

Kathleen Hicks
Deputy Secretary of Defense

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Moderator: -- thank you for coming. The ground rules are the same as always. This is on the record but there's no rebroadcast of audio or video. Please record for accuracy and quotes. I'll ask the first question, we'll go around the table. I already have many, many emails of people who want to ask questions. We'll get to as many as we can. Owing to the state of the world, the Secretary has a hard stop at 9:45 that we will honor.

One of my last interviews with Secretary Bob Gates, he told me something very interesting he had learned about Pentagon management. He said across the DoD everybody can say no, but only two people can say yes -- the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary. Which means you have rather awesome power.

So my opening question, Madame Secretary, is how you're going to get to yes on two very important things. First, your signature Replicator program. No secret I'm a big fan of it and about it, but how do you get the services who traditionally love their old, big platforms to sign onto such a dramatic change as swarming drones?

And to expand it a little bit, it's no secret that the current dynamics in DC are not exactly this side of paralysis. The CR, the leadership problems, all of that. How will you get to yes on so many of your important initiatives when Congress is in such disarray?

DSD Hicks: First of all, thank you, Thom.

Let me start on the second half of your question because it cedes the first piece. This is my 9th CR as Deputy Secretary.

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It is of course now all too common, so much so that it was with no seeming sense of irony that it ends on Groundhog Day, February 2nd, the one that we are currently under.

We have focused very much in this administration from the defense side, and I've said this a number of times, that we have a responsibility to build trust with Congress, to get done what we want to get done with an initiative like Replicator. But the truth of the matter is, trust is a two-way street and we are really being challenged to trust that our partners in Congress can get done what they need to do for us to achieve those ends. That's true on the supplemental where we need support from Congress, and there is strong bipartisan support I really want to stress, to make sure that we can help Ukraine. Russia's in an offensive right now. Make sure we can help Ukraine defend itself.

We know China is watching us and it matters what we do here as a nation and how that strong bipartisan support in Congress manifests in terms of support for a partner like Ukraine.

We know also we have support for Israel in that supplemental. Similarly, how we can support the partner at a time that it is trying to defend itself is also important. Border support's in there. Other things that are important for us in the department.

So there's the supplemental piece and then there's this baseline CR challenge that we face. We can get by. We've gotten used to getting by CR to CR, but it's with significant consequence.

We've lost probably a total of about four years' worth of progress on our modernization efforts in a decade, really 11 years, that we've been dealing with CRs. That has a cost. You can't buy back the time. You just can't.

We've seen in this CR that we have challenges with areas like advanced procurement where we would be moving out already if we

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had those funds on areas like shipbuilding that are important to Congress. This is sort of an irony, that we spend so much time at the front end arguing over these aspects and then at the back end we lose any differences, really, of disagreement just simply by delay. So lots of challenges there.

So into the question you asked around how we make sure we can advance initiatives like Replicator in the face of all that, we also heard very clearly from Congress -- we've heard for years that put in the reports for both the House and the Senate in the '23 cycle on appropriations, they indicated we want DoD to use its full authorities. We don't think you're pushing hard enough. Do what you can with what you have is the gist of what we read.

And I'm a big believer we need to be problem solvers in DoD. The answer to every question is not I need more money and more people.

The Replicator is a great example of how we are taking that feedback from Congress, looking to problem solve for ourselves, and working with what we have at hand. And how do we get there?

The way I have tried to work inside the department is to always keep everyone focused on the strategy. The President and the Secretary have given very clear strategic guidance, in the case of the Secretary in the National Defense Strategy. And then when we go to put resources against that or new initiatives or anything else we're doing, our rule is the strategy wins. Keeping the departments focused around that strategy with formula is how we drive change.

We can point to areas like the Marine Corps Force Design where we resourced them. We took supportive paths. We saw the vision of what they were trying to do. We saw the obstacles there. And the way we inculcate change really is showing that we're on the side of the strategy and that the resources will follow. So other services, for example, saw that. That can drive cultural

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change.

