PANEL 2 TRANSCRIPT (EDITORIAL RECONSTRUCTION)
PART I (Pages 1–6)

MR. TOM GOFFUS:

The Air Force has been running hot and cold on leadership and on whether we really want this. The Army doesn't want to give up the TOE. This is a two-way problem. First, the Army doesn't want to give up the TOE. Second, the Air Force doesn't want to use its TOE for this mission instead of its other priorities.

Nobody is coming. There is no cavalry here. That's what they were telling me.

Then I watched senior leaders pick that up and say the same thing. They know there's something we need to fix here. Trying to fix that is one of the hard problems.

The reason I call it a structural misalignment is because it creates too many seams. We have documented failures, including three F-15Es being shot down. People were trying to do their jobs, but we also had another problem. The Ukrainians pointed this out directly.

I met with the people who went down and helped establish the Sky System there. They were appalled by the number of different operational pictures that were not synchronized.

They asked, "What are you guys doing?"

We're behind where they are in terms of sharing data. If I can put it in very blunt terms, this is fundamentally a data-sharing problem. They do it better than we do, and we have something to learn from that.

Part of the issue is that mismatched operational pictures increase the burn rate of our most precious and expensive munitions. Those are all things we need to fix.

Ukraine was my example because we actually have a case study. Nearly 80 percent of air defense forces worldwide are not part of an air force. Most belong to another service or to a separate service entirely.

The exceptions are Russia and China.

Because Ukraine inherited the Soviet model, if you have an air installation, you also own the surface-to-air missiles protecting it. The air commander owns everything. There is no split.

I would say their success has been pretty significant. They've taken a lot of damage, but none of their bases have been completely destroyed. They're still functional whenever and wherever they can be used.

The decisive factor is that the same air commander controls both the aircraft and the surface-to-air missile brigades protecting them.

What got added to that equation was the complexity of drones, saturation attacks, cruise missiles, glide bombs, and ballistic missiles. Quite honestly, anybody in our system would have struggled with that.

The one area where the Ukrainians are really hurting is ballistic missile defense.

President Zelensky made a point—perhaps somewhat hyperbolically—that in the first three days of Operation Midnight Hammer they fired more Patriot interceptors than Ukraine had received over years of war.

Whether the numbers are exact isn't the point. The point is the scale of the challenge.

This is a new problem. Their system adapted relatively quickly, and they're doing fairly well under extremely difficult circumstances.

It's not perfect, but it is an example worth examining.

When I look at that seamless structure, I'm not saying every capability necessarily belongs under one organization, but we need a serious examination of who the responsible components should be. Right now, we have our greatest opportunity for change in seven decades.

Why?

Golden Dome. Space Force.

Where are the sensors for all this? Most of them belong to the Air Force and increasingly to the Space Force. Soon, we're talking about space-based interceptors as well.

To me, that suggests we should be reconsidering where all of this belongs organizationally.

Who's protecting Space Force bases? The Air Force.

Having all of this under one leader provides an opportunity to eliminate some of those seams.

We'll still have seams with the Space Force, and we'll have to work through those, but what I don't want is for us to spend the next two- or three-years baking today's structural misalignment into the next generation of air and missile defense.

Because that's exactly what we're on track to do.

MR. RIKI ELLISON:

Thank you, Tom.

One question and one comment.

The Air Force leadership is meeting this week, and they're discussing, for the first time, creating an air defense branch that would organize, train, and equip personnel to defend air bases against drones, counter-UAS threats, and possibly cruise missiles.

Can you comment on that?

MR. TOM GOFFUS:

They're going to have a fight on their hands because fighter communities don't necessarily want to spend money on that mission.

My concern is that if you only solve part of the problem, you're still left with a larger integration challenge.

Where does ballistic missile defense fit?

Where do Patriot and THAAD fit?

You can't just solve half of the problem.

That creates another integration layer above it that still has to be managed.

To me, this comes from watching multiple U.S. European Command and Indo-Pacific Command air component commanders wrestle with this issue and effectively tell me:

"Nobody's coming to help us. We have to figure this out ourselves."

They've been exploring different ways to do that.

