

**Senator Jack Reed**  
**Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee**

**Defense Writers Group**  
**Project for Media and National Security**  
**George Washington School of Media and Public Affairs**

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**Moderator:** Welcome everyone to this Defense Writers Group with Senator Jack Reed who we all know is Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Senator Reed's meetings with us are really one of the highlights of the year.

The ground rules are as always. This meeting is on the record, but there's no rebroadcast of audio or video. I'll ask the first question. A number of you have already emailed in advance to ask for questions. I'll go through those first. If anyone else wants to ask a question please drop a note in direct chat to let me know.

With that, Senator Reed, one note. More than 45 reporters RSVP'd, one of our biggest groups ever which shows the great interest in your comments today, sir. So thank you for joining us.

**Senator Reed:** My pleasure, Thom. Thank you.

**Moderator:** The first question, sir, many national security challenges present themselves and demand attention, whether it's the Chinese surveillance balloon or the horrible war in Ukraine. But as Chairman of this very important committee, you're about to convene them for the new session. What are your priorities and what issues would you like the committee to pursue in the coming year, sir?

**Senator Reed:** I think there are four broad categories.

First is reimagining how we fight. We are in a tremendously dynamic situation where technology's changing rapidly, techniques are changing rapidly, operational issues. We are truly multi-dimensional. Space is a key aspect of our operations today. Not so much years ago when I was a company commander. The electronic spectrum, how do we operate? All of that has to be reimagined and integrated. Our experience in Ukraine is giving us insights for this transformation.

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Of course that means, number two, [best define] the mission. We have to get equipment that is capable of operating effectively. In fact we have to stay ahead of the competition in this regard. That requires research, investment, and also requires developing production operations and techniques that get the equipment out the door in time.

I think that goes to another issue in competitiveness, our industrial base. We've seen particularly with Ukraine the fact that our previous planning didn't really anticipate massive artillery duels, the actions we're seeing in Ukraine. We operated from a position of thinking that our industrial base was rather complete. That we had sufficient resources we thought for the near future of battle, near peer battle, et cetera. We have to look at that again.

Finally, but probably most importantly, we've got to sustain our warfighters. The key difference between our forces and the other forces are the quality of the men and women, particularly our noncommissioned officers. We're seeing a little of that in Ukraine. Starting in 2014 we began to train Ukrainian forces, and the emphasis was to get away from the old Soviet model where there's no real leadership at the junior ranks. It comes from above. And to develop noncommissioned officers and junior officers who are very capable. That was 2014. Eight years on I think we've seen the effectiveness of that training on the way that the Ukrainians can fight in a decentralized way with great initiative and great ingenuity. But that's the quality we have to preserve and expand in our forces too.

So those are the areas I'd like to see.

**Moderator:** Thanks, Senator.

The first question from the floor goes to Tony Bertuca of Inside Defense.

**DWG:** Senator, thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate it.

According to OMB you will have the President's budget request on March 9<sup>th</sup>. The recent NDAA authorized \$850 billion for national defense spending. That was around \$45 billion more than President Biden initially requested.

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What level of spending do you think is appropriate for FY24? And what sort of challenges do you expect working with your House counterpart on this given the debate among Republicans?

**Senator Reed:** I think first, obviously, we're going to wait to see what the President does. Then take his budget, as we did last year, and see where we need to respond to threats and to accelerate modernization and do a host of other things. And every budget presents very tough, difficult challenges.

Mike Rogers is somebody who I've worked with and who I think is an extraordinarily thoughtful gentleman, and we'll work not among ourselves but also with my colleague, the ranking member [inaudible] and also our appropriators -- on our side, Betty Moran, Susan Collins are very, very competent, capable, extremely talented people. And Susan also is going to be the ranking member of the Defense Subcommittee. So she has a vested interest in adequate defense numbers.

The tendency has been over the past several years to go higher than the President. I think that pressure to go higher will be there, but we hope we can come up with something that reflects the needs, not just some arbitrary number that we pick out because it looks impressive.

**DWG:** As a quick follow-up, there is a lot more discussion on the Republican side, if not to cut defense outright, to find savings there. Some of the things I'm hearing over and over are let's suggest a BRAC. Let's cut weapons programs the Pentagon doesn't want. Let's cut unrequested research and development that always ends up in the bill.