With the Replicator, our goal really is in this initiative to get to scale fast. We have multiple valleys of death in the department. One of the most vexing is that scaling production. We also know we have a challenge with the commercial sector really looking at DoD as a strong and capable partner that can work within the two-year appropriations process, not just wait every two years to make major new investments.

So we have enough programs underway right now in the attritable autonomy area, that it was a good first area to go after through Replicator which is about replicating for production and replicating the process we're using to drive change. We're looking at how we burn down within those programs that we have already in the system, how we burn down risk against them. That risk can come from, again, the manufacturing process, it could be a software design issue, it could be a requirements process. The Vice Chairman and I, to your point, can sit on top of all that and say take that barrier away, take this barrier away.

We've already done that with another initiative we've had called CAPS. We've shown we can save years off of programs by just taking the bureaucracy out. Again, being problem solvers, solving our own problems. That's what we're doing with Replicator. We also picked an area that is very important to INDOPACOM and other COCOMs that will really move the needle with very low dollars.

Moderator: Thank you so much.

I'd love to follow up but I want to give more to the group. The first question goes to Tony Capaccio of Bloomberg.

DWG: Just a quickie on Replicator. When will the candidates be announced roughly?

DSD Hicks: We will select the candidates within the next about

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three weeks. I would not necessarily say the candidates will be announced. We're being very careful, as you know, about the way in which we talk about Replicator. Our goal here is an operational goal which is in addition to the acquisition side goal. That operational goal is to create dilemmas for China and any other competitor who might look at this approach and try to undermine it.

So we will be very clear and transparent with Congress. I've talked to Congress in classified sessions on this. But how we choose to speak about it in terms of the particular programs or projects that we'll be accelerating through Replicator is to be determined.

DWG: That leads me to a second question. One of the directives in the Appropriations Bill for '23 reviewing the insidious, rampant use of control of classified information. I get the sense Replicator candidates will be CUI.

What's the status of the report itself to Congress? You were asked to work it. Are there emerging conclusions about whether CUI is being over-used?

DSD Hicks: Let me just first say I would not speak with prejudice of the view that Replicator projects would be CUI. Let me get to your question, though, which is on CUI.

Overall the department does overclassify. And we've had efforts underway both on CUI and, for instance, on no foreign. So we've already put out with Under Secretary Moultrie's signature an update on no foreign usage as an example, to try to get everyone back to where they're supposed to be which is a default, a way from no foreign to sharing.

On CUI, similarly, we have been on a campaign to increase training and we've worked closely with Congress to make clear that anything that is CUI is available to Congress. There's no limit on sharing CUI with Congress, so making sure all of our

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components throughout the department are aware of, again, trained on that use.

Right now we're doing the data call related to the report you reference. It's really a briefing back to Congress to make sure we understand where the components are on implementing that training and the proper usage of CUI. So that's what we owe back to Congress, more like a briefing.

DWG: Okay, because reporters and the public in general, CUI, you keep encountering it. Is it your goal to try to reduce the use and have more discreet stamping of documents?

DSD Hicks: Our goal is to have the proper use of CUI. So it's really a training around making sure folks understand the rules and responsibilities on CUI. That's the government-wide CUI. DoD is a new player to the field, switching over from the FOUO. So now we'll be consistent with the rest of the government. There is an overall I think government look routinely at CUI and what are the rules around that, and we will be a part of that broader look.

Moderator: Next is Nick Schifrin, PBS Newshour.

DWG: I have a question about what's going on in Israel in the news. I understand some of this will be sensitive, but [inaudible] going on.

We are as close as we have been to a hostage deal. The War Cabinet's meeting in a couple of hours [inaudible] possible press conference. Obviously I know you won't be able to speak in any detail about that negotiation, but in general, zoom out. If there were any kind of humanitarian pause in Israel, is there were progress to release the hostages, progress to get more humanitarian aid in, and indeed perhaps a lowering of drone flights as part of that deal, what's the impact overall do you think of the US policy and the US stance when it comes to this war?

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And in general, there's a big concern right now about how Israel will proceed on its ground offensive in the south, in the Southern Gaza. Can you talk about some of those concerns?

