

Dr. Mara E. Karlin
Performing the Duties of Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for
Policy

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Moderator: Everybody, good morning and welcome to this Defense Writers Group with Dr. Mara Karlin who has one of the best bio lines ever. "Dr. Karlin is performing the duties of Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, serving as the primary assistant to the Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and formulating, coordinating and integrating national security policy and plans with the Department of Defense." Which basically translates to one of the smartest people in the room wherever she goes. So Dr. Karlin, thank you so much.

Our ground rules as always are, this is on the record. Of course you can record it for accuracy but there's no rebroadcast of audio or video. I'll ask the first questions, then we'll go around the table for 50-55 minutes and then we'll have a few minutes at the end for Dr. Karlin.

So welcome, and thank you.

Karlin: Thank you. It's such a treat to be here.

Moderator: I've become obsessed with how do we define or redefine national security with this new complicated age of danger. Newly aggressive Russia, pacing China, of course, but the problems of national security go beyond nation state risks, things that blow up, climate security is national security, food security, pandemic. So now that there's been many months since you released the National Defense Strategy, are you satisfied that it accurately defines the problem and has a path forward to keep us safe?

Karlin: Thanks so much for that, and again, thank you all for

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spending your morning with me.

Look, when we started the National Defense Strategy this was one of the real challenges which is the kind of threats and the opportunities in the security environment are just a whole lot more complicated than they were two decades or so ago probably. So we wanted to make sure we were looking at the things that we knew, like the threats posed by state actors, state competitors for example. But also the ones that might feel more ephemeral or trans-boundary that were going to have a big impact.

We were starting this still in the throes of COVID, so it wasn't terribly hard to convince folks of the significance on that front, so we wanted to make sure that we looked at transboundary challenges like climate change, like pandemics because we have all seen the impact that those have had.

That said, while accounting for them what you see in this National Defense Strategy is arguably the most serious prioritization of any National Defense Strategy that I've ever worked on or that I've actually seen come out of the Department of Defense. It is really clear that the focus is on the urgent need to sustain and strengthen deterrence vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China, and that's because there's no other country with the intent and increasingly the will to try to fundamentally reshape the international security order. I think that is the piece where the problem diagnosis is exactly right.

What I often get asked is hey, what about that Russia thing, right? You started this strategy before Russia's unprovoked aggression toward and invasion of Ukraine, and we were helped, frankly, by the fact that as we were developing this National Defense Strategy we had Russia's playbook. We were a little bit spoiled in that regard, that we had months and months of knowing exactly what Russia was going to be doing so we could account for that in the strategy development.

So I think problem diagnosis on the whole has been pretty right.

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The next piece of your question is, so are you on that path? How well is that going? I think really well. In fact we have demonstrated the ability to put out a pretty serious priority strategy and to do really robust effort at implementing that strategy. I know usually implementation of strategies goes a couple of different ways that I've seen. One is this beautiful strategy goes up on the shelf and it kind of doesn't get looked at again. Another is that it will be kind of a box-checking exercise, and you did your job, that's all done; or it's kind of a handful of folks in the bowels of the Pentagon trying to implement.

We were really serious about implementation this round, that was particularly due to the leadership of Secretary Austin who was intimately involved in making sure we built the strategy smartly and wanted to ensure it got implemented. So he helped us design this three-pronged approach where we have direct oversight by the Secretary and regular tough points with him on key elements of it.

Secondly, we've got an effort to empower senior leaders across the entire department to help them change their processes, policies and strategies in line with it. Then we've got creative data-driven solutions and tools to assess our progress. On the whole, I think we're on the right path for that. You see Secretary Austin just got back from the Indo-Pacific. First Secretary of Defense visit ever to Papua, New Guinea. Really splashy visit to Australia where the relationship is the tightest it has ever been which says a lot for an alliance that's lasted for so many decades.

A very last point on this, full of questions that were maybe up in the air as the strategy was being put out have fallen in our favor. What do I mean by that? In particular I would look at that in the case of the response to Russia's war on Ukraine. It turns out, of course, Ukraine has a tremendous will to fight which is why we can even sit here and have this conversation. It turns out the international community has been incredibly mobilized in supporting Ukraine. As you all know, every month

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Secretary Austin brings together 50-plus countries who all say here's how we can help Ukraine's military. And it turns out that an integrated deterrence approach, one looking across the Department of Defense's tools, across the interagency, and with our allies and partners can be incredibly successful. And finally, of course, it turns out Russia's military has not been as capable as folks might have thought.

So those areas that were a little bit kind of plastic, if you will, during strategy formulation have fallen in our favor.

Moderator: Thank you so much.

The first question from the table is Caroline [Kudra] of [Inaudible].

DWG: I saw that [Inaudible] last week wrote a letter requesting [inaudible] specifics [inaudible]. I was wondering if you could talk a bit about whether you think that's necessary, and more broadly, [inaudible] vis-à-vis China.

Karlin: I'm sorry, can you just repeat the second half of that question?

DWG: Yeah, if the White House asked for a supplemental funding bill in the next couple of months, what you would like to see [inaudible] related to [inaudible].

Karlin: Absolutely. I wouldn't want to get into kind of internal negotiations on supplementals. What I would highlight is a couple of key pieces.