What do you make of those suggestions? Should we expect something like a BRAC to --

**Senator Reed:** I think we should expect those types of proposals. I can recall several years ago when Senator McCain and I were interested in getting a BRAC and we honestly couldn't get much traction. But I think that's something that we should periodically look at. We've had infrastructure in place now for many years since the last BRAC and years before that. So we have to look at that.

There are other areas that we can look at. Last year the Navy

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asked us to retire eight LCSes. We in the Senate decided four was the right number. The House was not quite as understanding about the vision and we came together with two. But looking at systems that are no longer effective, looking at facilities that are no longer effective. All of that has to be done and I hope we can do it.

**Moderator:** Thanks, Senator.

Next is Tony Capaccio of Bloomberg.

**DWG:** A non-balloon question. On Navy ships, the General Accounting Office last week came out with a fairly devastating report about how over the last decade Navy ships' steaming times have gone down while breakdowns and slow repairs accelerate. The Senate and the House have chronically over the last decade added ships. Might this report shift the debate to the Navy needs to maintain what they have versus receive more than what they requested?

**Senator Reed:** I think the report which I read and was impressed with in terms of the coverage and also the topics. I think what we have to do is step back and look at our old Navy repair base. The shipyards, the drydocks, etc. I don't think we have sufficient capacity.

And then I think after we've done that analysis, and as I mentioned before in the previous question, we look at whether we have excess capacity or ineffective capacity within our ships. But I think the premise that the article had was appropriate, rather than having an arbitrary number, we want ships that are ready to sail today or within a prompt call to service. And we should put more resources into doing that. I think that's one of the objectives of this year's defense committee -- how do we help the Navy accomplish that? How do we use existing facilities? How do we expand facilities that need expansion? What's the excess capacity in the shipyard business, both the government shipyards and private shipyards. And we have to start being better at maximizing our access to repair [inaudible].

**DWG:** What area of the industrial base has been exposed most seriously by the Ukraine, by the need to accelerate Ukraine production?

**Senator Reed:** I think the most obvious one is munitions. The

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incredible expenditure of artillery rounds have been difficult in terms of our manufacturers, but we are ramping up very quickly, not wasting time. We provided incentives last year in the National Defense Bill and funds to go out and accelerate our provision of artillery rounds, particularly. And then there's also more sophisticated weapon systems like the Stinger missile which is a tremendous asset. Javelins, etc. Those take a little bit longer.

But I think the whole area of artillery and missiles are one that's been most sort of affected by the Ukrainian crisis.

**Moderator:** The next question is Felicia Schwartz of the Financial Times.

**DWG:** Thanks so much for doing this.

On the balloon front, I know that Senator Schumer said you guys would receive a briefing next week but I'm wondering if you've received any information up until this point, and I guess what your kind of key outstanding questions are.

And then a separate one, I think nearly a year into Russia's war on Ukraine I'm wondering how do you assess the threat of Russian escalation, particularly nuclear at this point.

**Senator Reed:** In terms of the balloon, I became aware of it last week as most people did. And then I thought the President's conduct was extremely appropriate. They can actually get probably more information from the satellites that are already flying above us than a balloon, so it's very difficult to determine why they did this.

I think one of the key factors we have to look at it is what was the point and who ordered it? This could be one of those situations where this was not a policy decision made by Xi, but something below. I think we have to look at that.

I had a conversation with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff over the weekend. I think the conduct, as I said before, of the administration, first they identified it, then they tracked it, they disguised any type of activities on the ground that they didn't want to reveal, and then they shot it down and now we're recovering the parts.

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At the end of the day we'll probably gain more intelligence from this operation than the Chinese, which makes them look kind of, pick a term, but it's an awkward moment for the Chinese, I think. And that's the way I think we should do it.

With respect to your second question, the use of escalation in Russia. I think the Russian strategy at this point is with sheer mass and very little military skill to try to attack along a very long battle front and try a breakthrough for both the publicity and also to stress and disrupt the anticipated offensive by the Ukrainians later in the spring. The Ukrainians are fighting fiercely. I think they will hold. And then I think they will conduct their operations and we hope successfully, particularly with the armored vehicles -- they have a combined arms team, they have armored infantry and artillery. They can not only break through, we hope, but also exploit the breakthrough.