DSD Hicks: I think the US role has been extremely constructive here in terms of making sure we can pursue not only the protection of civilian life, the defense of Israel, protection of our own forces, and really also that [inaudible] which is preventing the expansion of any conflict beyond the immediate issue of Israel and Hamas.

We're making progress I think on all of those.

I think where your question is going, if we have a humanitarian pause, if we have a deal on the hostages, I think you will see in the retrospect on that a significant US role in helping those initiatives occur.

DWG: So a significant US role, that is certainly, we're in the middle of that. But does it change the battlefield at all? Does it change the US dialogue with the IDF? And again, that future step, the IDF going south now. Some concerns about [inaudible].

DSD Hicks: The US has been engaged with the IDF and all of the Israeli government throughout the entire -- from October 7th forward. On both the aims of the conflict and also the conduct of it. That will continue to be the case, and certainly from the Defense Department perspective our engagements with the IDF have always been focused on how to help them think strategically about what they're trying to achieve in terms of their defense against Hamas, and also to be mindful of civilian protection and their responsibilities which are not lessened by the horrific nature of the October 7th attack. Their responsibilities for protection of human life in the conduct of their operations.

Moderator: Thanks. Next is Tony Bertuca IWP News.

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DWG: Thank you very much. I appreciate you being here.

Back to Replicator, I think one of the things happening is, I'm trying to track it like it's an acquisition program. I'm waiting for an RFP. I'm waiting for an RFI. There will be winners and losers. And it seems like Replicator is about circumventing that process. To elevate sort of the decision-making to a smaller number of people who can pick things that are already in the pipeline and say you're the winner. Off you go a few thousand.

Can you tell us more about what I'm perceiving, why it is not that, and what it is. This decision process.

DSD Hicks: I do think that you are not alone. The challenge is that we, back to agility in the defense acquisition system.

We are very acclimated to, for perfectly logical reasons, for a particular acquisition strategy, a program of record that we can track through the budget, that has specific line items that moves through different colors of money, et cetera. We already have opportunity -- again, back to the authorities we have -- with alternative acquisition strategies. Middle tier acquisition as an example, software acquisition pathways. We've already been granted authorities that move us away from that singular approach.

Now what we have been doing is layering on, again, it's been done on counter-IED. There are times we have done this before. A more systematic, senior level focus which is what can help change that system on how do we remove barriers beyond just the resourcing piece. The resourcing piece is also important. To make sure things make it across the valley of death. And that has been the focus from everything from Raider to again CAP as I mentioned, and now Replicator.

So what to look for on Replicator is, does the United States

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Department of Defense field within 18-24 months thousands of attritable autonomous systems? If the answer to that question is yes, and we're able to talk about the way we burned down risk to make that happen, and deliver capability, that builds trust on the commercial sector side that we can move within that two-year cycle. It increases investment opportunities for companies that are trying to be in that space. And most importantly for us, it delivers capabilities to the warfighter faster. That's what Replicator is about.

DWG: One of the things that happened with MRAP was you awarded lots of contracts to lots of different companies. Will that be the model for Replicator? In three weeks are we going to see a dozen companies get a contract?

DSD Hicks: I would think of the resourcing side this way. The '25 budget is coming in the spring. You will see the '25 budget areas that are what you're thinking of which is relating to line items.

In '24, the world we live in today, even though we don't have a '24 appropriations. With '23 money there are projects in the system and/or there are projects in our '24 request. They're already there. The question is, are they facing barriers, which almost all programs do whether they're programs of record or other acquisition strategies, that could inhibit their ability to deliver quickly? Or put another way, are there opportunities to pull them left or increase their scale? That could be new additive manufacturing. You could think of a lot of things that help us burn down risk. That's what the teams are looking at. Our answer is yes, we can do that.

That's what the teams are looking at now, which programs are ripe for intervention to help them. If there are healthy programs that are, even if they are attritable, autonomous programs, and they look good to go, we are not touching them through Replicator, they're just going to move as planned.

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DWG: Thanks.

Moderator: Noah Robertson, Defense News.

DWG: You mentioned that the candidates will be announced in the next three weeks, but because Replicator is moving through tranche lines, is that just the candidates for the first tranche? Or is that all the candidates?

