

“Epic Missile Defense for Operation Epic Fury”

Transcript Apr 26

[Riki Ellison]

Thank you ladies and gentlemen. I just want to first off recognize Auburn. Yesterday I had General Ryan with me, and he reminded everybody of April 29th, it started with some historical facts, but one of those facts was that Bo Jackson was drafted. April 29th. And I had the opportunity to tackle him and play against him, and also had the opportunity to be his teammate for three years. And he's the only guy, I've played with Ronnie Lott, 12 years, and he's the only guy I've ever seen truck Ronnie. And just an unbelievable athlete that didn't work out, didn't do the norms that you would think a professional athlete would do to prep, hated practice, but nobody could touch him in the way he played that game. So I just want to give you a little credit for that.

I think to start off, I always go - Winners associate with Winners to Win. And yesterday, I've been here 20 plus years, and I've never, ever seen the amount of stars, four stars, that come in here for a promotion ceremony and a change of command. That's never happened at this level. Not even in the beginning of the day, in the early 2000s. You have your next chief of staff, most likely, Chris LaNeve, here. You have the co-coms, the strat com, space com four star, golden dome, Mike was here. Ryan was your new Western Hemisphere command, centered on SMDC. This tells you that they are making SMDC the change agent for the problem.

And the problem is bigger than golden dome. It's that I'm going to help you here. It's not just golden dome anymore. It is our forward operating bases. It is our maneuvering force. It is our allies. It is huge. And it's all about resources, process, and culture.

And I've been telling you, culture's going to change. It's changing. And the process has to get ripped out, because you're not in the fight when you need to be in the fight. American lives have been lost. Billions of dollars of our capabilities have been destroyed. It has to change.

I'm just giving you a heads up. That element here showed that. And they are going to change this organization, SMDC. And, you know, chiefs are like quarterbacks, they're like presidents. You don't really get to pick them. They're going to come and play, and you're going to show up and play for them. No matter what they do, you're going to play for them. And I think nobody really knows about Chris LaNeve, because he's quiet. But he's there for a reason. And he's there to change culture. And I'm proud of that.

I want to just go back, before I go into the Middle East, just brought back some history here. Last Saturday, we graduated at the University of Southern California 20 military officers in our SHIELD program. 73 years, and you've got to love competition. We always love competition, because that's what makes America great. It makes America great.

73 years ago, there was an engineering graduate out of USC, graduated in 1937. His name was Trevor Gardner. And in 1954, General Hap Arnold, the Air Force general, selected this gentleman and a young colonel named Bernie Schriever. And they went in to do experimental capability to be able to beat the Russians. And they got in a little private Catholic school. I was there. I went and visited. It's still there. It's called Schoolhouse Gang. They had 30 people to create our solid fuel ICBM. 30 people right there. And they were competing against here and Von Braun and his group for liquid fuel capabilities. That was the competition. And the deep state back then was Curtis LeMay, who did not believe in ICBMs at all, but on the strategic bomber fleet, Huntsville and the Russians. We won that battle. That was huge. That was a huge win. And this is the magnitude that we're talking about with missile defense and Golden Dome and all that.

In 1972, we signed an ABM treaty that would not allow us to do missile defense. And the same year, one of the SALT-1 negotiators, Dr. William Van Cleave, opened up a Strategic Defensive studies program at the University of Southern California to create groups of 20, 30 to break the ABM treaty, to break it. I got involved with that program in 1980, and that was a forerunner for the Strategic Defense Initiative that was announced in 1983.

That program was terminated. Again, as you know, the population didn't appreciate missile defense at all in the 80s. It was terminated in 86. And I brought that program back to USC five years ago. I created a program at USC to do the same thing. And General Mike Guetlein was the Space Systems Commander as an 3 star, and I got a USC partnership with Space Force and created the SHIELD program.

We've had five of these. We now have undersecretaries that went to that. We have generals that went to that. And we have pushed courses of action and law, congressional law. So I'm just – in this past class, we were hand-selected five capstones specifically on Golden Dome that have been produced. Three of them will be coming out in Washington, D.C. on Monday, which I will take with our cohort class on that. But I just wanted to point that out as we move forward to be a much bigger thing than just us. It's got to be academia. It's got to be the public. It's got to be the world where we're going.

So I had the opportunity to visit our bases in the Middle East. And it's heartbreaking – it really is – to see crater holes in our living quarters on our bases. It's just bullshit. Unexcusable. The morale, not good. And I look at Epic Fury in a little bit of football terms. We did an all-out blitz. We did pass rush on the edge that nobody could touch, nobody could block. We completely destroyed that offense. But we didn't cover the flat. We didn't cover the flat. We didn't think we needed to cover the flat. And they did a dump pass and they hurt us. That's the fact.

And the facts are, it's just unacceptable to have Shahed drones fly 200 miles undetected on to your base, and the base is huge, and watch it destroy your capabilities. Unacceptable. And there will be forensics. This is coming.