Again, I think the use of nuclear weapons is always something we have to be conscious of. It's not, you know, redlines are an interesting issue but I think the line's never quite that bright or quite that obvious and there's multiple factors. But just generally speaking if there was a collapse of the Russian Army, if basically they were non-functional and were retreating en masse or surrendering en masse, that might prompt a discussion, I don't know if it would prompt an immediate reaction but a discussion. If the Ukrainians made progress towards Crimea or were entering Crimea, I think that's another area where the discussion would heat up tremendously within the Kremlin. Also other attacks on the territory of Russia.

I wish it was almost like arithmetic, you add one plus one and you get two; or you add X plus Y and you get nuclear reactions. It's not that easy.

**Moderator:** Thank you, Senator. Now I'm not going to sleep tonight, obviously.

The next question is Bryant Harris of Defense News.

**DWG:** Thank you so much, Senator.

I wanted to ask about your counterpart Senator Wicker related to Ukraine. He's pushing the administration to send ATACMs, F-16s, Reaper drones. I'm wondering where you stand on that.

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And related to that, you just addressed this in the last question a bit, but the administration is starting to mull this question of if the opportunity presents itself, that the US try to help Ukraine retain Crimea, if that's even feasible. So I'm wondering if you could weigh in on one, the feasibility of it; and two, you sort of touched on this in the last question, but whether or not you think that's a good idea. Thank you so much.

**Senator Reed:** Thank you.

Senator Wicker, [inaudible] support for our efforts in Ukraine. He's strongly supportive. And this bipartisan support is something that is necessary. I salute him for doing that.

I have called for, indeed even when I was in Ukraine, I called for the commitment of ATACMs. The basic rationale is that the range limitations on the GMLR is such that the ATACM can hit back further. What the Russians have done is they've moved back some of their command and control centers and depots to avoid the GMLR range. So we have to get longer range systems in.

We just sent a new system in which has a longer range. It has a longer range than the GMLR. Not quite as far as the ATACM. But it represents what we have to do. And again, my point is really not so much a particular system, it's a particular effect, i.e., disrupting their command and control and their supplies which is critical to a successful military operation.

With respect to Crimea, that's one of those issues that we know is out there, it's a very, very sensitive issue on all sides. I think though, before we can sort of think seriously about that we have to get through this next several months. It is a very successful operation by the Ukrainians. They are putting tremendous pressure and subjecting Russian forces to serious losses. There's also what we have to never forget. There has to be at least a back channel discussion about when do we stop this fighting? When do we go ahead and reach a point where we can with confidence cease military operations and start rebuilding Ukraine. That's a tricky political/diplomatic issue but that's something I hope that this military operation will produce. But the sensitive issues like Crimea are out there. I don't think they're immediate in the next several weeks, but they're out there.

**Moderator:** The next question is Jeff Schogol of Task & Purpose.

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**DWG:** Thank you. I just wanted to follow up on a question from my colleague, Tony Capaccio. Not only is the Navy struggling to get ships underway, and not only does the Navy have a problem with ships being stuck in shipyards, but the Chinese now have a much bigger navy and issues that caused the 2017 ship collisions may or may not have been resolved.

How and why has Congress let the Navy fall so far? Is it apathy? Or do you feel there's a lack of understanding in Congress about what seapower is and the importance of the Navy? Thank you.

**Senator Reed:** I think Congress grasps the importance of the Navy, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. I think what we have tried to emphasize is that the advantages to our Navy will be through several factors. One, the ability of our Navy to operate as a joint force. Not just naval ships, but Air Force aviation, Army support, the Marine Corps support, operate with that kind of jointness all from multidimensional in space, under the sea. And in fact one of the great and most successful aspects of our naval presence in the Pacific is the submarine. Our attack submarines move everywhere and they are extremely effective, and I think they're the most significant deterrent we have. And those attack submarines are constantly being improved. And we are investing a great deal of money not only in the Virginia class attack submarines but also in the new Columbia that will be our ballistic missile replacement.