DSD Hicks: Again, I wouldn't describe it as announce. We will make the selections in the next several weeks and that is the first tranche. That's right. So there are programs that we think are kind of ready to go now, as we said, on the '24 piece. The '25 budget will also deliver, we think, more programs that you would think of as being fast forwarded or expanded through Replicator.

DWG: Can you give us any more details on what that tranche will be? UAS or just any more specific --

DSD Hicks: All domains. We are looking in all domains. We aren't going to force it to be kind of a program in every domain, but we are looking in all domains and we're looking mostly at what can move the needle for particularly INDOPACOM in that kind of two-year period, what would be the most meaningful difference.

DWG: One more on innovation [inaudible] more broadly. When we compare that to past efforts to move really quickly, and you mentioned a couple earlier, one of the things that's been difficult to make that sustainable is that it requires such consistent senior leader attention. That really, to project forward, [inaudible] series of [inaudible] to make sure [inaudible]. So how do you make that through Replicator actually [inaudible] when [inaudible] in the future is always uncertain?

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the way in which you advance innovation. You can use that in DoD or anywhere else. So I would first argue you can call it what you will, but that is the reality of how we make progress and advance. So leadership will always matter. And the focus of leadership against their priorities will always matter. That is why Secretary Austin has been so focused on innovation from the beginning.

So that's the first thing I'd say.

The second thing I'll say relates to the response to the first question which is how do you get the incentives in the system right? If the incentives in the system are aligned with the strategy and the warfighter need, the COCOM need, now and in the future, how do you advance our joint solutions to those problems? And if you have winning solutions, we're going to put money against you. That's how you change the culture within DoD.

Now again, we need partners in Congress to make that happen so that those incentives that we set up in the department then resonate all the way through the budget that's appropriated. But I do think we have strong partners there. Again, I've had very good interactions specifically on Replicator and then more generally on innovation. So I think there's a good incentive structure underway.

Moderator: A good topic for an MBA thesis.

Next is Caroline Coudriet of CQ Roll Call.

DWG: Hi, thank you so much for doing this.

Going back to the CR issue, I know that's [inaudible] every year, but [inaudible] the possibility of a one percent cut if Congress is not [inaudible] a deal. Can you talk a bit about how that risk has affected your planning, if there's any specific programs and initiatives that are sort of on hold or

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suffering because of that?

DSD Hicks: The cost right now, if we were to be under FY23 appropriations, so think of it as no appropriation ever given for '24, that's about a \$35 billion cut. We have excluded from that about \$10 billion, appropriately, for pay. We don't think our service members should suffer and we have a lot -- you know 40 percent of our budget is around pay and benefits for our force. The distinguisher of the US force from competitor forces is the quality of that force and we want to do everything we can to recruit and retain them. So we're going to exempt that.

That means the rest of the budget has to bear that cost.

The other compounding effect is that we have, of course, a capped level, I think it's \$6 billion of ability to reprogram. So you're pressuring a subset of the budget and then you can't move money flexibly. Then you layer onto that the one percent cut which is by design, has to be -- as was true in the prior sequesters -- peanut butter spread, evenly spread across the budget.

So very inflexible approach. We do think it will impact much of particularly that set of efforts, substantial efforts we have underway to pace to China. I've mentioned some of those areas where we see specific effects. Shipbuilding is one, our nuclear triad is another. What we call the kill chain as we look at how do we defeat Chinese efforts to keep us away from protecting our interests in theater, in INDOPACOM, and how do we deny them the ability to execute an effective kill chain. A lot of those efforts are put first forward or most substantially forward in our '24 budget request, and if we don't get those appropriations we will absolutely, as I said, we're already about four years behind where we should be. We'll just push further behind.

Moderator: Jim Garamone, DoD News.

DWG: Hi ma'am, thanks for doing this.

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When you took office 2.5 years ago, you stressed the fact that the department has to be more agile and [inaudible]. And that was driven by the pacing challenge of China. I'm just curious, just off the top, are we keeping pace with China? Or not? Your thoughts?

