

Virtual CRT: “Epic Fury Halftime Adjustments”

Defense Wins World Championships

[Riki Ellison]

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, from El Segundo, California, from a beautiful southern day in southern California. I'm Riki Ellison. I'm the founder and chairman of the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance.

We are pretty excited about our 100th Missile Defense Congressional Roundtable that you're hearing today. It wasn't planned. This came up on relevancy to the warfighter and to the fight in the Middle East. And it's great that it's here because it's where I was introduced to missile defense 40 plus years ago with Edward Teller, Ronald Reagan, and it was also pretty awesome yesterday, I was at the White House to have some time with Newt Gingrich, who also was a huge supporter of missile defense during the tough years of missile defense in the 90s and even the 80s. But as he shaped this, and we both with affirmation, knew we were right and smiled about it.

So it's great that we're here at this place, at this juncture, where we've got some time. Time is critical for us as we relook at what we can do to ensure that our troops, wherever they are in the Middle East—water, land bases, wherever they are—are better defended than they were three weeks ago or a month ago when this fight started. And this is the point of our advocacy, our illumination, and our education of truth.

This has to be a priority. And I think we are struggling not making this a priority and putting other things in front of this as a priority. No question, we have the resources. We've got \$1.3 trillion. We've got resources that's done. We haven't applied those to where we need to go in the defense of our bases.

So welcome to our 100th Congressional Roundtable. As I look back, the first one was back in 2014 at the Rayburn Building. We used to do these things live. And it was also on the topic of operations of missile defense, both globally and regionally. Isn't it amazing? 14 years ago, when we first did our first one, I believe we had Sam Greaves, we had Dick Formica, we had some of the oldies, Craig Franklin was on that aspect of it.

Okay, so I'm looking at this. I'm going to give you a football term because I'm going to go there a little bit with you on this. You know, we had a hell of a half, and we put some points up on that board. But our defense let them score. And we have to make adjustments now. And those ceasefire days have given us time and effort, energy, leadership to make adjustments. And when you get beat in the half, you have to recognize what your problems are and adjust very, very quickly to doing this.

It's a road game. And one of the great things about the 49ers under Bill Walsh is we never lost our road games. It's hard to do it. It's hard to win in the road. And we are in the road right now with it.

So when you first look at the breakdown of our defensive scheme, because it's been a breakdown of our defensive scheme, our defensive coordination, and you're going to have to go high to be able to change the entire defensive strategy. And you can do that. That's what time takes to be able to look at the bigger issue before you start picking apart on the pieces. You have to look at why this is not a priority, who's in charge of making it a priority, and putting capacity and capability in there as fast as possible. You may have to look at a new defensive coordinator. I've seen that happen. You may need to look at a whole new scheme, because the facts are that we did not cover the flats. We've got great coverage deep. We can cover anything deep. And we've got a hell of a pass rush. But we've got slow, old linebackers that can't cover a simple dump pass in the flat. That's the fact.

So whether you want to continue with your same scheme and your same old linebackers, which a lot of teams do, because they don't have the courage to make that adjustment, you're going to get your ass beat. So we have to bench some of these players. And we have to put in rookies that are unproven and put them in there to cover the damn flat.

That's where we're at. I've been over there, seen it, understand it. We have processes that have to stop. Our processes are made for acquisition and development to put stuff on the field for bigger systems that require a lot more time and energy. The fight is happening every single day, innovation, and we're not adjusting to that.

So there are a lot of layers here. And we've got the best that I thought we could bring to the table. We've got OSD policy covered, because I think a lot of this starts with policy, man, to go all the way to the top, to where our policy priorities are as a nation, as a Department of War from the region to defense versus offense. Everybody wants to score. Everybody wants to spend money on that. Policy has to be addressed with this. And I want to go into the processes, the acquisition processes that we have fought with the last 20 years for those weapon systems that need all that, but we haven't adjusted to that innovation as of yet.

And we've got Charlie here as a warfighter, because you need to hear the warfighter. It's not about acquisitions, but we're fighting what we need to save American lives. And then we've got Mark here that's going to give us the success story, because there is success, because somebody did this right. And that's on the water. They did it right. And over the last couple of days, that Aegis has taken on everything they could throw at them and they've defeated it. And we got to get that thing going here. And Mark's going to give us a perspective, because he's fighting that battle that we'll fought to try to force this to have capability, to have cruise missile capability, to have counter-UAS capability. We've been on and we've been right.

So I want to open the flow up a little bit for a solution. I know we can bitch about the problem, but we got to create a solution and we got to do it now. Already three weeks I don't think that has been done. We're going to go back and fight and we better be able to defend our lives and our infrastructure.

Okay. With that, the esteemed four-star general from INDOPACOM, the Army Pacific, Charlie Flynn. Charlie, it's all yours.

[GEN (Ret.) Charlie Flynn]

Riki, thanks. And John, good to see you. Mark, good to see you. And I know, Mark, you're probably a little bit late at night there where you're at and looking forward to seeing when you get back.

So I'll just say, you know, listen, I think we already have a lot of tools in place. I mean, I think the real problem is that money and new organizations, as announced, I think it's more cultural and mindset.

If you look at the authorities that we do have, operational needs statements, JUONs, QRCs, the quick reaction capabilities, OTA, the other transaction authorities, middle-tier acquisition. I mean, they're all there. Congress gave us all these tools. But our problem is we're living in a program of record body, and we have a legacy sustainment mindset. And that institutional bias is killing us. I mean, there are material solutions out there already that are competing against programs of record, and yet the material solution, and the material solution is known by commanders and known by operational forces. And yet those material solutions are not being put in place, because the programs of record and the offices that run the programs of record, the bureaucracy and the layers just, they kill that kind of expeditionary, rapid reaction activity that has to happen in the field.

I mean, I put in a note earlier today about like, we were surprised by EFPs in Iran, and we should not be surprised by stuff like, we knew these things were going to be coming. And then we have to overreact to try to save lives and try to get in a better position in the battlefield.