First of all, the tremendous bipartisan support that we have seen for AUKUS. This big play, the strategic vision and this kind of generational initiative of tying together our close European ally and our close Indo-Pacific ally and doubling down on all of our undersea capability. This critical capability, that you see bipartisan support for and enthusiasm for. That is pretty notable. Also I would say within the international

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community.

In terms of the funding piece, there's a couple of points to highlight. First of all as you might recall in the President's budget that came out a couple of months ago there's a request for something like \$4.6 billion for submarine maintenance and production over the next few years, and that's really important. I highlight both of those pieces because oftentimes it becomes a conversation of just production. How many submarines can you produce? But it's also an issue of maintenance. If you can't get your submarines out doing things, then that's not as significant. So you've seen that in this President's budget and then also in last year's. There was a heavy investment of submarine industrial base. Congress has been really I think forward-leaning on that and that's been really, really important, and we want to continue that.

Relatedly, the Australians are going to make a historic investment in our submarine industrial base. That's a pretty big deal. That is a foreign country who is willing to put a very large sum of money into our industrial base. That is US jobs. And that is going to of course have important implications if you are thinking about how to ensure you've got more submarines and more submarines that are used.

So I know these pieces about both what you've seen the US government do and a willingness by our ally Australia to contribute to that submarine industrial base. To just highlight that, I think you have a bunch of different folks recognizing how important it is to invest in this. As you all know, undersea capability is one of our key strengths of the US military and it's one that we want to preserve, and I think we've shown a real willingness to do that.

Moderator: Next question is Tony Capaccio of Bloomberg.

DWG: I want to play off on this submarine issue. Since you're marching announcement we've learned more about how poorly performing the Virginia-class program is right now. General

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Dynamics and HII [inaudible] said construction cost continues to [degrade]. Submarines now are two years later than last year's [inaudible]. So what improvements do you need to see in Virginia-class construction performance over the next few years in order to make this a credible option for this generational investment we just mentioned?

Karlin: I think this is the first time, Tony, you haven't asked me a question that involves like page 32 of the strategy, which usually makes me very happy because you read it deeper than anyone, I think.

It is very clear that that industrial base has not been able to perform at exactly the level that we all want it to, and that is why the administration with the very robust support of the Congress has put funding into it.

As you know, though, that funding has taken a while to be realized and so we need to look hard, I think, particularly over this coming year, to see what pops out from the funding of that industrial base and the impact it has.

That said, and there's investments in the workforce, of course, there's investments in trying to make pieces of production and maintenance go more quickly. But the broader idea, the idea of three close allies being able to knit together and operate submarine across the Indo-Pacific to deal with regional security and stability, I mean that's a pretty unparalleled effort. The last time we ever even shared this sort of capability with an ally was I think 1968 or so with the Brits. So this is huge. I would also note it creates dilemmas for those who might be trying to undermine that regional security order.

DWG: How important are the Virginia-class, potentially the sale of two or five, three or five, how important is this to the AUKUS' pillar one agreement? Is that like a lynchpin? Ergo performance needs to improve over the next few years to give confidence that this lynchpin is going to come through?

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Karlin: Performance needs, absolutely need to occur. There is, as I noted, a lot of money going into that industrial base, so we all want to ensure that that is appropriately bearing fruit. So absolutely, that needs to happen.

Look, there are, as I think you know, two pillars to AUKUS. That first pillar really is, it's focused on a couple of key muscle movements and that includes selling Australia up to five conventionally armed, nuclear powered submarines. So absolutely that's crucial. Although I would just highlight, there's a couple of other pieces to this.

I was actually just in Australia a couple of weeks ago and was really excited to go down to HMS Sterling where our submarines are going to be doing port visits. Those are going to be happening increasingly starting this year. Starting in 2027 we'll start rotating our submarines. Within less than a decade, of course, the plan is to sell these submarines.

Then a really neat part of AUKUS that probably gets slightly less attention because it's so far away temporally is that by the sort of early 2040s or so you will have three countries that will have built a submarine together. SSN AUKUS. What an intimate way of collaborating with an ally.

Moderator: Next is Michael Gordon of the Wall Street Journal.

DWG: Obviously the emphasis of the NDS, this is sort of an NDS implementation question, is the pacing threat. But there are still ongoing threats in the Middle East from Iran, D-ISIS, and over the last few months the Russian Air Force in Syria. And it seems that over the past two weeks there have been two instances in which Russian aircraft have damaged American drones using [FLIRs]. One a week ago Sunday and one last Wednesday when the wing of an MQ-9 was damaged. They seem to be taking advantage of what they perceive to be a reduced American footprint in the region with no F-22s, F-35s, but they're allocated to the overwatch mission in the Gulf.

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So my question is, as a matter of sort of strategy and resources, given your priorities on China what's your planning to deter this sort of Russian Air Force behavior in Syria, which is interfering with the D-ISIS mission? And how can you do that with the resources available?

Karlin: As you know better than just about anyone, we want to be careful of baseline our understanding of Middle East posture from what it looked like in the years just after 9/11 when we were fighting conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

That said, our posture has been more similar than not over the last few years. So there is this notion, particularly I think held by some of our partners across the Middle East that the United States is abandoning the region and I just don't really see the evidence that that is accurate. Right? We still have something like 25,000-30,000 or so troops that are out there. We still have a bunch of capabilities.