And it's not just counter-drone. It's their ability to fly, I forget the name of the missile, but Zolfaghar or something? Short-distance, reduced-ballistic and they maneuver on the terminal phase, and they get in. So it's not just counter-drones or drones. It's ballistic missiles. It's cruise missiles.

And we can't play the way we have been playing. People, our people, American citizens are dying. There's responsibility for that. Yes, we don't have the capacity or the manpower in these bases, but where we do, we're still not 100% able to defend against that. And there's been some great stuff. I saw two Patriot batteries out there kicking ass, but still, we've got stuff coming in.

So, and if you look at the big picture, which they have to, which they are, you have to get capability in there now. Not six years from now, not requirement, DOD process, Now. And the warfighters, they don't want to guess. They don't want to guess on programs of record that are not doing what they're supposed to do. They don't. They want to go to capabilities that are proven in combat in the last three damn years.

Ukraine battle lab has done this. We all know it, and you can't hide from that. Iran is exactly using the same type of attack with the same sort of threat missiles. Ukraine figured it out with their sky map, with their integration to be able to sort all these things through, to open architecture, to bringing in unclass, nonclass capabilities, and making technology and being ahead of the technology edge.

Three years. We saw. We watched. We studied. Yet we didn't have that capability in our bases. We didn't. That's a shocker. It tells you we are going to break this process and this culture to get this right. And you see movement already on the amount of money that's going to come into this.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Riki, if I may, you have seen – I'm going to give you a little break here in the thought process. You've seen the vulnerabilities on display firsthand. Many of us haven't, although we've seen it in the media, we've read about it, and we know what those vulnerabilities are. Many people talk about them.

What would you say are some of the key – you hit on it. The key vulnerabilities that we are subject to, and how are those going to be addressed? There's a compelling urgency and a need to address each. You know, with regard to the economic vulnerability of the exchange, of the economic exchange of interceptors, very expensive interceptors for a \$20,000 drone for the depletion of our key interceptors and so on. And, of course, the production capacity obviously has the – you know, the against-the-counter-drone capability that you need to address the swarm issue or the drones. But there's others too that are just – it's so obvious. I can feel and I can see your emotion, and I share that emotion in regard to – particularly in regards to being attacked by obsolete equipment, and yet we believe in it.

[Riki Ellison]

Can I just comment on that?

[Joe Fitzgerald]

We're unable to, in these circumstances, even address obsolete systems because we've gone past those.

[Riki Ellison]

How bad is it when you have an F-5? Does anybody know what an F-5 is? That was built in 1960. How bad is it when you have an F-5 bomb your base? How bad is that? I mean, this is ridiculous. It's ridiculous. Ridiculous.

But getting to your question, because it's not – it's a bigger issue. It's that your organizations and your capabilities, that's where we struggle because those cultures don't give the warfighter their requirements. The Guam, all the – that's a seven-year requirement. You're not at the technical edge of the fight.

That's why SMDC is going to change to fight that. That's why the Department of War is going to change to fight that. That's why we may have a new autonomous unified command to do this because you've got to take on hundreds of thousands of drones from China. You think we're ready to fight? Do you think we can fight in the first island chain? You think we can – no. It's a wake-up call, everybody. It is a wake-up call to get it right, and it's so damn hard to turn organizations and our processing that haven't delivered at this level at this time for that.

There are two major problems here. One is immediate base defense, immediate base defense. And the other one is the bigger strategic level. Do we need a new four-star command? Do we need an automated command that does both offense and defense, which is going to happen because data doesn't really care what side of the ball you're on. And you don't have the organizations yet to be able to fight that fight. And maneuvering force will always be there, but we have to defend that maneuvering force.

So I think these are discussions happening today in the administration, in Congress, and in the Pentagon on how to deal with this problem. So getting down to that first level, what I told you, they're not going to wait for systems that you bring in or non-program records that have to get plugged into your C2s because that takes forever. It takes forever. If you're a warfighter, why do you want to wait for that process?

And it's not about more capacity. They got capacity. Believe it or not, they got capacity. They got it. But that's not good enough. It's not good enough because you've got, because even the adjustments, the enemy's smart. Russia and China are telling these guys how to beat us. They've watched us. They know how to beat us, and they know how to do the tracks and the missiles to get underneath the coverage or through the coverage on that. But we have to adapt to that.

So all that software comes back here to Huntsville, but it takes another three or four or six months to get back to the warfighter. That stuff's done. You can't fight like that anymore.

You have to have your stuff in the front theater and to turn quickly on it. We don't know how to do this yet.

So what they want right now is an open C2 architecture. You have to have an open C2 architecture. It'll plug into your agencies and your services architectures. JADC2. But you have to have an open, unclassified capability to move stuff in quick right now. That's what they're working on. That's the experimental that we're doing because it's about experimental labs. That's in theater, in fight, to be able to experiment and to create. I'm talking about creating green fields, not brown fields. That's happening in theater, in combat now. And that's not driven by the normal organizations that do this. It's not. The warfighter are driving this because they're not getting what they want from the acquisition community, and that's bad. So that's going to happen because you have to do this or else people are going to die as soon as this ceasefire is up or whatever. You have to do this.