Second point I'd make is, I think the \$55 billion in drone dominant requests shows, it kind of shows part of the problem here, right? So \$55 billion requested for autonomous systems. I mean, this is classic program of record thinking to my earlier point. We don't need another giant pot of money dumped at old systems. What we need is the acquisition community is to already use the rapid authorities that I talked about, because Congress has already provided us with those.

So, again, I think there's an article out in AEI by Bill Greenwalt. He basically points out these reforms were done in 15 and 17 through the NDAA. And they're aligned to bring commercial and innovation solutions at speed to the problem. And yet here we are a decade later, and we're still not being able to respond to that stuff. And I know that commanders in the field have these solutions, but once you get back to the building, or there's an argument between colors of money and authorities, and who's in charge and Congress and the department and the services, everybody is walking too slow and burdening each other without having to make the solution. And China, I'll just say they're not burdened at one bit at all. They don't have these artificial barriers, and we can't afford to wait any longer.

Fourth point I'd make is a weaving together testing, experimentation, exercises, and fielding that has to happen simultaneously. We can't do the test and experimentation, and then

bring it out to an exercise, and then come back to the building and come up with a fielding program. It's got to all done at the same time. And we can't wait for war to figure this out. The side that prepares the best is going to win those first battles. And I just think that we need to do a much, much better job of weaving together tests, experimentation, exercises, and fielding at the same time. Again, back to the authorities that we already have.

I said this a little bit earlier, I'll just come back to it. I don't think new money and new commands alone are going to fix this problem. I think Sec War is focused on autonomous systems and the stand up of a sub unified command in order to do that. I mean, look, it's important to take steps to kind of turn the system on its head. But what we can't afford to do is have a new organization with new people trying to form, storm, and norm, figure out what's going on. Because again, we already have the authorities. And this is where the service secretaries, I think, need to lean in and help the Secretary of War because they have them at their fingertips. They've just got to wear out Congress, and then be in the field and ask the commanders, what do you need and move stuff in their organizations to support them.

But, you know, defaulting to a multi-year program of record solution and the processes that follow that will bury all these good ideas, and they'll bury all the things that we know are working in the field. And just, you know, a kind of a closing thought here is just speed. We just, we have to find ways through those authorities to deliver stuff out quicker.

I'll pause there, Riki.

[Riki Ellison]

Okay, I got two questions for you. Charlie, let's just go back to that question. You said we got the authorities, but they've got capabilities out there right now, as you pointed out, that they're not willing to take risk on. They're not. They want to keep processing and going through all the things, send them back, going forward. Who forces them, who forces them to take risk? Once it's clear to make the soldiers safe, who forces that to get that in the field right away? That's not happening right now.

[GEN (Ret.) Charlie Flynn]

Yeah, four stars. I would tell you, four stars and service secretaries have to force that.

I'll give you an example. There's a capability that we were using in the Pacific. That capability was installed on a naval vessel, and it was moved from the Pacific over to the Middle East. Now, I will tell you, industry, because I'm aware of it, they adapted that capability literally overnight. Not just the software, but the hardware, the install, the downlink, et cetera, now being used.

That's an example of how quickly these things can happen, but unless senior commanders get involved in this stuff and they grab the steering wheel from the acquisition guys, it will get buried in a program of record type of process and will not move. That happened within the last two weeks.

There are other ones that have gone out there, but those are small examples that highlight the point I'm making here. Lots of money and a new organization is not going to solve this. It's actually four stars, senior commanders grabbing the steering wheel from the acquisition and community and the service secretaries and bringing it over.

I'll make one other point on this. Many times, you'll turn to your service solution instead of turning to the best solution, regardless of service, and getting it in play. That's why there's a capability designed by an army organization called TENCAP that's now on a naval vessel. That's how that happens. A lot of times, we'll turn back and just turn to our service and say, that's what we need. That's not always the best case.

[Riki Ellison]

Charlie, man, it's been three weeks. Let's get real here. The Air Force pilots that fly missions can't even stay on the damn base because they're not defended. They're more safe off the damn base. It's not happening right now. It's three weeks. It's not happening. They're still doing the same processes that you said. They're putting innovation there, but they're not taking risks to give it to the damn and go on capacity. Somebody's got to be in charge of this.

[GEN (Ret.) Charlie Flynn]

My view on this is you've got to take a couple of examples that have worked and put it in people's face. That's the only way to do this, Riki. You've just got to take a couple of examples that have worked and have turned rapidly.

Again, back to my comments. All the authorities are there. Mark knows this. They have them. They just don't use them. They don't know them. But the example I just gave you, they ought to pull a couple of those out and go, okay, why are we putting \$55 billion and building a new organization when we already have OTA, JUONs, ONS, middle tier? It's all there. It's all there. We've seen this movie. They just don't do it.

[Riki Ellison]

Well, I got you, Charlie. Let's back up because the big problem is roles and responsibilities still. Do you think the way we're doing it with a JFAC and AAMDC is the right way of doing this? Obviously, it wasn't enough. Does that need to be reformed? I know it's not urgent, but does that need to be reformed? If you've got a new COCOM, a SOCOM, who's got a component command that does autonomy, why wouldn't all the other COCOMs get an autonomy command? I don't think that model works in today's world when you've got China and Russia looking at this innovation day by day and innovating. That model doesn't work anymore. Help me understand that. That's why I think we have to break this thing up unless you think it works.

[GEN (Ret.) Charlie Flynn]

Well, no. What I think is that we ought to be de-risking through the operational commanders in the field who are putting requirements back on the system.

It's not just the COCOM commanders. The component commanders have a huge role here. They got to go back to their services, but they also have to have a broader view and go, what are the other services working on? Bring those out with us.

Again, an example I just gave is that was a system that we developed that is now on a naval vessel. There's multiple instances of that. That wasn't made by another service. That was made by the Army, and we were using it out there. They're like, well, we have a solution. Why don't we match this?

You need a couple of examples like, that's my point, Riki. We have the authorities, and we have some examples. We need to use those examples back with the service secretaries, the component commanders, the combatant commanders in the Pentagon and over Congress.