Moreover, the geometry in the region is changing in really meaningful ways. We saw this with the previous administration's efforts at normalization between Israel and some of the Gulf countries. We've seen this, of course, with the shift from Israel being in EUCOM to CENTCOM which means actually every day you see cooperation between Israel and various countries across the Middle East. They're all with CENTCOM Headquarters. They literally cannot help but run into one another. Exercising together.

So that's also worth nothing that actually, A, our posture has not changed dramatically in the last few years; B, that the geometries in the region are shifting and that that actually is what is I think the increasingly right approach to dealing with regional security which is knitting together these partners -- obviously to the extent that the US needs to be sort of the hub in a hub and spoke effort. That is important as well. And that they are contributing to regional security. Obviously this paired with the fact that bunch of these partners are investing in their militaries in new and different ways.

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So I wanted to sort of hit the premise of the reduced footprint because I don't think it is as dramatic as it has been painted.

In particular, as you probably know, of late the Secretary has actually pushed additional assets and platforms there because of the maritime security piece.

Turning to the Russia piece that you are highlighting, indeed the Russians have been operating in unprofessional ways vis-à-vis the US in Syria. We're watching that very closely. We're looking hard across the US government about how best to convey to the Russians these concerns because we are, in many ways, lucky that the incidents you highlighted have involved unmanned drones and not involved actual kind of casualties of human beings. Then we would be in a very different conversation.

So it is worrisome, it is irresponsible. I don't think it should be terribly shocking because we're also watching Russia has launched the largest war in Europe than any of us have really seen in our lifetimes. And moreover, it's problematic when you look at other partners in the region also don't want Russia operating in this way, so it's important I think for them to similarly articulate that.

DWG: Just one clarification on the last point. In the episode a week ago Sunday the Pentagon put out a video, a rather dramatic video, of the Russian fighter plane approaching the drone and the statement really [was really] about what that was all about.

In the episode that occurred last Wednesday, the Pentagon hasn't put out any video or a specific account of what transpired there. So you previously had a name and shame policy. You seem to have stepped back from that. Why is that?

Karlin: I would defer to the public affairs folks because I don't know that I'm tracking those pieces. I can tell you that we have tried to advertise the different instances when we have

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seen Russia or the People's Republic of China operate in unprofessional and aggressive ways. That's especially important because, again, you're citing case studies that could be a whole lot worse, and that is not the case, and we all know to the extent countries like Russia or the PRC operate in these ways, we are on a really problematic and dangerous trajectory. We want to make clear that's what's happening.

So you probably saw we put out a video maybe seven weeks or so ago vis-à-vis the PRC, when they were similarly operating in unprofessional ways.

Again, I can't speak to the details. I defer to public affairs on that piece.

But it's important to make clear who is doing what and why so that folks don't just end up looking at the results.

Moderator: Next Joshua Keating of The Messenger.

DWG: In the war in Ukraine we're seeing drones used in a conventional war at scale for the first time, and we're starting to hear reports of artificial intelligence systems also being used. Sort of what you're looking at in terms of the capabilities being demonstrated and how that might impact the US going forward and planning for future conflicts in terms of those [inaudible].

Karlin: There is an extraordinary laboratory for understanding the changing character of war in Russia's unprovoked aggression on Ukraine. Now to be clear, it is a horrible thing. That said, it is occurring and we have to try to learn from it. You're offering some great case studies. The Economist just had this amazing spread looking at different slices of how to learn from the war as well. And I can tell you, there are really robust efforts across the department to ensure that we figure out what we're learning, how and in what ways it impact how we understand that changing character of war. We also understand other countries are also learning and ideally we'll try to

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figure out what that looks like.

I think a piece of that is absolutely the role of drones and also artificial intelligence, as you highlight both of those.

On the drone side what has been intriguing is it feels like for probably the last decade or so there has been this sort of visions, if you get a bunch of low-cost drones that will swarm and operate on the battlefield. We didn't really see that actualized until this conflict in late 2021 or so between Armenia and Azerbaijan. I think both sides kind of opened up and said oh wow, like that's what this might look like. And at least from what I have seen it's like the first laboratory to start to watch how that might have an impact on a conflict in terms of the way the platforms were being used.

Obviously now we've seen that a whole lot, and that's really, really notable.

On the AI front, this is also probably the case study. It's hard to look at kind of other conflicts from the last few years where we've seen it being used in the same way at the same level. And that's really I think pushed a real culture change.

As you probably know, I'm going to be a nerdy bureaucrat for just half a moment, because I actually think nerdy bureaucratism is really interesting here.

There was an office stood up in the Pentagon maybe a year or so ago, the Chief Data Analytics Office. This office, which reports to the Secretary of Defense, has worked really hard to get folks comfortable with a lot of these things that may feel ephemeral, if you will, to a building that like relies on paper and what have you. And one of the things that they push really hard is making sure you've got Chief Data Analytics officers like all of the different combatant commands as well. And I can't emphasize enough just how important this is. You're trying to literally help the system understand that there is this kind of key approach to how to take in a whole bunch of

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information from a whole bunch of sources in a really fast way, and then incorporate it into your day-to-day work. Because it's not terribly interesting if we see AI kind of in this still ephemeral way and not really shaping decision-making.