I think the other aspect too is that we understand that ultimately our strength can be multiplied by partnerships and that's why the concept of AUKUS, interoperability, sharing intelligence, being able ideally, getting information from an Australian or Japanese source that we can filter instantaneously to a shooter -- ship or plane or land-based. That's what we're working on.

So I think again, this does not represent some type of ignoring of the Navy, it's really trying to transform it, make it more comparable to the exigencies they face.

The issue of shipbuilding, the issue of maintenance and repair is serious and we're going to have to delve into that. Not just talk about it, but do something. And it will require I think a combined effort between our private companies and our public yards.



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**DWG:** Is it time for the Congress to put the Navy into some sort of receivership when it comes to shipbuilding and take over the program? To quote Senator Romney, to let Detroit go bankrupt on this issue.

**Senator Reed:** No, I don't think the Congress would be the best organization to run the shipbuilding programs of the United States Navy. I think what we are best at doing is not only challenging but through continuous oversight affecting a change in behavior of the Navy so that they are able to organize, together with private industry, a partnership that is effective and that produces the kind of ships we need and keeps them at sea. That's what we've got to be doing.

We can be criticized too, frankly, for not doing enough over the last several years to give them the tools and to also, as I mentioned before, the Navy made a request to eliminate eight LCS. Congress thought four would be in order, the Senate. And then there were ultimately two that we're retiring. Four that we're retiring, I believe. So we're doing our part, or trying to do our part, but we have to cooperate with the Navy.

**Moderator:** The next question is Rebecca Kheel with Military.com.

**DWG:** Thank you for doing this. I've got to ask another balloon question.

Do you think the visibility, the literal visibility of the balloon changed the American public's perception of the threat from China? And if so, do you think that will spur Congress to do anything legislatively that it might not otherwise have been willing to? Things like, for example, changing the strategic ambiguity toward Taiwan or anything else in that lane?

**Senator Reed:** I think [inaudible] was, quite obviously made a great deal of difference. As has been reported, there were three intrusions by balloons during the Trump administration. They were not aware of it and nothing was done. And it was not even an issue because it never made the news. But once you see a big white object in the sky on CNN, then suddenly it's the topic of conversation everywhere. And I think when it makes Saturday Night Live you know you've got an issue that has a real resonance in the American people.

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But stepping back away from the incident and looking down at what we have to do, one is that I think the President handled it very well. We identified it, it was made public to the American people, there was no attempt to hide it. The administration, the President knew about it immediately. He was situationally aware. And then they took steps to minimize whatever intelligence it could gather and then they destroyed it. Shut it down, I should say, because we're going to recover a great deal of the equipment. So I think it was handled very well.

The question now is what as the motivation? Who ordered it by the Chinese? What were they trying to accomplish? What does that signal to us about the Chinese relationship? I think based on that analysis we can take steps. I don't think it goes to the point of changing basic policy, I think people work in terms of how more effective we can be in denying any access to our airspace by China or anyone else.

**DWG:** On the question of effectiveness, of course NORAD has said those previous balloon incursions were not detected in real time. Is there a capability gap we have there that Congress needs to look at filling?

**Senator Reed:** We'll certainly look at that, but I think the latest incident was picked up very quickly and transmitted to the President and the National Security team very, very quickly. But that's something we obviously want to check.

Again, I think the reaction specifically to the balloon is to ensure that no objects can enter our airspace without being discovered in a reasonably adequate time.

**Moderator:** The next question goes to Marc Selinger of Jane's.

**DWG:** Thank you for doing this.

I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what the US can do to help Ukraine become maybe more self-reliant in terms of building weapon systems. Is there anything the US is doing now and anything it could be doing additionally to help them?

**Senator Reed:** I think one of the most obvious issues is that they are under tremendous and constant bombardment from the air. It's directed primarily at their electrical system because it's part of the plan of the Russians to destroy their industry and

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freeze out their people literally during the wintertime. It also represents a horrific attack on civilians.

But I think given the disruption of infrastructure in Ukraine it's going to be difficult for them to start assembling equipment and rebuilding for now. They've shown a great ingenuity in taking the equipment that we've given them and keeping it running. So they're using their mechanical skills and their ingenuity to keep systems going, to tie systems together, to improvise. They're doing all those things. I think setting up assembly lines is something, though, that's beyond them at the moment simply because of the constant air attack and the ability of the Russians through satellites and other surveillance activities to identify a major production center. So that I think is the situation.

