influence. They respect our values and they trust our values, and that’s the type of force we need to be.

**Moderator:** Admiral Gilday?

**Admiral Gilday:** In terms of the policy question, I stand with my counterparts. I would say there are examples of what the Joint Force does across the spectrum that are pretty amazing. We just sent a hospital ship down to South America for about five months. While the Russians were sending back-fire bombers to Venezuela and the Chinese were providing military aid to Venezuela, we sent a hospital ship that treated 70,000 patients, many of them Venezuelan refugees, and performed over 1200 surgeries. That’s a life-long promotion of American values and who we are as a country to an area of the world that doesn’t always get a lot of help.

There are things that the Joint Force does across Africa and Afghanistan and Iraq and Syria to show, as General McConville said, that we’re the good guys. That we are a force for good. We can be a force that can be reckoned with as well. One would hope that over time as we do those deeds of good work that that helps with respect to allies and partners and keeping people with us, together for the right reasons.

**Moderator:** General Goldfein, I’m going to give you the last word because we’re running out of time, but I have a question.

What is the difference in the threat from Russia versus China from your point of view as we look forward with the National Defense Strategy?

**General Goldfein:** I think one is we categorize it as Russia is a rather dangerous threat right now because it’s an economy in decline and the demographics of Russia are pretty challenging I think for the President. And we’ve seen his actions when he finds himself in that situation.

China is the pacing threat. China’s got the economy.

I just came here to this conference from Hawaii where I was with the Pacific Air Chiefs, and it was very clear to me. One of the best presentations was from one of the Chiefs who talked about the overlying spheres of influence that they’re seeing in the South China Sea. And whether you want to talk about the
Philippines or Vietnam or others, they’re all seeing it and they’re all looking for American leadership and commitment there in the region.

So for us, the National Defense Strategy, again, is a great framework for us to build the force that we need, both individually as Service Chiefs and jointly to be able to win.

I think the path that we’re on right now, I’m actually more optimistic now this year, just given what we’ve been doing over the past several months in the joint war gaming and the things that we’re doing and with this team. I’m as optimistic as I’ve ever been on being able to do what we need to.

**Moderator:** Well I want to thank my esteemed panel and I want to thank our audience this morning. This was a wonderful way to start off the conference.

# # # #