How can that happen and another instance where it doesn't happen?

[Riki Ellison]

Okay, Charlie, but just going back at you, the COCOM commander, he doesn't believe in AAMDC stuff. He went right to getting his own component commander to do that. They don't know where that's going to get funded because it's not working through the joint funding of missile defense.

We are not getting the manpower, the capability and capacity through that model that's been going on the last 20 years. We have to change that model.

[GEN (Ret.) Charlie Flynn]

I agree with you. I agree with you, but I'm not talking about a model. What I'm talking about is the authorities are already there. They're already there, and commanders don't push those authorities because many of them don't know it. Then the other thing is the acquisition community will stall them and get it in the program of record, I'll say legacy process, and then it gets buried, but they're all there.

[Riki Ellison]

Thanks, Charlie. We're going to unleash Mark now because Mark's been waiting for this. He's in Ukraine, of all places today, under fire, I would believe, with the same sort of threat that's going on here. Mark, turn it up. Let's get this thing figured out.

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

First, it's a complex issue, and Charlie made that clear. Reforming acquisition and procurement is really hard. I will say we have not done a good job at it. You quoted someone saying that we've done this, I think, first, or Charlie did in 2015. I'd go farther back.

I think we've reformed acquisition again and again and again, but more recently, in the last year, I think that this administration, and I'm very critical of many things Secretary Hegseth does. I think his attempt to reform procurement will long term be helpful if they have the patience and deliberation to see it through. Because a lot of these other reforms would have been helpful, but in the end, people were outweighed. Political decision makers who are trying to make change were outweighed by career civil servants who are pretty comfortable with how things were going. I hate to make it sound quite that deep statey, but

there's a little bit of that in this procurement thing. Certainly, we have never gotten rid of the risk aversion that permeates our procurement and acquisition system to an egregious state.

Now, here's the irony. What Charlie and I are saying in this very deliberate way about risk aversion leads exactly to the passion you have about failure. This risk aversion led to failure. Here's the bad part. We won't hold anyone accountable because the decision not to make a decision is very hard to IG. It's the decision to make a decision that gets IG'd. IG being Inspector General.

I want to talk about three areas total. The first is we've got to learn to learn from allies. Probably the most egregious thing is what you know. Probably, Riki, I would say you were about the first, even before CD, you were taking a look at the Ukrainian stuff. You'd made some connections, especially on the sensor side.

But we really have been observing Ukraine for three full years with an aggressive sensor network, working the drone issue—acoustic, infrared, radar—and then brought together in unclassified networks that can rapidly distribute the information to shooters. The shooters here aren't like we think of shooters, like Link 16. Maverick gets some kind of digital thing, points his radar out there, and all he has to do is look at it. This is like, hey, something's coming from the south, and it'll be there in about 15 seconds. Then the guy gets there with a gun and gets ready to take care of it. It's evolved from that, but it started that way.

And then they've evolved shooters. Today, where I'm sitting, I'm surrounded by eight different types of—I didn't see eight—I saw five different types of counter drone interceptors. I heard a bunch of them go off a couple hours ago because there's a small—I think it actually wasn't anything, but at that time, they thought that there was something coming in. And you know what? They can waste a round because most of the rounds I saw cost about \$1,000 to \$1,500. Their PK is only 60% or 70%. We would never allow that. Never allow a 60% or 70% PK. Well, guess what two 70% PKs is? 89%. What's three? 97%. Suddenly, for \$3,000 bucks, I've got the same PK as the AMRAAM at \$1.1 million.

They're not perfect. Some of them are only good for the Shahed and the Geran 2 because they only go 200 or 300 kilometers an hour. They're slightly faster than the Shahed. They don't go as fast as the rocket-propelled Geran 3 or Geran 5. But they've got ones for that, and they tend to cost more like \$5,000.

But we've observed an ally do this, and there have been enough U.S. military officers coming through Ukraine. Now, we haven't done that properly. Shame on us to give a country \$60 billion worth of U.S. equipment and not come observe it, right? But that's not the military's plan. That was the politician's plan across two administrations. As a result, we have failed. We have not really learned what's happening here. There's individual officers that get it, but that's not the same. You have to have your systems, your army system, come

over and do a systematic drawdown of best practices and lessons and go back. We didn't do that as a result, even when we can observe it like our videos.

[Riki Ellison]

Mark Why? Why?

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

Well, that's a political decision that was made by the last administration, reaffirmed, or probably even increased by this administration, to not have U.S. people in the kill zones, basically. I think that was a mistake. What's crazy is we eventually gave all the weapons that we thought would be provocative, and we didn't have people there. Literally, I'm not saying these guys wouldn't have sidearms, but these would not be traditional armed warfighters. These would have been guys with some self-protection capability, and that's it.

Then, Zelensky came over and offered the package to President Trump last summer. President Trump doesn't like Zelensky. I know he said on Monday that he's changed his mind and he likes Zelensky again. But I would say last year, he didn't like Zelensky. He said, he doesn't have any cards, he doesn't have anything I need, and that's a bad attitude. He was wrong. I don't expect the president to get on TV and say I was wrong. I'm not insane. The president was wrong. Ukraine has something we need.

But don't put this on the president. I put this on the system that had us not pick it up. In our efforts to do this, our companies didn't reach out and grab the technology. Now, Ukraine would have probably insisted that our government get involved so that they could get something out of us, like more Patriots or Tomahawks or whatever. I get that. But sometimes you need to give something up to get something, and they had something we need.

I'll go so far as to say, Riki, that we would not have had as many combat deaths. I'm not going to say zero. We would not have had as many lost aircraft, as many lost radars. I have to say, the way you said it with the rushers and the defensive backs and the linebackers are the ones who screwed up, I agree with you.