**Moderator:** The next question is Jen DiMascio of Aviation Week.

**DWG:** Thank you, Senator Reed, for talking with us today.

I wanted to revisit a bit of the point you made at the beginning which was the need to modernize the joint force and reach for more technology. How do you balance that with these concerns about maintenance on the low end and replenishing the force with a lot of the equipment and munitions that we're sending forward?

**Senator Reed:** It is a constant tradeoff by the military and by Congress, frankly. We have legacy systems that are critical. They have to be maintained. And then we want new systems to come in. In fact one of the ironies is that, I won't say an advantage, but the difference that the Chinese face is that they didn't have much of a legacy system. It was pretty primitive. So when they're investing in new equipment, that's basically, that's their whole, entire stockpile. And to a degree, the Russians also, the equipment of the Soviet Union are basically rotting at the pier side, submarines and other places. So some of their new equipment, they don't balance off that much with older equipment, although they do have a lot, a lot of old tanks in the inventory.

But we're constantly trying to strike this balance. First it's driven by operational objective. What's the most important thing? Second, with respect to the newer equipment, it's driven by the science and also the difficulties of producing breakthrough equipment, novel equipment, the changes you have to

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make. So there are tensions on that side too.

But this again, is something that we're constantly looking at and it's something that there are successes. I think one example of a successful system that has modernized our Army is the HIMARS. We've been for years chasing different canon systems and discovered that this missile system is probably a lot better than the old Howitzers. The 102 Howitzers, and they're very effective in Ukraine.

So we have a series of successes. Sometimes you don't even appreciate it, but we do have to be conscious of this tradeoff. It is absolutely critical.

**DWG:** I wanted to ask specifically about transferring F-16s to Ukraine and what your thoughts were on that.

**Senator Reed:** I think you have to evaluate the equipment in many different ways. One, can it be used effectively? That often includes the training of the personnel using it. Can it be maintained effectively? Will it make a critical difference in the fight?

One of the issues that I look at is that the Ukrainians have jet aircraft right now. Russian models that they use. They fly them infrequently because the airspace is not permissive. It's extremely difficult to get up in the air. Literally what they do is take off and fly at tree-top levels until they reach their target, then they bounce up to the safest place they can drop the ordnance, drop it and then get back. They've lost some pilots doing that.

So you have to ask yourself, what would the F-16 add? They're not going to be able to take advantage of its range, its altitude and those things because the airspace is not at all permissive.

So I think it's something that we have to continue to consider, but at this juncture I don't think that's the most pressing need for the Ukrainian forces. I think ammunition, obviously. Fighting vehicles. The tanks I think are going to be decisive. Better and more indirect fire. The longer range rocket system that's going over there for the HIMARS. All of that I think is going to be an immediate impact and be much more easily adapted into the Ukrainian fighting model.

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**Moderator:** Ashley Roque of Breaking Defense.

**DWG:** Good morning, Senator. Thank you for doing this.

One balloon question, one non-balloon question.

I wanted to first on the balloon, you had mentioned General [Inaudible] had said they had missed, that there's a capability gap that needs to be addressed and the intel community had actually picked up the previous incidents much later.

Is there something from your understanding at this point that you need to get briefed? Something that changed in the calculus of maybe different equipment, different technology, radars, that they were able to detect this time around?

**Senator Reed:** I don't honestly know yet. That's one of the key questions that we're going to pose to both the intel and Department of Defense briefers. Why did we detect this system and we failed to detect the other system? I don't want to be coy, that's a question I have to get answered.

**DWG:** Thank you. Then also at Ukraine. Any concerns or joy or whatever word you choose, about requirements for modernization programs currently underway for the US military? Whether it's the Army and some of its programs. Have you seen that the Army, the different services are revisiting the requirements and potentially tweaking them as they learn more and more about Russian capabilities or other capabilities that they could face on the battlefield of the future?

**Senator Reed:** They are. I think the most adaptable is the field of electronic warfare and the innovation that they're seeing taking place. Some of it spontaneously on the part of the Ukrainians just doing some ingenious things because desperate times require desperate means. So they're doing it. That is I think one area.