In some respects, this is almost the inverse of the Key West Agreement. Key West began with anti-aircraft artillery, and now we're discussing returning portions of that mission to the Air Force while leaving the rest in the ground forces.

I don't see how that works cleanly.

We need some innovation here.

I'm going to leave the IBCS discussion to Mark because he's spent a lot more time thinking about that problem than I have.

GEN. (RET.) CHARLIE FLYNN:

Integrating all of this is one of the hardest challenges we've faced.

But what's your answer?

If the air commander is effectively the ship captain—as I think both you and Riki suggested—what's the answer for roles and responsibilities?

Who owns ballistic missile defense? Who owns THAAD? What's the command relationship?

MR. TOM GOFFUS:

My answer is the Ukrainian model.

I would give it to the air component commander and tell him:

"You're responsible for all of it."

That means the interceptors, the sensors, and the command-and-control architecture all belong within one integrated framework.

Instead of having separate C2 structures and separate sensor networks, you integrate them so they can be employed together.

With the Space Force becoming increasingly important, I think that integration matters even more.

I would realign the roles and responsibilities accordingly.

The Air Force would be responsible.

That includes the space-related assets supporting the mission.

That includes future space-based interceptors.

I would even realign the Missile Defense Agency and place it under an air-focused structure.

That's where I would go.

If I were king for a day—which isn't happening anytime soon—doing this cleanly would still be one of the hardest organizational reforms we've undertaken in a generation.

MR. RIKI ELLISON:

Thank you, Tom.

Mark, from the Navy perspective—and from your broader experience—what's your view?

RADM (RET.) MARK MONTGOMERY:

First, it's a real pleasure to be here with Tom and Charlie. They're good friends.

I describe this as a three-body problem.

The first problem is organizational.

The second is procurement.

The third is conceptual.

There is no single service responsible for this failure. It is a collective failure of the system.

You cannot pretend this wasn't foreseeable.

Organizations like the Missile Defense Agency have been warning about this for years. I've testified before Congress multiple times saying this was coming.

The only thing that surprises me is the lack of attention being paid to the tactical failures we've seen over the last several months.

That doesn't necessarily mean the campaign failed operationally.

But tactically, things happened that simply should not happen to U.S. forces.

The organizational failure begins at the department level.

We assigned the risk of attack against air assets to the Air Force but assigned much of the responsibility for defending them to the Army.

Historically, joint forces handle joint responsibilities, but we failed to think through how emerging threats would affect that arrangement.

MR. RIKI ELLISON:

Congress can't fix this alone. The Department of Defense can't fix it alone. Everyone has a role.

But it starts with the Department of Defense.

Congress can help. Congress is a necessary part of the solution. But we do have to revisit roles and responsibilities, and we have to think carefully about how we organize and resource this mission.

What I'm really asking is simple: think about it.

That's all.

Think about it.

Because we haven't thought about it.

Mark, I know you've got to leave, but thank you for being here.

GEN. (RET.) CHARLIE FLYNN:

As Mark is heading out, I want to build on a point he raised about organization.

Between roughly 2004 and 2007, the Army essentially dissolved its short-range air defense capability.

It went away.

Why?

Because for twenty years in the Middle East, we never looked up and worried about what was flying overhead. Everything overhead was friendly.

When I was later serving in Army G-3 and we started rebuilding SHORAD capabilities, I made the comment that it took us about three years to dismantle the entire short-range air defense branch, but it would take ten to fifteen years to rebuild it.

When I came into the Army, we had SHORAD systems everywhere. We had Chaparral. We had Vulcan. We had Stinger. These systems existed throughout the force.

As Mark said, they were lined up across Europe during the Cold War.

When you think about today's threats—drones, cruise missiles, counter-UAS systems, and low-altitude attacks—we're talking about capabilities that cannot be recreated overnight.

This was an entire branch within Air Defense Artillery.

Some personnel stayed focused on Patriot and THAAD. Others remained in short-range air defense.

Those formations were integrated into maneuver forces.

So organizationally, we didn't wake up one day and decide to eliminate SHORAD.

We were directed toward other priorities.

The Army looked for capabilities it could harvest in order to support those priorities.

SHORAD became one of those capabilities.

Now we're paying the price.