DSD Hicks: I think there has been phenomenal work that's happened across the department, all across the department.

One of the great things about our defense system is that innovation happens all across it. It happens at the lowest levels, and then there's real opportunity for [inaudible]. Because of the way we have our force designed, that innovation at the lowest levels is valued and has the opportunity to compete at the most senior levels for everything from budget share to changes in doctrine, et cetera. I think that great work continues today.

I worry that we aren't able to reach the potential that we have. We are so fortunate not only to have that but to have a commercial innovation system unlike any in the world. We have an incredible alliance network to build on, also with a lot of innovation underway. All of that should improve our agility, but to tap into that we have to be able to have predictable, reliable and appropriately strategically driven resources. And we have to be able to have the leadership in place which brings in the holds, for example, on our general and flag officers.

All of that really impacts our ability to meet our potential.

DWG: If I could just sort of [inaudible] a little bit more. By any measure, the progress in the strategy in the Indo-Pacific -- between AUKUS, the Philippines, the fact that you've got the tripartite with Japan and South Korea. That has been nothing but good news out of the Indo-Pacific. Is that the way forward? That has to be the way forward, right?

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DSD Hicks: It is a yes, and we both need the combat credible capabilities. We think we're doing a good job on that. I think there's more opportunity. And we need to leverage that alliance structure that both is so valuable and asymmetric for the United States and something we know the Chinese are very worried about. And to your point, Jim, we have made incredible progress there. I don't think anyone can look at the US-Philippine defense relationship a couple of years ago and have expected us to achieve the kinds of agreements that we now have. The ability to bring South Korea and Japan together with the United States, incredible. AUKUS, incredible. Lots of really positive momentum, and real gains there that we know are having deterrent value on the Chinese as they worry about what the implications could be of creating larger conflicts when they look to take on any one of those nations.

I think that is definitely in the win column, and the combat credibility that we want to have go with it, we're doing great things. There's opportunity to do more.

Moderator: Next is Ashley Roque of Breaking Defense.

DWG: I wanted to go back to Israel. There's growing concern on Capitol Hill about end use monitoring. As some lawmakers have said, maybe we don't need more regulations, but let's do use the laws we have on the books, whether it's [inaudible] or CAP policy with the new civilian harm incidents [inaudible] guideline.

Can you walk us through where -- I know it's not just DoD on this, but just sort of what the department or the administration's doing on applying these regulations to Israel, and how if there was a move to apply that, that could potentially change the weapons or the timeline of delivery.

DSD Hicks: I won't respond to that because that is really the State Department's lead in how they think through the provision of security assistance. What we're focused on in DoD is making

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sure that we have a good understanding of the types of capabilities that are needed both as I said for Israel's defense but also what we need for our force protection. We're very focused on our own force protection throughout the region and making sure that we can maintain our readiness in other regions of the world even as we increase that, but I will defer to the State Department on this --

DWG: Let me try a different angle.

This is the first big conflict with CENTCOM in charge of Israel, and sort of their whole entire umbrella. Are you able to sort of walk us through potentially how that's helping or not helping? Or no impact on gleaning lessons learned or observations on civilian casualties or counterterrorism operations?

DSD Hicks: I think there are a couple of things in there, but what I would say is I think we are seeing the benefits of having CENTCOM looking both at defense of Israel issues and the overall picture in the region. So much of what we do in and around Middle East security is about working with our Arab partners and CENTCOM, they're used to that. Bringing in the Israelis to that structure I think has helped to broaden the picture at the very time that we're already moving as a nation, the United States, toward more opportunities for Arab-Israeli conversation and even potential, narrowly construed partner opportunities.

In this crisis at this time I think that has been opportunity because CENTCOM can help advise on the range of what is happening in the region.

Moderator: Meghann Myers, Military Times.

DWG: A couple of years ago you guys started a roadmap to implement more than 80 sexual assault prevention reforms. I wanted to get sort of a round of information of what has been accomplished in the past couple of years and what is on the

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docket for next year in understanding that funding has a lot to do with things they've done.