Also there's much more flexibility I think in making changes to software than there is to building a major offensive or defensive platform.

But we're starting to take real lessons and look at those lessons, and one that we mentioned before is the industrial base that was sort of in a mode of you know, we've got enough

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munitions, we've got enough systems to handle peer threats, etc., and then we discover now when we've got this fight on our hands that we need more munitions.

So we're seeing adaptations. Again, you'll have to look further down the road I think to see if we cancel a system because we determined it was not effective in this new context, and we started a new system. That's not going to happen I think immediately.

**Moderator:** The next question is Josh Keating of Grid.

**DWG:** Thank you so much, Senator.

I wanted to ask an overall question about aid to Ukraine and this dynamic we've seen with weapons deliveries, most recently tanks and Patriots going back to Stingers and Javelins at the beginning of the war. US officials first say it's not appropriate to provide, too escalatory, and then eventually agreed. It's a point where like the other day when President Biden gave a fairly unequivocal no about F-16s, you saw quotes from Ukrainians assuming that he eventually would come around.

My question is, repeating this debate for each individual weapon system, does that actually serve a useful purpose or what would you say to those who say that if we really want Ukraine to win we should be giving them more or all of the systems they want now rather than having this continuous debate every time?

**Senator Reed:** I don't think the debate has materially prevented us from helping the Ukrainian forces, and I think one indication of that is the progress they've made over the last several months to press and push back Russian forces.

We're now at a critical junction which we all anticipated, that is winter weather would slow the fighting down into more of as we see a siege, a long battle [inaudible] etc. in the spring. The goal is to prepare them for an offensive that will really shape Russian forces and displace them.

Again, every piece of equipment that we put in, I think we have to ask very fundamental questions. Do we have the capacity to use it? Is it something that's going to make a difference? Is it a system that they can use effectively? Again, these questions sort of overlap each other. And we do that. It was a

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different fight a year ago. Small and relatively small decentralized teams of Ukrainians attacked Russian supply lines that were bogged down on a single road because of poor logistics, poor planning.

Now we're looking at much larger forces dug in and making all-out assaults against Ukrainian forces.

So I think we're adapting. We've adapted well. And the plan now is to hold and then begin the counter-attack.

**DWG:** Just to follow up on that, earlier in the question about F-16s you said it may not be appropriate at this time but it's something we still should consider. Are there redlines for you? Are there systems that Ukraine is asking for that you think will just sort of, you can say now would never be appropriate no matter what changes on the battlefield. Or is it all just sort of dynamic and changing?

**Senator Reed:** I think in the context of conventional equipment, it's all changing. It's all what they can use more effectively. And that changes based on the situation on the ground. So I think it's what we can do best to help them, and help them help themselves. And one thing too, there is a significant integration of advice and assistance coming from the West. Not just the United States, but NATO, on a minute by minute basis. And that advice I think is very very helpful to them. We tend to focus on hardware rather than advice and assistance, intelligence, helping them connect their software, etc. That might be more vital in this context than an F-16.

**Moderator:** One question in the chat from [Bronty] Monroe. She's with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute here in town. This is her question.

**DWG:** Senator, you mentioned that an advantage of the US Navy is that it is a strength multiplier with allies. The US naval industrial base is already struggling to meet its on reduction targets. So do you think AUKUS is understood widely in Congress as an initiative that will aid the American long-term security even if it might impact the reduction of the US' own SSNs? Or is it likely to face pushback once it goes to the floor following the March announcement?

**Senator Reed:** I think AUKUS is a very powerful tool, and I think

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it's power comes from the collaboration of the Australian forces, US forces, and British forces. It comes from collaboration exercises.

Years ago when we started the Pacific Defense Initiative, we ramped up significantly the resources that were going to joint operations between Australia, Britain and the United States because that was the foundation of AUKUS in terms of building this cooperative structure so that in the case of a conflict it wouldn't be the first time we called you. It's like okay, here we go. This we're going to put into our XYZ Plan. That's the power.

I think the indication in the agreement that we're going to collaborate -- Britain, Australia and the United States -- on a submarine is an important part of that. But as the question pointed out, we have capacity issues here in the United States. We have to solve those capacity issues for our own benefit and I hope we can solve them in a way, and we're going to work to do this, so that we can accommodate being a major participant in the development of an Australian submarine.