GEN. (RET.) CHARLIE FLYNN (continuing):

On the structural misalignment issue, I would differ slightly from Tom.

I agree there is a structural problem.

However, I believe the primary purpose of an air commander is to generate airpower.

His focus should be on generating sorties, maintaining aircraft, fueling, arming, rearming, planning operations, synchronizing ISR, integrating tankers, coordinating collection efforts, and generating combat effects through the air domain.

His primary focus should not be defending the airfield itself.

That terrain—the airfield, the airhead, the infrastructure—should be defended by forces whose profession is defense.

That leads to the third point: culture.

Tom is absolutely right that we have cultural issues.

The Army's instinct is maneuver.

We're trained to maneuver.

We're trained to attack.

But defense is also a form of maneuver, especially in today's operational environment.

I'll give you an example.

Several times in the Pacific, I participated in discussions regarding Agile Combat Employment.

The Air Force would disperse aircraft across numerous locations and then generate airpower from those locations.

I would ask:

"What do you need from land forces?"

The answer was always the same.

Fuel.

Ammunition.

Force protection.

So we began developing concepts to support agile combat employment.

The air commander generates airpower.

The land commander protects the infrastructure necessary to generate that airpower.

That means airfield defense.

Critical infrastructure defense.

Point defense.

Area defense.

Layered defense.

These are missions Army leaders have been trained to perform since they were second lieutenants and young sergeants.

I don't see the Army being absorbed into the Air Force because it helps protect air bases.

I see the Army providing capabilities the joint force requires.

The air commander should focus on generating airpower.

The land commander should focus on protecting the airpower-generating apparatus.

That's where I come down.

GEN. (RET.) CHARLIE FLYNN (continuing):

The third issue is culture.

Our tendency is to say, "That's defense. We need to get back on offense."

Well, maybe.

But if the joint force needs us to defend, then we defend.

If the joint force needs us to protect critical infrastructure, then we protect critical infrastructure.

That's our responsibility.

This is where the Department of Defense, Congress, the Joint Chiefs, and the services all have responsibilities.

We need to hold organizations accountable for the missions they're assigned.

And I would argue that defending infrastructure in the land domain is something the Army is trained, educated, and organized to do.

Now, I recognize my service bias.

Everyone likes to cut Army capabilities until they need them.

Then suddenly everyone asks where those capabilities went.

That's exactly what happened with short-range air defense.

People said we didn't need it.

Then several years later they realized we absolutely needed it.

The problem is that rebuilding a capability takes much longer than dismantling it.

MR. RIKI ELLISON:

Let me push back on that.

You just described who should be responsible, but who is actually accountable?

I watched video from one of these attacks.

Two Shahed drones separated by just a few seconds.

A young sergeant can be heard yelling:

"They're going for the radars. They're going for the radars."

Moments later the radars are destroyed.

Then the follow-on attacks target the aircraft, fuel farms, ammunition storage, and support infrastructure.

So who's accountable?

Who decides where radars go?

Who decides where weapons systems go?

Who determines priorities?

Who owns the integrated defense?

GEN. (RET.) CHARLIE FLYNN:

That's exactly the point.

When you defend something, you have to decide where you're going to kill the enemy.

You establish engagement areas.

You establish target reference points.

You coordinate sensors and weapons.

Defense is not easy.

In fact, defense is one of the most demanding missions a ground commander can perform. I've done it.

You don't sleep.

You're constantly evaluating threats, adjusting positions, and reassessing priorities.

This is not something most Air Force officers spend their careers doing.

That's not a criticism.

It's simply a different profession.

My point is that somebody needs to be designated as responsible for defending air bases and critical infrastructure.

That responsibility needs to be written down.

It needs to be resourced.

And it needs to be enforced. Right now, too many organizations are involved, and responsibility becomes diffused. Everybody owns a piece of it. Which often means nobody truly owns it.

If we're serious about solving this problem, we need to answer a simple question:

Who defends air bases?

Who defends critical infrastructure?

What service receives the resources to perform that mission?

And once we've answered those questions, we hold that organization accountable.

Because right now, everyone is pointing at someone else.

That doesn't help us learn the lessons we need to learn.

And it certainly doesn't help us prepare for the next fight.