So having the CDAO shop has been really important in helping folks I think internalize and realize on a daily basis the impact AI can have. And a lot of that is coming down to how do you look across a whole bunch of sources and synthesize them and then understand whether it's on a battlefield, whether it's thinking about force management, whether it's thinking about planning, you name it, how do you think about that in a more kind of effective and deeply understood way.

We'll, I think, have a lot to learn on both of these pieces, but it feels as though kind of the speed of learning has gotten increasingly robust.

Moderator: Patrick Tucker of Defense One.

DWG: Thanks for doing this.

The war in Ukraine has shown I think the importance of asymmetric capabilities like long-range fires and consumer drones in helping a relatively small force to combat a numerically much larger force.

What is the plan for pushing asymmetric capabilities like extended long-range fires and like, for instance, submarine drones or advanced naval mines into Taiwan to deter a Chinese invasion by 2027?

Karlin: If you don't mind, let me just start with your point on the temporal piece because as I noted, the strategy is pretty clear that we have this urgent need to sustain and strengthen deterrence vis-à-vis the PRC. And that's not a challenge folks are anchoring toward a specific timeframe. No one has a crystal ball along those lines, and indeed I think it is very clear that deterrence is real and it is strong and any sort of conflict is

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neither imminent nor inevitable. So making sure you've got deterrence that continues to be real and strong in the near term, mid term and long term is really important. I just wanted to tackle the idea of one is anchoring to a specific kind of date, if you will.

Turning to the next part of your question in terms of how do we give support to Taiwan. Obviously we have a history of doing that and we are continuing along that path. You probably saw there was just an announcement of using presidential drawdown authority for the first time to support Taiwan, and this is really focused on self-defense capabilities. It's about 345 million and it's looking at things like critical defensive stockpiles, multidomain awareness, antiarmor and air defense, and I think that's all really important in terms of Taiwan having those asymmetric capabilities so that it can fend off kind of attempts to undermine it.

I might also suggest it's worth spending a moment looking at what's happening around the Indo-Pacific in terms of investments. I will say, the investment in regional militaries looks a whole lot different than it did five years ago, and definitely ten years ago. So you see this just looking at two examples -- Australia and Japan -- as really notable cases where they're investing meaningfully in their military. What's striking, and unsurprising to say this as like a national defense strategy nerd, you also see them kind of putting out strategies that are very much aligned with what the National Defense Strategy is saying in terms of how they're understanding regional security and how they're understanding their shifting role in upholding it.

DWG: A quick follow-up on that. The US is doing a lot more exercises with a lot more regional partners in Malaysia as well, and certainly in Indonesia. Are these exercise partners in the region prepared to play a military role in defending Taiwan if asked?

Karlin: I don't want to get into hypotheticals on

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contingencies, but I'd say a couple of things. One, the United States has an unparalleled network of allies and partners. That's pretty extraordinary. You brought a few [in] initially. It really is extraordinary to watch Secretary Austin every month bring together 50 countries plus from across the world who want to collaborate to help support Ukraine's military. I just think if we had all stood here a year and a half ago, that would have been a bit mind-boggling.

Obviously turning to the Indo-Pacific, as well, you see a really tight network of US allies and US partners. What's so intriguing these days compared to, again, five, ten years or so ago is how the geometries in the region have shifted considerably. The US is part of some of those geometries. We're also not part of some of those geometries.

For example, obviously, we're intimately familiar with the Quad as one of those geometries that's kind of growing tighter. But you also see, for example, Australia and Japan getting a lot closer. You see the relationship between Japan and South Korea which obviously has a complicated history getting close as well. And you, as you note I think so well, you see the scope and scale of the exercises we're doing getting a whole lot bigger. The exercise that used to be just a bilateral one with US and Indonesia now has 14 countries participating. And it's a heck of a lot larger and more sophisticated than it was.

I think overall this is a really good thing to see that region more knit together to see those increasing geometries and I think particularly -- having countries increasingly recognize that Indo-Pacific security and stability is not a given and that they need to play a role in ensuring that that continues to be the case I think is generally good for kind of the international rules based order.

Moderator: Chris Gordon, Air and Space Forces Magazine.

DWG: Thank you.

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When the NDS came out the administration talked about how the [inaudible] is really very closely aligned with the Nuclear Posture Review. And how overall the Biden administration wants to deemphasize the role of nuclear weapons in the world.

But since those documents have come out, obviously we've seen not encouraging signs from North Korea, from Iran, from China on that front and in fact we've seen the US have not just policy talks with the South Koreans but also the deployment of strategic assets, the SSBN to South Korea.

Is that a realistic possibility that you can really reduce the role of nuclear weapons? Or are these strategic assets in fact growing in some of these deployments that haven't happened for decades?

Karlin: First of all, I'm so delighted that you opened with recognizing how historic this National Defense Strategy is. Insofar as it's the very first time all three big reviews were done together -- National Defense Strategy, Nuclear Posture Review, and Missile Defense Review.