And the second thing is, well, there's a couple things here, but the second thing is you will never, ever have enough capacity or manpower to defend every single base in the front. You don't. That's never, ever going to happen. So you've got to understand that. And so the game is outside the fence line. The game is outside the fence line with sensors, with shooters, outside the fence, which means it's your allies. It's open architecture, and it's offense and defense capabilities. I'm just on the defensive side of the ball, but I know offense is right there with us to be able to do that aspect of it. That's the shift that has to happen to go forward. And until we are able to plug this gap, which we're not right now, it's going to be exposed and exposed and exposed. And China is looking right down our throat on that.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Riki, what are our impediments to solving this problem? Because as you indicated, China and our adversaries are playing on the opposite side of the ball and are pushing for those impediments to be more severe. How do we overcome this? Obviously, your organization and this organization, and education is a part of that, budgets are a part of that, but is it programmatic? Is it will? Where's the will to do this?

[Riki Ellison]

We already talked about I'm not going to get into that because leaders are going to do that. They have to, right? That's when you're going to get left behind. That's going to happen regardless of anybody, it's just how fast we're going to do that. But our acquisition community has to open up the spigot to innovation from young, fast, quick companies. They have to open up and take the risk away from these young companies that can go and get that fast. They have to do it. They haven't sent that message yet. That message is coming at the highest levels to get that innovation into our bloodline.

But the government, the Department of War, A&S, has to give you confidence and take that risk away from you to do it, and they're going to demand that. That's number one. I mean, just getting that, right? That's huge because that's how we've seen it. And then you've got to get the big five plus two are going to have to scale some of this stuff up and go big with it, which they haven't gotten the message either. To go after counter-UAS that's cheap, it's not

expensive, and we've got a lot of problems here because a lot of money has been spent and invested on stuff that didn't work but they've held it back.

This is America. We should not ever be dependent on some garage in Ukraine for our capabilities. It's crazy, but that's the best stuff right now, and we should be stealing stuff, taking it, paying the \$10,000 FAA fine, whatever that is, and going and getting after this because people are dying. You don't have the time we did the last 20 years to do a limited threat from North Korea and Iran. We're beyond that. That culture is gone. It's gone. And we're encouraging this to happen, but you don't have an open architecture yet to plug into fast. You don't have that. That's what the experimental stuff is being done out in the field.

And Michael Guetlein and his team are also working this thing huge as well at a much higher level than Class III. They're above Class III, which is another whole fight. Hypersonics, and I know we're about 60% of the resource in space with the space interceptors, which is a big-time feature on that, and 40% on the stuff underneath. But really, if you're the president and you're trying to protect your people and point defense, are you going to wait on your acquisition people or are you going to go to combat where they're doing it? You've got to think about this because it's that serious of where we're at right now.

I think it's going to fold out, it's going to terminate, and it's going to be a new way of doing this. But we're just in the thick of this fight right now, trying to do everything we can to defend our base. Look at our fixed site. How in the hell do you think you can defend a fixed site? A radar? They're taking out at least five or six TPY-2 radars.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

With what? We know what they're taking out, but a \$20,000 drone. It's incredible. Billions of dollars worth of hardware taken out.

[Riki Ellison]

Yeah, but it's not only ours, it's the GCC's too. So they have the same issue. But you now question, you have to have that fixed site. You have to have fixed site power. They're studying. You've got to defend fixed site power, you've got to defend your infrastructure, you've got to defend this. But you don't have it. And yes, you've got to evolve away from fixed site radars to aerostats above and around.

But we have a serious national security problem right now. And it's great, Secretary of War keeping everything positive, and we're kicking ass with our offense. We're kicking ass with our offense. And we're not paying anything, basically, for our defense. And we've got to have more players. We have to have our international partners with this now.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

All right, let's open it up for a few questions to get some more dialogue going here. Yes, sir.

[Audience member]

So to the kicking ass offense, everybody keeps saying that, and then every day when they say decimated or obliterated, whatever hyperbolic term is used, and then the very next day

another missile attack, another drone attack. And so you were over there, I'm really curious what your take is on this message that, again, we've done sustaining bombing, and it's been all services, joint effort doing all this, and yet Secretary of State, I think a day or so ago, said that Iran still has half of their missiles. So that's not decimated or obliterated. That's still a tremendous amount of capability that they still have. So we talk about left of launch and offensive-defensive integration and shooting the archer, not just the arrow. So, again, we build a defense all day long, but we're supposed to.

[Riki Ellison]

We haven't to build a defense. So let's don't go there.

[Audience member]

I understand. I get it, 100%. But, again, if there's nothing to shoot, then that helps the defensive problems a lot better. So why is it that we're not really taking out everything that we should in terms of what it sounds like we're doing but really not in reality?