I can't think of -- again, if we could deploy several Australian submarines along with our submarines and they were interoperable, almost totally interoperable, that would send a very chilling message I think to the Chinese and that's what we want to do.

**Moderator:** Next is Shawn Carberry of National Defense Magazine.

**DWG:** Good morning, Senator. Actually the previous question is exactly where I want to drill down.

You've expressed there are concerns about US ability to meet its own needs on submarines let alone look at producing extra for an ally. Similarly, Britain is in the same situation in their production timeline. It looks like best case, a decade to 15 years before either country would be in a position to produce a submarine for Australia.

So is there a viable path forward? This decision that's supposed to come out next month about how to move forward on submarines, is there a path that makes sense that actually does within the short term increase allied capacity in the Indo-Pacific that sends a message to China? Or does this agreement sort of run the risk of being a paper tiger that can't be executed in a



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reasonable timeframe?

**Senator Reed:** I do think there's a pathway forward. One of the obvious issues is resources. And resources in the context of the submarine industrial base come in many varieties. We need skilled workers here in the United States and we also want to develop steelworkers in Australia too because we want them to be a big part of this operation. Not simply a purchaser but also one of the major producers. That requires training and also in this labor market with 3.4 percent unemployment, it's very difficult to get workers for any type of activity. That's one aspect.

We've got a demand in the United States shipyards for the new first class Columbia submarine. And whenever you get into a first of class of anything there are unanticipated problems, etc., and there's a tendency to move resources away. If that tendency is there then we've got a situation where Virginia might slow down a bit.

So if we can, again, multiple issues. We have to effectively deal with Columbia, that contract. We have to go ahead and as a result get Virginia back on track. Then I think we have to build up, and that's going to require some additional investment, additional resources so that we can accommodate more work. More work whether it be a joint operation between Britain and the United States and Australia for their submarine.

Now I presume the submarine will be -- I don't know yet, but one presumption is it's a new design. That whole new design phase will take several years. So we have the opportunity in the context of a reasonable period of time to straighten out some of these issues. But it's a challenge. The good news is we're not hiding that. We're not pretending that we can do everything. We're bound and determined to do what we must.

**DWG:** So what then would you estimate is a realistic timeline for Australia to have its first new nuclear powered submarine? And where does that fit into the Indo-Pacific deterrence plans and how China views that timeline?

**Senator Reed:** I think first, just the coming together of Australia and the United States and Great Britain has already, I think, got the Chinese attention.

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As far as projecting a line, I would be hesitant to make a projection. There are so many different variables, and also my expertise at West Point was not naval engineering so I will refrain from making an estimate.

**Moderator:** Next is Mark Pomerleau of DefenseScoop.

**DWG:** Good morning, Senator. I'd like to revisit some of your earlier comments about some of your priorities, specifically reimagining how the United States fights. I'm wondering if you could elaborate on that, especially under the context of a few recent events.

Obviously one of the findings from the 9/11 Commission Report was that the United States lacked imagination. And as you've seen in recent years, the Russian meddling in the 2016 election; now Chinese balloons entering our airspace and going undetected. I'm wondering if you think maybe there's some degree of lack of imagination within the military and I'm curious how you think that gets addressed.

**Senator Reed:** Again, I think in every organization there are forces that enjoy the status quo and there are others that are looking ahead. That's no different in the military.

I think the military, though, has taken some steps that show that they do understand. For example the Army created Army Futures Command. They built a little campus -- that's exaggerating a bit -- in Austin to get out of the usual sort of Washington atmospherics. And they've looked at some of the six critical systems that the Army believes -- one of them's Virtual Lift. They worked with the two contractors and they now have plans to put out a new helicopter for the Army which seems to be a significant improvement in range, speed, and particularly in the context of the Pacific battleground where range is a very, very key object.

That's an example of beginning to focus, specialize, cutting through the bureaucracy, getting things done. And there's a move afoot to try to create a Joint Readiness Command which will look at not just within the Army but across the services, and I think that is really going to be critical.