I can't emphasize enough how significant that is. It means for the very first time you didn't have folks thinking about nuclear weapons sitting in their own room; folks thinking about missile defense sitting in their own room. It meant that actually you were able to bring together all of the folks who are looking at that security environment and at the tools to deal with that security environment coming together and being able to say how do we understand this holistically? And that I think actually gets to the heart of your question and a really important answer to how you reduce the role of nuclear weapons which I very much think is doable, which is to take an integrated deterrence approach. Or another way of saying it is really like a multidomain approach to how we are understanding challenges and how we are responding to them.

I think you've actually seen this tested out a bit in understanding what is happening in Russia's war on Ukraine and

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how we are responding to it. For example, because we have taken sort of this multidomain approach, it has meant that we've had to really understand how and in what ways escalation has become worrisome. We've seen these periods of time in the different phases of this war, of course, when we know escalation management has become extra worrisome. I think making sure that folks who are looking across that tool set are engaging in talking to one another has actually resulted in much smarter responses.

So a case study that I really like to give that came from last year. Before the war started, the Secretary started bringing together the senior leaders from across the Department, of course, to really get an understanding of what are the things that you are doing within your bucket that have echoes, if you will, vis-à-vis Russia or vis-à-vis Ukraine. Right? The idea is you want the Secretary of Defense to be able to understand the entire picture. And as the war started, I think it was maybe two months or so into the war but I'm probably not exactly right on that. It became clear that there was an ICBM test that was planned. Now this was just a regular old ICBM test. Traditional. These things happen all the time.

But understanding in that context was critical because the context was, of course, Russia's military had just attempted this massive invasion. It wasn't doing terribly well. Ukraine's military was fighting a lot harder than perhaps some folks had expected. So what would appear to be just a traditional old here's what we do, not interesting, actually might be meaningful for escalation management. And in fact the Secretary ended up thinking hard about it and decided to postpone that.

It's such a good example of how to look holistically across the tools in your tool kit.

I do believe it is possible to reduce the role of nuclear weapons. That doesn't mean that you don't modernize them, it doesn't mean that they don't have "a" role. I think the nuclear

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posture is pretty clear on what those look like. It means that you want them to have an appropriate role, and you've got to think hard about all of those other pieces, and particularly all of those other domains that can have echoes and escalation risks along those lines.

DWG: If I could just follow up on escalation management in Europe vis-à-vis Russia, but China is rapidly building up [inaudible]. We're not talking to them, we're not talking to the North Koreans. So how do you manage escalation management in the Indo-Pacific?

Karlin: Escalation management in the Indo-Pacific is so incredibly important and we would be delighted to have increasing communication channels and connectivity with the PRC. I think across the US government you have seen increasing connectivity, obviously, with a couple of senior-level visits as well.

Just speaking from the Department of Defense's perspective. As you probably know, we have been trying really hard to set up communication channels and they have not been enthusiastic about those. So Secretary Austin has requested multiple times to have communication channels, particularly crisis communication. I mean an earlier question was talking about what happens when you see unprofessional behavior? It's really important that the most senior folks can talk to each other as quickly as possible when something happens.

So Secretary Austin keeps asking for that. The PRC has not been enthusiastic about that and I think that's really problematic. When we look at history, it is usually quite helpful for us to be able to sit down and speak with those whom we disagree at least so we can get an understanding of kind of what they're doing, what we're doing, what we all think is escalatory and how we might understand it in different ways.

Moderator: Haley Britzky of CNN.

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DWG: Thank you so much for doing this.

I wonder if you can talk a little bit more about the conversation around F-16 training for Ukraine. [Inaudible] it seems like sometimes the [inaudible] in how it starts with European partners saying the US needs to sign off on the F-16s while the US is saying there needs to be more framework on sort of what the training program looks like.

What is that push and pull, what is the conversation happening there right now?

Karlin: Look, it continues to be a robust conversation writ large in terms of how all of these countries are coming together enthusiastically to support Ukraine in a whole bunch of ways, F-16s being obviously just one platform.

What we have seen has been, in particular, robust enthusiasm by a couple of our European allies to really help make this real and I think that's fantastic.

I'd take a moment on that. In the National Defense Strategy we talk about allies and partners being a center of gravity and this is really kind of another really nice case study where folks who say hey, United States, go and deal on your own with these challenges. That doesn't make sense in this security environment. It also just practically doesn't make sense, right? We have some of our European allies who have these F-16s that are available, they're able to do the training.

So what I would say is it's all in-process. It's coming together over these next few months. And we're -- I don't have anything interesting to kind of announce today, but I'd say over these coming months we're all working hard particularly with some key kind of European allies leading in ensuring that the Ukrainians are getting the platforms that they need but also, of course, the training. This is a pretty sophisticated platform and we want to ensure that they've got all the training they need so that they can employ them effectively on the

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battlefield.

DWG: Are there certain things that we need to do [inaudible], kind of [inaudible] question as well. But that we [inaudible] before that sign-off is complete?

Karlin: Can I ask you to give me one more sentence to make sure I understand the question?

DWG: Are there certain things you want to see from Denmark, from Netherlands, whoever is creating this training program for the US to feel comfortable to officially make that sign-off --

Karlin: We're working with them really closely and talking to them about how do we make this a reality, and ensuring that -- it is not useful to give a country a sophisticated platform absent the training, so we're working closely with them to ensure that that's the case.