[Riki Ellison]

Well, I'm not an offensive expert at all. I'm studying it. But they have damaged that country. There's no question about it. The trillions of dollars of debt, they have put them backwards. Okay? It is a symbol to the rest of the world, and it is a symbol to China of what we can do.

So I want you to think through that strategic messaging before we get into details of how much of the stuff and the infrastructure they wanted to hit to them was more important than the loads of inventory of offensive strike. It's a huge country. They have caves. They have all that stuff that's in there. But I also know that half their stuff doesn't even fly. When it flies, it falls out of the sky. So they're not the be-all, end-all at all. But that is no excuse for not having any capability or limited capability on your bases forward in that region. No excuse. But I'm not the government. I'm just an independent guy on the thing, and that's what I've seen. You've got to look at the bigger picture to our allies and so forth.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

I knew Phil. I just want to ask Phil. Phil. General Koch.

[Audience Member]

Riki, thanks for doing this again. This is important stuff. One of the things that the Ukrainians are teaching the Russians that is a dramatic change in the nature of fighting is that big countries are actually at disadvantage. Within the last, I guess, three weeks, they've reached the Urals with the UAVs. They've been able to take down the Russian oil infrastructure to the point to where even though the price of oil has gone up dramatically since the war in Iran started, the Russians are losing money because their export capacity has been just absolutely blasted. That type of war where a very tactical tool is now being used at strategic depth and the ability to defend. We're talking about fixed sites now, but what happens when China decides this is a target, this building, because it generates part of our intellectual capacity? Do you see any discussion of how we protect ourselves in those environments?

[Riki Ellison]

Well, that's the discussion that they're trying to create in the Unified Command, to be able to handle that mass. It's mass on mass. And it's both our offensive mass on their defensive mass, which they don't have either. So we have that capability. And we're all playing in this game right now underneath the nuclear umbrella. So at some point, that line will be crossed on that. But we have to deal with this problem. And you have not been given the signals. You've not been given the risk mitigation to build these capabilities and scale as fast as possible. And I believe that is coming.

[Audience Member]

Riki, again, thanks for bringing us the latest. Can you speak to, and I think you've touched a little bit on it, can you speak to the intersection of acquisition reform, culture, leadership, and tactics. And can you speak also to, do we collectively have the understanding that you just brought back? Is that being discussed in the bowels of the Pentagon? Is that being discussed in all the right places such that we're all seeing the same picture?

[Riki Ellison]

Change, people don't like change. People don't want to change things. The processes are built. And the process, people are in it. It's not a shame or anything, it's just the way our society is. A lot of people don't want to rock the boat, want to get the paycheck and then go. They're not in it to win it, they're just in it to career it.

That's a huge cultural thing, and it's got to be disruptive, and they are putting those things in place to do it, and it's got to start with the big five, and our team, too. And they're incentivized, they're pushing them big time, and they're putting people in there to reform their leadership, to take the risk. They're going after that, and they're going to open this up, but it starts at the undersecretary level, that I believe our DEPSEC, not SEC, DEPSEC, it's the A&S, and it's the R&E, but they've got great leaders in that, just like we all know, but the culture of the thousands of people underneath are not thinking that way, nor do they have incentivized to go that way. Why would they change anything? They're going to fight that change, and that's what I call the deep state.

That's the deep state of our defense industry base, and the Pentagon, and it's self-licking, right? So there's going to be some hard choices and deliberate action coming from that, because this is unacceptable. You can't have Americans, it's unacceptable, and they're going to bring that out to light.

[Audience Member]

Is this a Pearl Harbor event? Can we create the need? Because right now, what you just said, the entrenched bureaucracy is fighting against the real solutions. We figured this out before under extreme circumstances. Can we figure it out again?

[Riki Ellison]

Pearl Harbor, there was accountability right off the bat. I think they fired the Army commander, the base commander. Of course, they fired their ass right off the bat. We haven't seen that yet. We haven't seen a public display. I don't know if that, because you can't change, you cannot change culture without accountability. You cannot unless you just

tolerate it. That's the first thing you see, a coach or whatever does. If you act up, you fail miserably, you've got to be punished and put out.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

We're seeing the beginning of that.

[Riki Ellison]

Has anybody seen it? There was a row of tankers taken out. I thought there was agile combat deployment where you're supposed to disperse this stuff.

[Audience Member]

It was an AWACS

[Riki Ellison]

It's unbelievable, and yet we don't have accountability yet. So yeah, I think it's a Pearl Harbor, but again, this is culture change.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

What's it going to take?

[Riki Ellison]

Americans dying. I guess this is what it's going to take.

[Audience Member]

You mean more?

[Riki Ellison]

It's going to be more. More, yeah. This is not shocking. We're not moving on this. Look at our borders. Come on, think through this. You don't think we can stop Shaheds coming in our borders from Mexico or Canada? Where's that capability? I know we've got stuff out there, but China's seen all this. The world's watching this. So accountability, from my perspective, to change culture has to happen, and we have not acknowledged that yet.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Any more questions, folks? Please. Anybody?