We did okay against ballistic missile defense ashore. Not perfect, but we don't advertise perfect. We advertise 95%. I think we were pretty good. We have done fantastic for two and a half years, THAAD and Aegis system off the shore, protecting Israel, supporting Israel in their protection. And our airborne systems did okay. The advanced precision kill weapon system did what was made for, which is that if you give me some room to get behind you, I'll shoot you down. So for ships at sea who can back up, APKWS on F-18s, F-16s, or F-15s is a good thing. For Israel, it's a great thing. If I have to fly 300 miles and you get to run my ass down, I shoot you down.

But when you only have go 90 miles across the Gulf or 110 miles across the Gulf to hit Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, the aircraft couldn't get behind them. Then we didn't have a point defense, a ground-based point defense for counter drone interceptors.

As a result, I think our CAOC got hit, our MOC got whacked. I would call where the eight men were killed a formal part of a GOC. It was probably the logistics cell of a GOC.

Let me put it this way. If I was the J-35 at the IRGC command, and I made my top 20 infrastructure to hit ashore, I might have gotten 10 of the top 20. This is insane. I think what happens is we have a false sense of how fast our offense can remove their offense. Then we had no understanding of how we could get their defense.

So the first thing is, learn from our allies. The second thing is, it's not impossible. The US is good. I know we're good because I've watched the Air Force and Navy get APKWS going. First of all, like I said, I saw the Army do well on ballistic missile defense. I saw the Air Force and Navy do well on APKWS when they had the room. Sometimes you just don't have the geography. You can't fly feet dry over Iran before you've eliminated all the air threat. But then the Navy, because they had a lot of advantages, distance, two years of getting fired at in the Bab el-Mandeb, they've got it.

But here's the other thing the Navy has. It's something that we did in a SHIELD capstone three years ago now. I think in year two, we did a modeling and sim one, and we looked at Dahlgren as part of it, where Aegis is. We have created a system. When I was a junior officer, I'm not a junior officer, when I was CO of a ship maybe 20 years ago, I would get an Aegis upgrade once a year. It would be like a major event on the ship. We'd all be like, install it, and you'd be like, I hope the radar works when this is over. You'd have to go out and shoot a missile almost to make sure everything worked. You were so unsure of this stuff. Certainly, the first ship to get it had to go out and fight, and so it was quite the to-do.

When I was an admiral, these things were coming about every three months. Now, a destroyer these days, this is an issue of weeks or days, and they're getting doctrine updates much faster, recommended doctrine changes, things like that. We are rapidly turning around observations on the ground and in the systems, tapes—we used to call them tapes, but now they're electronic files—that are shot back, examined by HAL 3000 or something, that looks through it and says, holy crap, you got to reorient yourself this way. Your radar bandwidth was wrong. It was 10% too much on this angle. Try this. Then it goes back out to the fleet as an improvement quickly without some ridiculous review process that takes six months.

We have done it. We don't do this everywhere. The Navy doesn't do it, and the Air Force doesn't do it for F-35 software upgrades. I think software block four is now officially five years behind schedule. There are moments when we don't excel.

[GEN (Ret.) Charlie Flynn]

Let me highlight this point that Mark just made. That example that I told you before, the software change happened in under 24 hours. It happened remotely. To Mark's point, we can do this. We have the technology and the people to do it.

[Riki Ellison]

Charlie, Mark's right on the Aegis capability. Our damn Patriots still got to send that stuff back to Huntsville for months. They're not at the same pace of innovation to pick up from the data.

[GEN (Ret.) Charlie Flynn]

Two different things here. You're talking about a programmer record that has this big wraparound. That's what I'm talking about. The system I'm talking about is more like stuff that's adaptable in the way that Mark was outlining.

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

Charlie, I also say this. The Navy is doing it with a big programmer record, but let's be clear. They had a massive infusion of Missile Defense Agency money into Aegis for 25 years. I mean John Rood was probably putting it in when he had a full head of hair. It was a long time ago.

I'll say, in the end, resources matter. And Aegis BMD, our friend Tom Druggan was a champion of this for seven or eight years in different jobs making this happen. Money will eventually create opportunity. I'll give the Navy credit for taking advantage of opportunity and building something that's across the whole missile defense spectrum, allowing them to update this.

Patriot may be past the point where you do this kind of thing. You've got to make these investments. I'm with Charlie that as the new weapon systems come in, we have to create a software warfighting ethos.

I have one last thing to this. I think there are now Navy destroyers who go into a three-week availability where you used to think, okay, how many valves and pumps am I going to change? How many bearings am I going to pull out? Now they're like, no, we're not doing any of that stuff. Instead, we're going to go into your ship and make 15 software changes—10 to your weapon systems, two to your sensor systems, and three to your engineering systems. You'll test them for two or three days and you're out.

That's literally improving your ship much more than any other kind of availability. In other words, as long as we build good hardware stubs to build on, we can bring in software and effectors that change the game. Like the Mark 41 VLS, the vertical launch system on a destroyer, is the most kick-ass, mindless piece of hardware. I think, as Charlie may have averted this earlier, we can just put a Patriot missile in one of them.

[Riki Ellison]

Mark, that's what they're using for Golden Dome Underlayer, man. You got that.

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

That's what I'm saying. In other words, that's what you want—things that can take anything. I'm a receptacle that can take anything you got, but the software you write has got to be the agile, performance-enhancing thing.

That's one of the shifts that I think Pete Hegeseth's is pushing. I'll give him credit for that. When I say Pete Hegeseth, that doesn't mean Emil Michael and others who are driving this kind of train.

But I got to tell you, it takes a level of attention to detail I've seldom seen in the political appointee. To get it done, you got to almost have your whole three or four years of the term, and you have to not get distracted by some other shiny object that rears its head. This is the hard part.

Let me just summarize that. We need to learn from our allies, and we need to absolutely invest in that kind of software-driven change agents. I think that the Navy's got it in one area.

The Navy needs to work this in 10 other areas, and I would just say the Army has to work it in 11 areas—the 10 plus the one missile defense one. And the Air Force could probably use it as well, judging by the F-35.

[Riki Ellison]

All right, Mark. It's halftime. What the hell are we going to do?