Moderator: Jeff Morris, Aviation Week.

DWG: Thanks for doing this.

What's the current position on whether and when Ukraine could receive MQ-9 UAVs or attack helicopters?

Karlin: I don't think I have anything on that one at this moment, I'm sorry to say.

DWG: Okay.

Karlin: You know there are like constantly robust discussions about a whole bunch of capabilities for them, but I can't tell you them for [inaudible].

DWG: Getting back to AUKUS for a second. The leader of the GCAP program in the UK [inaudible] they're doing with Italy and Japan, has suggested recently that maybe AUKUS could be expanded to include Next Generation Fighter at some point. What do you

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think of that possibility? And does the US support that?

Karlin: As you probably know, there are these two pillars to AUKUS. The first is really focused on undersea capabilities; the second is focused on advanced capabilities. It's effectively premised on this idea that you have three incredibly capable and sophisticated allies who see the threat picture pretty similarly and have robust defense industrial bases, and want to be able to exercise and operate effectively together.

There's been kind of a handful of areas of focus of pillar two of AUKUS, artificial intelligence being one of them, for example; hypersonics being another.

I think what you're citing is not an element that has been looked at. What I find really unique about AUKUS pillar two, and this is why the conversations that are happening right now on export control reform, particularly with our colleagues and Congress that again might sound a little bit kind of wonky, are actually crucial to the success of AUKUS and how we think about our network of alliances.

What's so important is when you can find ways to collaborate with your closest allies to knock down barriers to cooperation, technology development, interoperability, getting these defense industrial bases kind of knitted together is you're going to incentivize a whole bunch of interesting things.

Right now I can tell you where AUKUS pillar two is. If done right, I won't be able to tell you what it will look like ten years from now. Because as we all know, the military kind of technological space of the 1980s is not the military technological space of today insofar as we are learning from other countries in the same way that they are learning from us. It's not that the United States has all of the answers on technology development, particularly military technology development, the way that it would have been when our predecessors were sitting here a couple of decades ago. That has changed. And I think it's really important to recognize

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that.

For example, when some folks are talking about export control reform, they will say but gosh, isn't this just a way to be able to give various things to different allies? I would say absolutely not.

I think this is in all of our interest, because it will allow us to benefit by being able to also take from and learn from them and what they've developed in the same way. That's all a way of saying I can't speak to that, kind of that specific piece. But kind of the theory wrapped around it and just how critical it is for us to be able to lower those barriers to interoperability so we can knit together, and obviously we are knitting together with Australia and UK, two countries that have stood shoulder to shoulder with us in no shortage of global security challenges.

Moderator: Next is Diego Laje of Signal Media.

DWG: Thank you very much.

How effective do you believe the sanctions on semiconductors are working with China?

Karlin: This is not an area I work on, but I would say it appears that they have been quite --

DWG: For military and AI.

Karlin: Okay, that makes sense. Look, what I think is so interesting about how this administration has approached the pacing challenge vis-à-vis the PRC is that this is not just a story of the US military. And we have seen times throughout history where it is a story of the military dealing with challenges, and at the end of the day that's probably going to be imperfect.

What you really need is a holistic approach to how you are dealing with strategic competition, and I think this is a really

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good case study of the strategic approach and the impact of that strategic approach. And you have seen this, whether it's -- to kind of broaden your question slightly -- whether it's the speech that we saw Secretary Yellen give a couple of months ago for example, by the efforts by various pieces of the US government. Our colleagues at the State Department just opened a couple of new embassies, for example, across the Indo-Pacific where you really got a holistic approach to saying we care about Indo-Pacific security and stability in a number of ways and we don't just want this to be a story of what the Department of Defense is doing.

I think semiconductors is a topic that just a few years ago was not at all in the ether and very much increasingly [inaudible] both in terms of how and what ways the PRC has access to them and also of course kind of where the real hub of that is which happens to be in a different part of the Indo-Pacific.

So I think what we're seeing is the evidence that this is having the impact that folks have intended for it to do, but that's probably the most I can say on that front.

Moderator: I'm not going to make my usual bad joke about when the chips are down.

Next is Bryant Harris of Defense News.

DWG: Thank you for doing this.

I wanted to ask about the new presidential draw-down authority for Taiwan. Before it was mainly through FMS, so it was from a separate pool of the stuff from the stocks we're giving Ukraine. Obviously we have industrial base [inaudible] punishment. So now that you're doing a presidential draw-down for both countries, I'm wondering how much overlap there is in what we're sending them.

Also, separately, President Biden is pursuing a Saudi-Israel normalization deal. Reportedly one of the Saudi requests is a

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mutual security pact with the US. I would assume the Pentagon has some input there, so I'm wondering if you see any universe where we may end up with a mutual defense pact with Saudi Arabia.

Karlin: Let me take that second one first. I don't want to speak about the status of internal deliberations, but to the extent you can more closely knit together partner across the region to help with security and stability in the Middle East, that's a good thing. We have tried to do that from the Department of Defense in an operational way. I talked a bit about Israel's entrance into CENTCOM and how much interaction we have now been able to see with the Israeli military and a bunch of other countries around that region. But that's probably the most that I should say on that front.