[Audience Member]

You were talking about your capstones Monday. Speak to why that is so important, what has to happen, and the next steps on that.

[Riki Ellison]

Yeah, so we chose three of the five, and they're all very important for this mission set to move out. And the first one was normalizing space warfare, space policy to normalize our ability to defend and attack in space. Because if you look at this with fixed sites here, fixed sites in space, same way, with cheap capability are going to be lost against that stuff.

Our \$10-15 billion, that's harder to do, (like with) the GEOSATs, but they're vulnerable. This whole thing is vulnerable. So we have to have policy to enable us to go do that, and we have to normalize that policy and get it out of the way of everybody scared that we shouldn't be able to fight and kill things in space.

And the bigger question is, I think we all recognize, we don't want to say it, but we recognize if you have an ability to shoot down stuff from boost-phase interceptors in space, that kind of looks like an offensive strike capability is on. And you know the Russians and the Chinese and the far left of our society will go hard against that. So that's why we're doing that, right? We have to have policy, and we've got enough policy to do that, but we have to break the policy to allow us to play that game up there. That's one of them.

The second one is our infrastructure. We can't even launch the capability that we need to put up the Golden Dome. We don't have enough launches and enough time to do this. We don't have enough power to do our C2. You all know this. That has to be addressed first and foremost. This is civilian partnership with our ability to project. We don't have that yet. That's a huge, huge thing. We don't have the ports, all that. That's how big this is, right?

And then the third one is you have to play with your allies. Canada, Britain, we're in the first five, right? Canada, Britain, Japan.

So those are being pushed. We're pushing those. They're going right into Congress. They're going to be congressional law, and they're going to be courses of action. That's why that's important. And it wasn't created for us. It was created by the war fighters who put their people in that program. MDA's got them in there. We have everybody in that. And they're able to articulate that with the academic environment around them and flesh that out. And just like anything else, right, it's creating teams. You create networks. You create bonds. You create trust on that. It's a phenomenal program. And, yes, we're leading that big time on those three.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

We have competing priorities that you're speaking to. And given that we can't do it all, although that's our goal, prioritize those, if you will. What comes first? I mean, in terms of these vulnerabilities, these needs that you speak to. I mean, there's ways to address it, and you've also spoken to that relative to our cooperation with our allies. But space is going to compete with terminal. Even within the Department of War.

[Riki Ellison]

You have to have a layer of defense capacity. You cannot have silver bullets. We're not doing that. We learned that, right? So you have to have terminal. You have to have midcourse. You have to have the NGI. You have to have it all. So that's what we have to do. And believe it or not, the sustainment cost for the NGI is ridiculous. It is ridiculous. Compared to space-based interceptors. You can do space-based interceptors forever. But you have to have them all. You can't just pick one over the other. But right now, the development for space-based interceptors is maximum. That's what Gold Dome is doing. Huge impact. Huge change of the game for it. And we're going to have a huge fight. Because

I've been through the 80s. You guys have been through the arms control people. The whole think tanks are going to attack this like you've never seen it.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

We had that issue a few months back with Mike Griffin. Who spoke very strongly against the ability to deploy space-based interceptors. However, there are competing technologies. We've had that discussion. But there are challenges, technical challenges, associated with space-based interceptors that can be overcome. You spoke to a moment ago.

[Riki Ellison]

I don't believe that. The technology, we did Brilliant Pebbles 40 years ago. Don't tell me that we can't do this. We know we can do this. And those space-based interceptors can do. I mean, they can do boost phase they can do mid course. They can do all sorts of stuff. No, Mike's wrong on that. On the technology that can do it.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

He points out some limitations.

[Riki Ellison]

Yeah. It's going to be demonstrated right in front of everybody. They will have space-based interceptors demonstrated.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

We'll get Mike back to talk about it.

[Riki Ellison]

Well, generations have passed. Things have passed by. Things have passed by.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

That's exactly right. You spoke to the power that we have relative to computation, to AI, the server problems that we're – basically, the shortfall that we're experiencing. That, too, has to be addressed, and that's a priority that's very costly to address. That's where I'm getting at relative to the priorities that are going. Can you do it all?

[Riki Ellison]

We're going to have to go small nuclear. We're going to have to go do it.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

There you go.

[Riki Ellison]

And that's just the reality of the situation. It's clean. It's green. That's the only way you can do this.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

You say it's clean. It's green.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

There's no accuracy here, folks.

[Riki Ellison]

No, it's true. You can't get any cleaner than that. But that – somebody has to start that. And I think that process may be out in Kwajalein or may be out in Hawaii. We have to start rolling with this to be able to power it up, because the trillions of data that you're going to be computing by bringing all the sensor data together and then push that – you can't do it with the power that we have today. No chance at all. That's part of Golden Domes problem. I don't know if there – yeah. And I think we start – we're going to start probably at one base.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

He's talking about a modular nuclear reactor, not a nuclear interceptor. I'm listening to him. You're talking about a power generator.