Why in three weeks? You got four weeks. What can we do right now to better those soldiers and sailors?

It doesn't look like we're doing anything.

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

I was at the Ukrainian Counter Drone Command and Control Center, where they track—I think they do about 35,000 engagements a month. I mean, just to put a fine point on this. Now, a lot of these are countering EW, countering first-person FPVs in the close-in, in the opposite—not the kind of stuff we're talking about with Shaheds.

Shaheds are more in the 3,000 or 4,000 a month probably. They have figured it out. I mean, they have an ops—they have a network running, a command and control network that is fast enough.

It may not be a firing quality track solution. It's firing quality warning. In other words, to get yourself ready for the shot with your localized detection system.

Sometimes it might be a firing quality track solution. And then they have battalion-level, brigade-level embedded weapon systems, and they have core-level embedded systems, and they have ops group—what we would call like an army, they call it something else—level embedded systems. And it appears to work to me. It does not appear—I do not see like a kid's soccer. Everyone fires too much at one set of targets. They have their battle space. They manage it. And then the Air Force runs separately thinning herds so that the ground guys have a chance, you know, that they're looking at 10 Shaheds instead of 30.

[Riki Ellison]

You're saying to bring that process into Saudi Arabia?

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

Here's the problem. You could not—as mad as I am, I'm mad that we haven't done enough in these last three. I join you in a belief that we probably could have done more.

Now, look, I look forward to you and I being proven wrong if we resume combat operations. But if we resume combat operations, there's a chance we don't have this in place. Now, I suspect some of our Arab partners do, but they don't really have the C2 in place.

They just have the effectors in place. And that's going to be sporty. That's why we don't, because we have army and Air Force fights over C2 to make sure, hey, when you throw a weapon up there, how do you know that's not an F-16 or an F-15 or an F-18?

And if the answer is, “well, I'm thinking it's not,” you know, that's not the answer we're looking for, right? We're looking for a link 11, you know, a IFF Mo-4 or something, right? Or link 11, link 16, whatever it is.

We're not going to have that. Our Arab partners have water desalination plants that have to be protected. They have power grids and data centers they have to protect. They have rural communities that have to be protected. They don't give a shit. At some point, they're like, yeah, okay, the C2 is not right.

The weapon works. And we've got Ukrainians here helping us fire them. So I think you're going to see a lot of weapons, a lot more drones destroyed.

You might see some green on blue, you know, where one of our friends hits one of our aircraft. I'm not going to eliminate that as a possibility. Good news is these aren't big warheads.

You know, hopefully our guys can avoid it and or get out of it. And they're altitude limited. So if you pick up altitude, you could probably avoid this thing if one accidentally gets fired at you.

Look, I'm not rooting for any fighter pilot to have to do that. But just so you know, I'm with you in the pucker, you know, I'm tight, you know, right now, a tight pucker factor over this, over what if combat operations recommence. But I also recognize, we're just not good at this kind of, you know, trying to get the C2 right on the fly. I wish we were better at it, but we're not.

[Riki Ellison]

So Mark, just going on what you said, what looks like happening in the three weeks, they're taking our best pass rushers, and they're peeling them off to cover the flat with aircraft to go out expensively, whether they use APS or whatever.

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

....27,000 rounds...

[Riki Ellison]

I got it, I got it, the plane's not cheap. Those are F-35s. Those are offensive pass rush weapons...

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

Not F-35s, not F-35s, F-15s, F-16s, F-18s. The F-35s are still going downrange. By the way, most of our downrange ass-kicking, those great rushers you like, are called B-2s, B-1s, and B-52s, and they need the F-35s to escort them. I don't want to commit this many fighters to this. I'm with you on that...

[Riki Ellison]

But that's the only thing we can do right now that's going to increase our capacity right now, and we're going to put some old linebackers out there. We're going to keep feeding old linebackers that they can cover a slow running back, but they get beat. So that's the reality of where we're at, because the reality is, is that open C-2, where you can plug all that crap in from Ukraine as soon as possible.

[GEN (Ret.) Charlie Flynn]

He's on a roll, hes on the chalkboard, Mark he's on the chalkboard

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

Look, you can't plug in the Ukraine stuff into our C-2 system. You can plug it into the hole. You can plug it in the hole.

I'm for plugging it in the hole, not at airfields. Probably at airfields, I say Air Force, Defender, airfield with everything you got. Take your max risk on aircraft with that.

But all right. I want to give John some time.

[Riki Ellison]

As a defensive coach, what are you going to do? Replace? What's your key thing? You change the scheme? Are you going to replace your players? What are you doing?

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

I'm going to play with the players I got. If the players I got are APKWS, I'm going to maximize that. And I'm going to tell the CENTCOM commander, if I'm the CAOC at this point, I'm going to say, "Sir, to reduce the likelihood of Shahed strikes from 82% to 97% or increase my likelihood of engaging them, I'm going to commit another 20% of my force to the Protect mission. And that means I can only do 400 strikes a day instead of 500 strikes a day." That's what you do. You got to tell them that.

Now, I think we'll be okay. By the way, the Israelis can probably add in a little juice and you're all covered. Or you could move more squadrons in.

I know the President doesn't really want to do that. But sometimes to win, you should have more than 17% of your Navy and 20% of your Air Force in theater if you want to win. That's what we got. In the Army, I'd say we probably have 5%. I mean, I don't want to get too specific because we're using specific elements, but maybe 10%.

[Riki Ellison]

Now, Charlie, what would you do? Change the scheme or put players in? What are you going to do? Your perspective?

[GEN (Ret.) Charlie Flynn]

I think the percentages that Mark was just talking about, I mean, I think they have to have a gauge of something akin to that. I mean, I've changed a few schemes of maneuver, I guess, because I think we could be doing a heck of a lot more in the non-lethal targeting and then the electronic warfare, ISR collection, jamming. And to Mark's point, I think it's not just Israel. I think there's other allies that can help us here. And we ought to put more forward to help the total force out.