Regarding this issue of overlap, obviously, and it sounds as though you're tracking this quite intimately in terms of the fact that the PDA for Taiwan looks a little bit different in terms of the authority compared to Ukraine.

I would say there is a robust conversation and a really robust intense effort that has occurred ever since the Ukraine PDA started now a year and a half or so ago, two years or so ago, to ensure we're understanding what is it they need and what is the impact that would have on the US military's own readiness. Obviously PDA in the Ukraine case has this like almost reimbursement type of effort. The military services kind of get to resell what they have had, so you have to kind of assess what that looks like. When would that material come to fruition, when would they get it back.

As we are looking at the PDA for Taiwan, and even just more broadly. It's really important that we have this robust conversation about the impact on our military forces' readiness and what makes sense on the battlefield, what could get to a battlefield in the time that it could be effective.

Those conversations continue as they need to do, and they are

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exceedingly detailed, is probably the best way to put it, given that you really are kind of having to look like capability by capability to understand that.

I should probably just emphasize, folks from around the department have a voice in that effort. That's an exceedingly inclusive process, to make sure that we're able to understand the impact on each military service, et cetera. It's one that's just done in a little closed stovepipe.

Moderator: Next is Matthew Beinart of Defense Daily.

DWG: A quick follow-up on that last question, then a separate topic.

If you can just kind of get into a little bit more about the difference between the PDA for Ukraine versus Taiwan. I think you mentioned it's just process or authority.

And then separately, over the weekend Secretary Austin discussed the joint coproduction with Australia where GMLRS is going to happen by 2025. So just some of the context about what led up to this point and then some of the next steps that you'll need to take to get to that 2025 goal. Thank you.

Karlin: Absolutely. My recollection of the difference with the PDAs, it's like the way Congress has given it to us looks a little bit different with Ukraine and with Taiwan. In particular, my recollection is that the Taiwan one is not reimbursable in the same way that Ukraine is. And by reimbursable I mean if a military service says I can give X amount of Y platforms, and in the case of Ukraine that then gets reimbursed, and I don't believe that that is the case for the authority that Taiwan has.

Also the numbers are really different. So for Taiwan Congress gave us I think up to \$1 billion. So this package that just went forward is \$345 million and in Ukraine it's a heck of a lot more than that. I believe that's accurate on the first piece of

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it with PDA, but it's worth fact checking, as you know that well.

On the Australia piece, this AUSMIN was pretty fantastic in a whole bunch of ways and I would just note at how dramatically our relationship with Australia which is, of course, a really historic and tight one, has expanded robustly in the last decade.

So when we were all sitting here a decade or so ago, we were probably in the kind of final stages of the negotiations of rotating the US Marines to Darwin, Australia, and that was a really big deal at the time for any of us who sort of remember it, right? That we'd be rotating these forces on this consistent basis to northern Australia. What would that look like? Where would they be? What infrastructure? All of those kinds of things.

Now fast forward ten years, and as you probably saw from the announcement, Secretary Austin has been able to make our force posture vis-à-vis Australia has grown multidomain, it's grown incredibly robust, it I think hits a number of our different military services and the cooperation is kind of ever more intimate.

So we've been talking about AUKUS obviously, right? We are going to rotate submarines there out of Perth. It's such a big deal. And having been intimately involved in a lot of those AUKUS negotiations, what was so striking to me was frankly just how mature that relationship has gotten. So watching, again, ten years ago the sorts of kind of debates and dilemmas we were having as we were thinking about the Marines out in Darwin and what that looks like now. You just have a relationship that is even more intimate than it has ever been, and there's a bunch of tangible examples there as you see announced by the Secretary down in Australia.

I was in Australia a couple of weeks ago, as I briefly noted, and I went up to Darwin to see our Marines who are rotating

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there. I have to say, it was just so striking to see what they are doing in terms of exercising around Australia, exercising with the Australian Defense Forces, and also because of that location up in northern Australia, how much easier it is for them to be able to exercise with and develop interoperability with a whole bunch of partners. It's just like a lot easier to have those jumping off points.

I was also struck by how much they are really focused on realizing the kind of national defense strategy -- and this is on working with allies and partners to really help close warfighting vulnerabilities and build warfighting advantages.

So this all gets to GWEO, this announcement, of course, that came out of AUSMIN as well with co-production. I think that's such a kind of natural development of where the relationship has gone, and yet again, I think if we were talking to ourselves a decade ago that would have been a little bit inconceivable, that Australia is investing in its defense industrial base in such a meaningful way, and that we're going to be -- they're going to be able to produce what we know is a really important munition that is needed in a wide range of contingencies.

So there's been a ton of work particularly over the last year or so in helping make this real. So I think it's an important test case that we're all going to be watching really closely. If you haven't spent any time with Australia's Defense Strategic Review, I would very much suggest you do so, though. And I highlight that because it is like the chapeau under which so much of this becomes a reality. It's really meaningful, especially when you compare it with again, where they were ten years ago. You see Australia saying that they're seeing effectively the greatest threats to regional security and stability in effectively all of our lifetimes.

What's meaningful is they are thinking it, they are saying that, and they are taking a whole bunch of actions to deal with that. That's really quite a virtuous cycle.