One of the lessons, again, that I take away from this is this battle in Ukraine has been so much [more] in the spectrum in

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terms of individual Ukrainians developing software so that someone, anyone with a phone can report the location of a tank. It goes in, it's analyzed quickly by the AI and then sent to a shooter. That's the type of information and type of technique that we have to start evolving.

The Marine Corps is trying to do some of this with a distributed forces posture in the Pacific. The Army has a brigade at Fort Lewis which is also trying to develop these techniques.

So I sense this is taking place and we now encourage it in the Congress.

Again, the people who fight the last war usually end up losing it. We don't want to do that.

**Moderator:** Thank you, Senator. We're approaching the five minute mark so I think our last question of the day is Matt Beinart of Defense Daily.

**DWG:** Thank you so much. I have two quick questions on separate topics.

Building a bit on your earlier comments about budget, there's been talk of the reported proposal from House GOP leadership about capping FY24 spending at FY22 enacted levels. So just to get your thoughts on is that kind of dead on arrival as a proposal in terms of concerns about instituting a kind of 10 percent cut on defense? Your thoughts on that.

Then I've got a separate, quick follow-up.

**Senator Reed:** It would roughly be I think a \$78 billion cut on defense at a time we're in the midst of supporting an active conflict, at the time we are seeing at least provocative behavior by the Chinese in some respects. I don't think that would be an appropriate number and I don't think it would receive a lot of bipartisan support here in the Senate.

**DWG:** Separately, some of your colleagues, especially from Connecticut, have cited some concern with the Army's decision on its recent Future Long Range Assault Aircraft program to find a Black Hawk replacement and the pick that was made there. Is there any area of concern that you've seen with that decision or that decision-making process? Any plans to maybe bring in the

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service just to kind of explain their reasoning behind their thinking for that program?

**Senator Reed:** Again, this was a very sophisticated process, competitive process between two companies. At present the company who did not get the contract is using their power to protest. That will be conducted by the Pentagon and the outcome of that will determine the pending status of who goes forward.

My sense is that there were two very good products and the military professionals made decisions on what they thought the best product would be.

**Moderator:** Thank you, Senator. As always you've been very generous with your time and wisdom and experience, providing us with a thoughtful and thought-provoking hour. I wanted to give the last couple of minutes to you, sir, for any closing comments or thoughts.

**Senator Reed:** Again, let me thank you Thom and your colleagues. Not only this session but your constant analysis and insights and questioning of what we do makes the system work much better. Without being exposed to the news, we would not be as sensitive to getting our job done correctly. So thank you all very, very much. I appreciate that.

We're in a critical moment. We've got combat on the ground in Ukraine in which we are supporting significantly -- I was there about a month ago. We have to prevail in that endeavor. Allow the Ukrainians to prevail. If not, I think Russia gets the signal that this illegal and immoral behavior can be conducted elsewhere. And China gets sort of the signal that we can bend the rules to our advantage like the Russians. So this is critical and we're putting a lot of effort in it but nothing compared to the sacrifice and selfless courage of the Ukrainian people. That's one aspect.

We mention also too, the technologies. We've got to invest in modernizing our systems.

The other point I would stress is we have to practice and operationalize. It's one thing to have these great pieces of equipment, but if the pilot or the crews of these systems don't operate them frequently, then we're not going to be ready. So that's something too that we want to stress, is operational.

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WE have advantages because of simulators. We can do a lot on a screen that we used to have to do out in the field, but we still have to get out in the field. So that's something else we're looking at.

The final point I want to make is that the greatest strength of our military force are the men and women who serve. Their intelligence, their commitment, their courage is what keeps us in the ballgame in every situation. We have to do more in our recruiting efforts. We have to do more in our retention efforts, although we've seen some very good retention numbers over the last several years. And we also have to ensure that this force is America's force. It's not a sectional, discreet sort of family operation. It is American. It was a lot easier during the draft because literally it was America, large parts of it. Now I think we have to be more specific in trying to reach that goal and maintain that ethic.

So those are some of the thoughts I'd leave you with. Again, I thank you for your kindness and also for the work you do. No one likes to answer tough questions, but we can't do our job unless we get tough questions.

**Moderator:** Senator Reed, thank you for your service to our nation in so many ways. Thanks to your staff for all of their support. And again, thanks to all the correspondents on the call today. It was a really terrific session.

Have a great day everybody.

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