[Riki Ellison]

Okay. All right. I want to just raise the game a bit with John, because I think we're a constitution, we're a democracy. Civilian leadership oversees military leadership and war fighting. And I think that policy plays a big part, a big, big part in this, and how important this mission is, the urgency of it, whether this region of the world is more important than another region, or their defense offensive mix. And I don't think we've held policy accountable to this.

And I, from my perspective, there is some policy responsibility for what has taken place in the lack of defense's priority and capability and capacity from a policy perspective. But I'm going to hand it off to you to answer that, if that's correct or not correct, John.

[Mr. John Rood]

Well, what I, thank you, Riki, for having me on and, great conversation so far. Thing one, I'd say is that what policy does is say, what is the nature of the threat that I'm facing? And I think we've misjudged that here in the sense that we're not just fighting an Iranian regime.

Iran allied with China, Russia, and to a lesser extent, North Korea, they're collaborating. We saw that. I agree with Mark. We have not learned the lessons from the Ukraine conflict. And so thing one, have you identified what's the strategic threat and what are you up against? And what's the character of the force and the priority of the force?

And are you organized correctly to do that? Have authorities been provided? And then, what's the prioritization of resources to go against that? And what are the parameters under which operational forces in CENTCOM and elsewhere operate? And what are the objectives you've given them? Those are all the policy questions here.

And so starting at the top, I don't think there's a clear recognition that we're in a fight with an alliance here. And to a lesser extent, at a sub-included level, the Iranians with their allies around the region, it gets a lot of press that there was some fighting in and around the Strait of Hormuz in the last two or three days. But you notice the Iranians also having their proxies in Hezbollah conduct 20 attacks against Israeli targets simultaneously. You see movements among militias in Iraq. You see movements in the Red Sea by the Houthis. It's part of a broader strategy.

So one, have we correctly recognized the strategic threat we're up against? Secondly, do we have the right character of the force? Because the character of the force is not just who, it's what are they using.

And we continue to, in my view, fail to heed the wake-up call that we live in the age when missiles and drones are a primary instrument of warfare, not a lesser included, a primary one. And do we have the right policy that prioritizes that? I think we're at halftime and you're right.

The way to think of this is we are a great team and we've underestimated the opponent. There was a lot of hubris around how short the conflict would be, how this could be done with offenses only. It's very obvious to me that in hindsight that that was not seen by policy people as understanding the nature of the threat and the tools they could use and the staying power.

I think it was apparent, but obviously not seen in real time. So you have to adjust for that and prioritize defenses. One of the things that is a learning disability, if you will, is this saying we're going to shoot the archers and not the arrows.

I love offensive forces, offensive strike, but we've seen time after time since conflicts with either the Iranians or their militias since 2006 in the war that the Iranians fought with Hezbollah and Iranian advisors on the ground in Lebanon, that offenses of forces alone will not suppress the rate of fire with missiles and drones and rockets to a lesser extent from the adversary. Whether that was the 2006 Lebanon war, the wars that the Houthis fought with U.S. allies like the Saudis and the UAE because we didn't learn from the experiences we should have that our allies were going through, the wars that we've now fought in recent times and sometimes conflicts like the 12-day war with the Iranians, suppressive fire alone will not fully suppress the capability of the enemy. You're going to have to defend against it.

And the exchange ratio doesn't favor us. You're right. In the short run, we can do things like surge manned aircraft and manned aviation, still the largest thing that we spend money on, but shifting the character of the force to rely more on missiles ourselves, drones ourselves, and other things we need to do.

And you got to heed the wake-up call. In my opinion, we still haven't. To stick with your sports analogy, you may remember in 1992, we put together the dream team to go win the gold medal in basketball at the Olympics.

And we brought in all of the greatest, perhaps the greatest NBA players in our history, Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan, Charles Barkley, all on one team. And they went to practice against a team of college all-stars and the greatest players ever assembled got beat by a team of college all-stars because they were arrogant and they didn't take their opponents seriously. It's very similar.

We've got the greatest military force assembled, but what we're seeing with the Iranians, you know, for example, the Washington Post story today that discloses much of what we've been hearing prior to that, the hundreds of targets the Iranians have struck with assistance from China and Russia, the number of instances where they have taken out key American

capabilities in the region. We've been saying for a long time this was available. Brilliance is not just found in the United States.

Brilliance is found around the world, and we need to leverage and harness that. And I don't see us organizing. Second thing this policy does is are we organized for success?

At MDAA, for example, we said the Army can't handle defense of these distributed air bases. The Air Force needs to be given the role and responsibility to do that as well. That didn't occur.

As far as I'm aware of, it still hasn't occurred. Have we organized also for the ability to leverage the lessons that the Ukrainians and others have learned? Whose job is that in the United States government?

Why isn't there a general officer that's been impaneled to rapidly assimilate those capabilities and incorporate them into the force? Those services have not devoted their rapid capability organizations to doing this. And I agree with Charlie.

The authorities largely do exist, but one of the clarifying things you can do in crisis is empower someone to cut through that. We had to do that with things like dealing with improvised explosives or fielding MRAPs to the field. Sometimes that doesn't create a whole new organization, but it basically puts together a task force of people whose job it is to rapidly do that.

So I don't see us also changing our policy to allow for essentially experimentation in the field in time of war. The Ukrainians are rapidly inserting capabilities into the theater of operations, iterating them. They are not 100% solutions.

In many cases, not even 80% or 60% is what Mark is talking about. And you have to be able to do that. And we have to change our policies also to allow for failure.

In World War II, as an example, we've surged many generations of capabilities. We started the war at a severe disadvantage versus the Germans and the Japanese and others in the capabilities they had, but we rapidly innovated. Still at the end of the war, in many cases, we're at a disadvantage technically, but we've got 10 times or more as many assets as they do, and we can overwhelm the opposition.

But there was also many programs that didn't succeed, things that were fielded that didn't work right, things that were bought that didn't end up reaching combat. There's a certain error rate that if you have to go fast, and you do in time of need, or you're going to pay for it in blood and the combat losses we're facing, or worse, the strategic defeat that you could be inflicted if you don't take the opponent seriously. Like you said, at halftime, we're reevaluating here, they scored a couple of times.