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DWG: You kind of described it as a test case. How does that fit into the kind of broader context of this kind of co-production fitting into the replenishment of stockpiles, especially something like GMLRS, sent over a bunch to Ukraine. How does it kind of fit into that context?

Karlin: I think it actually needs to be. Look, you all know obviously as a group of defense wonks that the challenges of the defense industrial base have been real for a number of years. The 2018 National Defense Strategy Commission talked about this. To be fully up front, I staffed that effort. We've all heard about this for years and years. So I suspect it has been exactly of zero surprise to this cohort.

That said, we didn't see a whole lot of action on it until Russia's war on Ukraine made us all really tangibly feel, and kind of intimately understand the need to turbocharge our defense industrial base and for our allies and partners to do so as well. And for all of us to be able to work intimately together in a complementary fashion along those lines.

Moderator: We're at the five minute mark. Five more questioners. We're not going to get to them, I'm afraid. The last one is going to be Mike Glenn of the Washington Times. Then we'll reserve a few minutes for you, Dr. Karlin.

DWG: I wanted to talk about the [inaudible] training there. It's one thing to train an individual soldier to operate an individual platform. You can train a soldier to run a Bradley in a three-day weekend. I've done it myself. But it's another thing to train battalion commanders and brigade commanders to fight the kind of modernwar that we fight in the US or the West. Combined arms.

What's the status of the [mission] to sort of convert them away from the Soviet way of thinking which from what I've talked to people who are watching this, there's still evidence that Ukraine is still, the higher level in Ukraine still has kind of a Soviet mindset. What's the status of our weaning them away

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from that and get them to fight the kind of mobile war that the US and the West prefer, sort of the Western way of war.

Karlin: A couple of points on that.

It is really easy to take an Excel spreadsheet approach to training and equipping a military. We give them X amount of materiel, we give them Y amount of training, and you add that to a stew and here you go, a capable military. I think you're hitting such an important point which is actually leadership that plays a huge role. Right? Helping folks really progress their mindset to understanding how and in what ways their conflict is changing. We know conflict goes through different phases, obviously, and how they need to help transform their military. So you are highlighting an important point, and I think the intimate cooperation that we have seen in working with Ukraine's military by the US but also by a whole bunch of other countries, has been important here.

Obviously it's the equipment that's going to get the attention and yet I might suggest just as importantly is how you think about that sort of transformation in conflict.

The heart of your question is we haven't really seen a war like this before in our lifetimes. As that kind of earlier question was highlighting as well. And the Western way of war in particular -- we can sort of give you snapshots in time about what that is, but I have to think that that's evolving. Indeed, it needs to be evolving quite considerably given emerging capabilities, given the things that we are learning in this battlefield, given the relevance of some domains that are sort of newer, if you will, like cyber; some capabilities that are older like nuclear weapons for example, kind of looking across all of those.

So we are learning as well and what we are trying really hard to do is work with Ukraine and work with our allies and partners to figure out how and in what ways you want to shift your force as that conflict is shifting as well, and shifting that approach.

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Again, if we were sitting here a year and a half ago this would be a really different conversation that is happening now. So I'd hate for us to kind of see that the approach was very much modeled on the Soviet military and continues to be. I think we have seen some real evolution along those lines, and no doubt that's probably going to continue.

Moderator: Thanks.

The questions today and those that weren't asked for time indicate interest in your portfolio. This has been a thoughtful and thought-provoking discussion. The final minutes are yours for any closing comments.

Karlin: Thank you for so many hard questions. It was such a treat to spend the morning with you all.

I think I would just offer kind of one final approach to think a little bit about. It's really how the National Defense Strategy is illuminated in the Indo-Pacific. Because I think we have a pretty good chapeau or framework and it's manifesting in some important ways. That framework is really working on having a US military that is more capable, more forward, and more together.

What I mean by each of those -- more capable. We have the most combat-credible US military in our history and we're pushing hard to ensure that that continues to be the case. Obviously the request for \$842 billion, which is really a procurement budget, but also is pushing on things like multi-year munitions is a good example about that first piece, of being more capable.

More forward, really making sure across the Indo-Pacific that we have a more resilient distributed, hardened posture is critical for deterrence which we do believe is real and strong. We have a number of good examples of this. Australia being one of them. The four [inaudible] sites in the Philippines that we'll have access to. What we're doing in Japan, kind of all of those efforts to make sure that the US military is robustly in the

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region with the capabilities that it needs to be and smartly. So that's the more forward piece.

And then more together. We spent a lot of time talking about that today. Really working closely with our allies and partners. Encouraging the geometries that we're maybe not going to be a part of because those are a good thing, but also a whole bunch of geometries that we are going to be as well. So being more together, whether it's through something like AUKUS, whether it's through the exercises that have grown in their scope and scale. But really recognizing that Indo-Pacific security and stability requires our allies and partners collaborating with us across the region to help ensure that that's a reality.

So that's a little bit of a framework you may find helpful. Being more capable, more forward and more together. I think it's just a perfect way of understanding how that National Defense Strategy focus, that urgent need to sustain deterrence via the PRC is our pacing challenge, is really being implemented.

Moderator: Great.

Dr. Karlin, thanks to you, thank you to your staff, thanks to all of you who came today. It was a terrific discussion.

Karlin: Thanks so much. I appreciate it.

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