[Riki Ellison]

And it might have to be in space. And all that stuff, the power of this stuff, we can't do this without infrastructure, serious infrastructure. And that is civilian. It's not just U.S. government. It's civilian partnership with the government on top of that.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Yeah, like any program manager, on a master schedule you might have an invention or a miracle happens, so to speak, some breakthrough.

[Riki Ellison]

Where's our directed energy? Where is that?

[Joe Fitzgerald]

What breakthroughs are we going to have to have?

[Riki Ellison]

Directed energy, lasers have to come.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Any other questions, folks? I hope to have a question or two out there. Phil, I know you've got another one for you there, by the way. Come on.

[Audience Member]

I do as a matter of fact

[Joe Fitzgerald]

I know you do.

[Audience Member]

This autonomous combatant commander structure, will they also address organizational issues? For example, Ukrainians have brigades that do nothing but UAVs. They have unmanned system brigades that are separate from the UAVs. We've got, you know, we've got cooks that are flying their frickin'-

[Riki Ellison]

No, you're going right. And right here, it's SMDC. You're at the center of this for the Army. You are right. That's what I saw. Look, read the tea leaves. It's right here. It's coming here to do all of that, to do offense and millions drones. We've got to build that with our defensive capabilities. Let me ask you how else are you going to do this? You're going to do it the same way we're doing it? With a component commander? You're going to feed them? You can't. Army's getting blamed for everything, and it's an Air Force mission. You can't even do your own bases, right? This is not going to work. It's not. We're going to be all speaking Chinese in 10 years. That's the facts.

And I think, you know, the bigger thing is to get these interceptors cheaper. MDA has to get the interceptors cheaper. They have to take a lower PK count. We're on 80s technology. We have to reduce the cost of the interceptor at the high end, big time. And whether that's taking some of the discrimination out of it, putting it in space, zipping it in there as it goes up, or lowering that PK value. You can't do this. We can't afford to do it. And that's war of attrition. They're winning that war of attrition.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

They're winning an economical war on these things. But it's not the same interceptors cheaper. These are different interceptors. That's where we have to arrive at. These are different technologies, different interceptors. We're going to see.

[Riki Ellison]

We're stuck with some of the legacy systems right now. The Golden Dome is going to evolve out of that to have much more cheaper capability, more mass. But I'm just – this whole Epic Fury is a disruption to the energy and the flow of what we've been used to with the Golden Dome that just came out, MDA, the whole thing. There's a lot of shifts that are going to happen.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

How do our adversaries see us. I mean, this has exposed us to China and Russia, particularly China. I'm all China all the time now. What have they seen?

[Riki Ellison]

Well, their battle lab is Iran. They've got the battle lab. They've got the battle lab right here against us. That is a battle lab for them. And Russia's got the battle lab against Ukraine. But for us, Russia and China, it's their Ukraine. And they are putting people in there, producing, supporting all that, giving them all the information. How do these guys target with Shahed's right on the damn radar? How did they do that? They didn't do that on their own. So that's their battle lab, and we've seen it, and we're not adjusting to it fast enough, which makes us a little unstable with Taiwan. You just got to think through that first island chain.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Think for a moment about the economic disruption that Iran is experiencing and subsequently China is experiencing as a byproduct of the oil, you might say the oil embargo, blockade. I'll make sure to say we're getting a two-for out of this. We're getting – we're defeating Iran in terms of economic – do you think the blockade is going to-

[Riki Ellison]

No. Did we win the Vietnam War? Come on. No. They're going to get stuff no matter what we do. They're going to – you're not going to win that fight. They're going to be supplied. Iran is going to be supplied. And China—

[Joe Fitzgerald]

And China is 70% of its oil consumption comes from Iran. So it's going to feel the heat, lots of pressure.

[Riki Ellison]

Just getting out of my zone. I'm a defensive guy. [Audience Laughter]

[Audience Member]

Why do you think we're not restarting the air campaign?

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Repeat the question.

[Audience Member]

Why do you think we're not restarting the air campaign?

[Riki Ellison]

I know why because we can't cover our damn bases. How about that? I mean, we're regrouping. What do you think? This is helping us more than it's helping them. Believe me. We are naked. We are doing everything we can to regroup, re-weaponize, but we're vulnerable. And all the guys I talked about, they're thankful that there is a ceasefire so they can regroup and get passive defense. Everything. Passive active, you got to play with what you got. And it's not coming fast, so yes, it's saving lives by not striking right now. So we're saving American lives by the ceasefire right now from those foreign operating bases.

[Audience Member]

With the awarding of SHIELD, MDA SHIELD, to 2,400-plus awardees, they were going great lengths to look for non-traditionals and small innovative businesses to award to. But if we have, as small businesses, we have technologies that we can develop into low-cost interceptors for drones and things like that, how do we get that in front of people who can actually say, yeah, that's a good idea, let's go do that, as opposed to – I mean, traditionally, we do a lot of business with the Lockheed's and the Boeings of the world. But the speed at which that kind of information bubbles up to the actual people who are making decisions that are going to affect the warfighters is very slow.