We don't make real changes and heed the wake-up call, they're going to win the game. You have to take this very seriously. This is a determined adversary, we always knew they would be, and their playbook that they're implementing was well known prior to the conflict.

So, we have to be able to adjust to the nature of the threat that we're facing, make the changes in our policy formulation. I'll close by saying, the Pacific theater of operations and the threat from China is the largest existential threat to the United States. That being said, all of us go through times in our life where we've got to prioritize short-term needs, where we've got to prioritize the fight that we're in today, versus what we know will be a long-term struggle.

And so, we have to make those decisions until the current conflict is over, and as much as I'm not in government, so I can be freer with my tongue, there's a lot of fighting going on during the so-called ceasefire. So, I think we have to be ready to surge now, not next week, not six weeks from now. And we should be borrowing assets from Ukraine.

We should be incorporating things into the force that are 50 percent tried, things of that nature, and doing experimentation in the field. And we have to organize at the component command level, also within the combatant commands. And I'm not, at least from where I sit on the outside, I'm not seeing that, and I'm not seeing the visible advocacy from the policy leadership in addressing these things and leading the change that needs to be implemented.

[Riki Ellison]

Thank you, John. Your successor, (Eldridge) Colby, has been focused on beating China in the Indo-Pacific region. It looks like to the sacrifice of what's happened over there.

How does he change policy right now over the last three weeks? Can he do that? What do you do if you're in that position to do what you just said to be able to support the fight and get the priority into this?

Because as you said in the beginning, it is a China-Russia-Iran fight over here, and China's going to triple whatever we're doing over here to win. Where is the policy initiative? Where are we, policy-wise, to make shift to put defense on number one or equals our offense? Where is that? Is that coming? Is it here? Is it not going to happen?

[Mr. John Rood]

Well, my successor, I'm not familiar with the exact tactics he's employing, but from what I can see from the chair I sit on the outside, I'm not seeing the advocacy or the results from it. Certainly, China is the longest-term existential threat facing the United States. It's not China the country, it's China under the communist leadership of China that has global ambitions that is a threat not only to the United States and our people and property, but our way of life and our belief system.

Certainly, that is the longest-term threat, and that's where we've got to over time adjust our posture. But we're in a hot fight right now, and you have to shift resources, and you have to recognize the nature of the threat. One of the things policy does, whether it's in things like the missile defense review or when you're reviewing the strategy that you need, the prioritization of resource, and also, what's the character of the force you need?

Are you implementing that force? One of the things I was very proud of earlier in my career was leading the fight to put in place missile defenses for the first time to protect the United States, to protect our forces and allies in the theater of operations, and that was previously

seen by policy as prohibited. They sound like very fundamental fights, but you have to take them on.

So here, it's not just defending against drones, but is there a policy that understands the convergence of technology that offense and defense are blending together, and the rate at which autonomous operations, AI-infused things, are allowing rapid innovations? You're seeing the Ukrainians field tens of thousands of autonomous systems for offense and for defense simultaneously. You have to be pushing and saying, are we embracing in our policy, outdated views, the role of that kind of autonomy, the role of those kinds of defense systems?

And I would say, we are. So there has to be some recognition that this has to be done faster and better. But I would also say, when you're leading the policy organization, the Pentagon, really, ultimately, the responsibility rests with the Secretary of Defense for the way that things are operated, in this case, the Secretary of War, as it's called now.

You have to be at the hip with that person, and with the Deputy Secretary, who largely is the Chief Operating Officer in the Pentagon, to be the civilian leadership. When I was there, we operated simultaneously, and frankly, with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. We would have, that was the four people that met on a regular basis to push things through the system.

And I don't know if that same relationship exists, or the same level of advocacy. And you also have to partner with the combatant commanders, because they're the other person, the COCOM leader, in this case, Admiral Cooper, they're the ones calling the shots in terms of what is needed in the actual fight, tactically. And your role as the head of policy is to be joined at the hip, and aiding them, and cutting through the rest of the system. And I don't know if that relationship exists either.

[Riki Ellison]

Yeah, John, but the fact is, is that our old way in policy, on missile defense, roles and responsibility has failed. It's failing. Why don't we have leadership from policy to change the damn roles and responsibilities of this failure to deal with? I just don't see that. We've got COCOMs creating automated commands. Where is that in policy? Where is policy on any of this? And here we are, at the point, people are getting killed, losing billions of dollars and stuff. And yet, policy is not a voice yet on reshaping this, because the warfighters can't do this without that type of shape, and directive from a civilian in charge of policy to enable us the best way to fight our defensive side of things. It's shocking that we're not addressing this. Go ahead, help me on this.

[Mr. John Rood]

Well, it just feels like from afar that we're definitely not operating at the speed of relevance, and we're not operating like we're at war, which we are. And so, I mean, point one, you've got to be the loudest voice in the room making those kinds of points. But secondly here, in terms of roles and responsibilities, as I mentioned, we advocated as a policy matter from MDA that the Air Force be given the authorities and the ability to defend their bases from air attack, whether that missile or drone or cruise missile.

Things like that are not occurring. And also, are we organized right to go after it? As an example, earlier in my career, a policy matter I was heavily involved in was the creation of the Missile Defense Agency, the idea that we needed a single integrating entity to rapidly field capabilities to the field.

And I'll tell you, three years after we founded that organization, we had a missile defense system operational for the United States to defend ourselves, for the first time in our history. So, policy decisions like that can make a big difference. And it is acquisition policy, and there are other people.

I don't know, I mean, that part. But don't forget, though, that the chain of command runs for the operation in the theater, from Commander Central Command to the Secretary of Defense, not even through the deputy. And so, the Commander CENTCOM has to be recognizing the threat and advocating for the forces that he needs through the allocation.

There are forces around the world. It's always a zero-sum game where they are at. But unless and until Commander CENTCOM is requesting them, the guy who's saying what I need to win the fight, they will not be allocated.