[Riki Ellison]

That's what they're doing. They're trying to work out to give you mitigation on the risks that you're going to invest your money in. Yeah. That's what they're doing. They're trying to figure that out. The SHIELD thing is just qualifications. It's just like – it's nothing more than that. Right. They just qualified you so you're not Chinese companies and you can compete. It's not about what technologies you guys have. I'm going to tell you that.

[Audience Member]

Right.

[Riki Ellison]

That's what it is. Let's be real here. And then you're set to bid the next one, and then they'll sort you out to that aspect of it.

[Audience Member]

So that's what I'm basically asking is what advice do you have for people like us to get this stuff known to the folks?

[Riki Ellison]

You've got to hit the gap and you've got to take risks with that money and investment and believe in your product to take that risk because you need to take some risks too. Right? So it's not going to come to you. You need to get out in front of this if you believe in your product. And if you can get your product tested over in Ukraine, get it tested over in Ukraine first. I think there's opening – if you can do it because you've got to take risks as well. I'm sure they're going to give you risk incentives. They're giving the big four and the big five risk incentives to make them move faster and send that signal.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Sir, you might be able to speak to some of this if you're permitted to. But the FUSE program, the Army's FUSE program, is something you might want to look at for acceleration of technologies. But there has been somewhat of a paradigm shift or a shift in terms of seeking and demanding that the industry themselves invest their own money and their own – at their own risk, make those kinds of decisions within the industry. But there's – no more Mr. Nice Guy, you might say, with regard to the Department of War investing in your R&D programs. Those days are relatively limited or over. But there's a demand signal for industry to make the investments and to take more risk. That's – is that right, Riki?

[Riki Ellison]

Yeah.

[Audience Member]

So you were speaking about the coming culture change, and I wonder if that includes a reduction in bureaucratic overhead. Like we are manufacturing flight hardware, and we have a DX rated order, and we've had the parts ready for months. And we send the inspection reports, and they take two months to review those and to say, yes, release those. But if they have these parts that they need so urgently and then they sit on the documents for months before they'll release the shipment, it seems like the sooner they can push a piece of paper, the sooner they get the parts and they're making missiles and things. So, is

there like an upcoming way to reduce that overhead to make it so that we can turn around things more quickly?

[Riki Ellison]

Well, the president stopped Elon Musk from tearing that up in the Pentagon. That was politically done because of the mass of the deep state in the Pentagon. They did not allow them to – they cleaned up the other one. They didn't clean them up, but they damaged them. But we were not allowed to damage the Pentagon's sacred cow. That's a sacred cow. That's their power. So that – this is where Hegseth, DepSec they have to break this. And why it's going to be broken? Because they can't move the product fast enough. That's why this has to go. And they're going to take much more risk now because American lives are at stake.

This is real. So I think you're right at the edge of that, on that. And we're going to – as a Pentagon, we're going to take risk, risk instead of have 100 percent, 95 percent solution. And we have to take risk now because otherwise we get a counter-UAV thing 12 years from now or eight years from now.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

To your point, though, I mean, the political environment that we're in, that carries weight relative to the constituency and the campaign contributions and the PAC contributions on behalf of those folks that are contributing to this political – the members, congressional members. And so are they going to move? Are they going to demand change when they're being funded by those that don't necessarily want change? So this is a perplexing problem. To your point, relative to – more Americans will have to ultimately die as a result of what we think should happen. I hate that. I know you do. I mean, we all do. What's it going to take? That's the question. What's it going to take to wake up and expunge these bureaucrats and these deep-staters in order for things to move fast?

[Riki Ellison]

But we haven't opened this can up, and we're not because we're in the middle of a war. But Congress would tear into this in a heartbeat. We're not there. We don't want to do it right now. That's not what we're doing right now. We've got to get some constructive stuff done when this thing settles down. There has to be accountability back to Pearl Harbor. There has to be. And there will be. There will be. They're going to do that. You don't usually lose a TPY-2 radar, a billion dollars. You don't do that. It's coming.

[Audience Member]

Simple question from a simplistic-minded person. How optimistic are you that this is going to be changed, that we're going to actually change the paradigm to get this fixed beyond – I mean, we have – where we are in the current administration, we know we're moving in the right direction. But one side, it's – if this side says it's so, this side says it's not, the infighting and everything at the top level is all the way down. Beyond the next three, four years. What is your level of optimism that –

[Riki Ellison]

Well, my optimism is on this experimental capability that we are doing at the four-star level that's creating a green, open C2 without any industry help, on their own, to put in unclassified, non-classified capabilities like the jet quad hopper, all that stuff. Not only from Ukraine, from Britain, from other countries. Because warfare makes that happen faster. So I'm optimistic that we're going to come up with a solution that's not going to be made in the Golden Dome, or not going to be made in the MDA, or not going to be made here. It's going to be made out there.