And then secondly, you've got to have other people playing their supporting roles. And one of the roles of policy is evaluating, well, where are the assets most needed? Because combatant commanders always want more assets than, frankly, exist or can realistically be.

There's always competing demands, and helping adjudicate those things is something that the Joint Staff plays the principal role in. But ultimately, those decisions are made by the civilian leadership, the Secretary of War in this case. But rapid acquisition policy, trying to rapidly incorporate, for example, the traditional role has been policy lead, the assistance, providing assistance to allies with security assistance.

But you're also the principal interface to incorporate lessons learned, to bring the allies into the fight. And one of the things I'm also not seeing is we've got to get back to fundamentals here. We have not fought as a coalition with our allies. We have not effectively incorporated them into this war. We are, in some ways, very grudging and dismissing of their contributions. We don't have to do all of this ourselves. There's brilliance around the world that we can use both as a coalition and to learn from it. And I don't see us doing that.

[Riki Ellison]

Okay, thank you, John. All right, we're going to wrap it up. But Charlie, I just want everybody to go around. You're either going to be the head coach or the defensive coordinator, and you're going to give us what you're going to do in the second half and what you're going to make your team do. So, Charlie, thanks for taking the time to have this discussion. It's a great discussion.

[GEN (Ret.) Charlie Flynn]

Yeah, great, Riki. Thanks. It was great listening to John and Mark, as always.

I guess what I would say is, you know, I'll go back to my comments early on here. First of all, I think the authorities are there. I think John's point, I think there's probably some commander to secretary to policy discussion that needs to go on.

And then I'm going to wrap Mark's commentary in as, like, grab those lessons from our activities and our allies and bring those forward into that theory of operations and say, we're going to put these things in place. And start with a very short list. Like, just pick up five examples that, you know, I mentioned one earlier in the cast.

Get five examples and say, we're going to put those in place. And that will thicken our defense. That will add a layer.

That will enhance our protection capabilities. And that would be my answer to your halftime adjustments.

[Riki Ellison]

Thanks, Charlie. Thanks for your time. Mark?

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

You know, just sitting here in Ukraine, I'll just reiterate, there's an opportunity here. We can still get stuff from here. We can work with them.

U.S. companies can come over here and partner with them. The Ukrainians are starting to change their laws to allow sales in the United States. We've got to get the C2 right.

Eventually, things that get fired in the air with explosives on them generally need to be deconflicted with things that are flying with our pilots riding in them, right? We don't want one hitting the other. So we got to get at that.

I would say there's some exigent circumstances now that tell me we should get some of the better ground-based drone interceptors down there. And then that's number one. And number two, we need to really make sure we got advanced persistent kill weapon system up there.

Almost if a guy's going downtown for a strike, he still, you know, if we can put a couple APWS on the way back, he can whack drones that he comes across. But anyway, that's something for us to think about, work on. But I am nervous like you.

I'm probably not quite as passionate about it only because, generally, as the military guys, we got to look at the risk, evaluate it, understand it, and then mitigate it, not eliminate it. A very few times, I doubt Charlie in his career either ever said to himself, well, all the risk is eliminated. That's just not one of the solutions you end on.

But what you want to do is mitigate it down so the risk to force is balanced with the risk to mission and justifies the success you're going to achieve from the mission. And so, you know, that's kind of how I look at it. Thanks for the chance.

[Riki Ellison]

Mark, before you go, any questions on the playbook or on the policy of this thing or on the time? We look at roles and responsibilities. We look at this playbook and scheme on how you win games, because it doesn't look like this is the way to do it if we're going to take on China.

[RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery]

We got to get this fixed. Look, China, again, China is not 10 feet tall. We're going to get, I'm not, I worry about China for lots of reasons. Drones is like down the list. It's there. It's down the list. It's there. But I worry more there about that high-end stuff where you say we took it out, like, you know, long-range anti-ship ballistic missiles that target our aircraft carriers with MIRVing multiple warheads coming in on them. That stuff worries me. And that's something that the big five companies are working on. And right now, it requires a high-end solution, at least for now.

[Mr. John Rood]

Riki, just to jump in for a minute. Unfortunately, we're a little over time, and I'm going to have to unplug, but thank you so much for having me on. No, I'll just say, look, I think the key thing is recognizing that we have a problem here.

And then secondly, I would empanel some people and empower them to be working with the Ukrainians to rapidly incorporate those capabilities into our force, to rapidly incorporate lessons learned elsewhere in the world, and also putting in place the right people on the staffs and the teams that their whole day's job is figuring out how to accelerate rapid fielding for experimentation into the field and understanding that we are in a tough situation. Don't get away from the hubris that, you know, this is going to be over tomorrow. Over-plan, over-prepare, so that we can be assured of victory. Anyways, thanks for having me, excuse me, Riki. I'm going to sign off.

[Riki Ellison]

Thanks. I appreciate that, John. I appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you, Charlie. Thank you, Mark.

My final thoughts are we're going to have to change our scheme and our capabilities. And that's going to be the long term that we have to now dedicate with a new game plan and new roles and responsibilities, a new priority. That's not going to happen in three weeks, but that is the projection.

The next three weeks or when this thing goes, we have to take risk. We have to take risk. What's there to lose?

What's there to lose, not taking risk, is Americans dying. You have to take risk putting stuff in. And we have to get that cheap stuff in from everywhere else coming in, which means you need to have an open C2 that can fit all these foreign systems and have those foreign systems cover the flats.

We need the Arab states covering the flats in front of our fence lines. It's not about just in the fence lines. And this should be the way to break it. We've got this game. We have to make change. And we cannot, cannot not do anything and let the offense win the second half. That's bullshit. And we're going to fight to get this right. And if it's policy, if it's urgency, it's got to be prioritized.

And the time is now like no other in the history of our country with missile defense, like no other. So I'm looking forward to making change and seeing change happen. Thank you for joining us today.

Appreciate it. Have a great day. Thank you.