And they're going to – it's good. And that's my optimism. That's American ingenuity. That's happening right now in the front. And so once that is moved and that shifts into the four-star new command, that's going to be a fight like hell for that. Nobody wants to do another command, and there's only one president. And that's why this president is going to do it, because only George Washington created two new services. So that kind of thing is going to move. But that is real because you physically – your country cannot compete against China if you don't do this. You have to do this. There's no – so I'm optimistic that that's going to happen.

I'm sure the bureaucracy is going to adjust to it and be bureaucratic with a new idea and just add all sorts of jobs to the whole thing. And Congress makes it even more inefficient when they get a hold of it. But we're America. We're going to win this fight. We're going to figure out – and we always get our ass kicked the first year of war. We always do. And then we adjust. We never get ahead of it. We never can put policies ahead of it because they're too aggressive. And we don't have our warfighters that fight the fight in position. We know this is civil. This goes back all the way back. It's our culture. That's what we accept. But we're trying to break that. So I'm optimistic that this will change.

[Audience Member]

I got one here. Any particular reason why Golden Dome remains such a sensitive topic? There's often times in other areas we can't even say Golden Dome. We have to say Shield. What is it about it?

[Riki Ellison]

Why do you think they are afraid that the Chinese, once you open this up, they're going to go buy your companies. They're going to go cyber your companies. They're involved with this. They're going to attack this.

[Audience Member]

You mean that they already haven't done?

[Riki Ellison]

Well, they're trying to slow that down. But I think a lot of this was, A, to really protect. They were seeing a lot of Chinese investment going, so they wanted to protect our companies. They were getting involved with that.

I also see it from my perspective as kind of a free zone where they're not getting critiqued by anybody. So they got a free run. Nobody can critique them at all. So a lot of these

programs get stopped. What they learned from SDI, how not to do it. It's pretty cool that they can do it that way. If we can get away with it and do it. Like you said, 28 is going to be a new year. If you didn't transfer this, it's like NASA or something. You better be able to transfer this over. This can't be a Trump thing. Golden Dome can't be a Trump thing.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

It can't be a political thing.

[Riki Ellison]

So those are reasons why, and I think they're not mature enough yet to really sell the world. They don't have to. They've got to be done by 28. That's the deal. I fight that a lot with them. I want to do gold rushes, man. I want to go out and sell this thing to our public in a gold rush and go and let them know they're going to be defended.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

At that point, how do we transition Golden Dome from a Trump-named, Trump-capstone program? His name, the Trump presidency is all over Golden Dome. That cannot be going forward. How do we transition to a national imperative?

[Riki Ellison]

You just change the name. Take Golden out.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Good point. You've got to talk about the gold rush. I mean, we're in the gold, okay?

[Riki Ellison]

Yeah, I just think it fundamentally works. And what he's doing is creating that joint, that C2 that no one's ever created. That's the golden egg. Everything else, or it's the gold goose. The gold goose. So I think that's the number one. That's SBI number one. And, you know, the cruise missile, they'll hit us where our gaps are, right? I really think our cruise missile defense is an alarming gap as well. It's hard to do, right, in volume. We all know that.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Final questions, folks? Any other? Riki, final comments?

[Riki Ellison]

Yeah. You know, I'm glad that you got some truth. Truth always comes out. It might not come out today, but it always comes out. And you're hearing truth. The consequences of not having defensive capabilities on our bases and not working, it's going to come out. And, you know, it's tough on all of us because we're part of building that, and it didn't do what it was supposed to do the way we wanted it to do. So we own it. We own it.

So it's our job to change it, to bring it to light, and hopefully some of this conversation you can put in your own words and be able to, in your own thought, and be able to move it to other people to understand we've got a problem. We can't stick it under the carpet and that you're part of the solution. Be part of the solution.

You know, you've got to be in cauldrons of greatness. You've got a cauldron of greatness happening right now at the base, at SMDC for the Army. I know that. Be a part of that. Be a part of the change that's going to disrupt the people that don't want to change. There's a lot of them, right? GS-14, GS, they're embedded. But you have to fight that change. They're not the only experts on this, and that's what happens when you have the expertise and they crush it. They crush the commanders that come in for two or three years. You're the core, and the country needs you to do it. I'm a team player. I'd love to have you guys. We just introduced an individual. I have a blitz package, a goal line and a red zone. So if you want to be part of me, as an individual, not as a company, as an individual.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

You just opened that up, by the way. For individual memberships at certain levels.

[Riki Ellison]

Yeah. We have to fight this fight, and I'm excited about it. I'm going. Is that on your website? Yeah. We'll put it up. But I'll be in D.C. I'm going right into the White House. 23rd time since the Golden Dome. We've got influence, people. We've got influence. And we're going to use it the best we can to make this change. So thanks for this opportunity.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Thank you Riki. Thank you for coming.

[Riki Ellison]

I want to thank some of the original gangsters. When we first did this, there was about nine people here. And now some of us have gone.

[Joe Fitzgerald]

Thank you, Riki. Let's give Riki a round of applause.