DSD Hicks: A big initiative for us for sure. And one of the earliest that we started moving on was to counter sexual assault and sexual harassment in a fundamentally more significant way than has been seen. We do have the Chief Prosecutor Offices up and running in December -- we have them staffed and ready to go as of the end of December, I want to say it's the 29th of December. They will actually -- anything that happens after that point, they will have that independent oversight of. So we've ensured they're ready to go. The President has signed the update on the manuals of court martial with those updated changes, and we have approved and begun the hiring of our 2000 person integrated prevention workforce. That includes prevention workforce participants all throughout every echelon of the department, in the combatant commanders all the way to the service academies.

We do believe the public health prevention approach is incredibly important to going after this problem. We also think that prevention workforce, because of the way in which harm and self-harm issues are interrelated will help us on things like suicide prevention, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, domestic violence. So there are advantages and benefits we expect to see beyond just a reduction in sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Then again, many other things going on in those 83 recommendations but I would focus first on prevention and then to my beginning point, on those accountability measures that really build trust in the system.

DWG: And what is coming up for next year? What are set to be accomplished next year?

DSD Hicks: Getting those offices up and running that are direct reports to the service secretaries, that's probably the biggest change you'll see. You'll see a continuation of the growth of

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the prevention workforce. We have made sure we protected funds for that prevention workforce hiring. We're up against a significant hiring challenge across on mental health professionals, behavioral health professionals, and licensed counselors across the entire United States. So we're really putting energy and focus on making sure we can get the workforce we need, even in remote locations like Alaska.

Moderator: Josh Keating, The Messenger.

DWG: Thanks so much for doing this.

Israel and Ukraine, obviously very different conflicts but we're already seeing some overlap in the systems being requested. Artillery, ammunition, loitering drones.

How confident are you in the ability of the defense industrial base to continue supplying these conflicts if they turn into long wars? At what point are they going to start presenting some difficult tradeoffs both in terms of supplying both these wars and readiness for other contingencies, namely Taiwan.

DSD Hicks: We start by saying we focus first and foremost on that readiness equation, and in any request we get for assistance we're evaluating how it could affect our ability to conduct US operations because we want to make sure our force is ready to go. So that's a given.

Then when we're looking at where various partners -- obviously the two that we're seeking supplemental assistance for from the Defense Department which are Israel and Ukraine. Or any others that might come to the US for security assistance under other authorities that we have. We are weighing all of that together.

Can industry deliver it? I am confident, yes, that we have strategies underway. With appropriate funding we can get there or we already are there in terms of the ability to produce. The real issue is making sure that we are projecting accurately

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inside the department where the needs are going to be. Again, both for our own force and for any that might come to ask that we're able to weigh those risks appropriately and judge appropriately, and then that we're sending that signal to industry of where we want to go.

The issue really is typically the ramp. So where you have seen, for example, with artillery, that's been our ramping challenge, but we are moving up that ramping challenge very rapidly and significantly more artillery shells, for example, are produced today in the United States than they have been.

The last thing I'll say here is Ukraine's a great example. Fifty countries are involved in providing security assistance to Ukraine. So back to my earlier point about the potential that we have here. It's really not just about US innovation, although that's really important, ,it's also about what opportunity there is to work with allies and partners to expand that base of common security goals.

DWG: Can I ask if for Ukraine specifically if there's not a new funding package passed by Congress, what does that mean? Is there a contingency plan for how to get around that?

DSD Hicks: We'll be very challenged to continue to provide security assistance from the Defense Department without additional resources. We are protective of ensuring we can help the President with any flexibilities, so you will find that we are going to make sure we reserve that opportunity for him. But obviously we will need supplemental support in order to provide Ukraine the kind of assistance we've been providing.

Moderator: Next is Frank Wolfe of Defense Daily.

DWG: Just back on Replicator, what is the unit cost for [inaudible]? Do you have any idea?

DSD Hicks: It depends on the program or project. The

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application, that's usually a range payload or payload obviously could be like cameras -- just to be clear. A combination. But what we are thinking of is more like things in the tens of hundreds of thousands of dollars per unit than in the millions of dollars per unit. That's the attributable piece.

There are a lot of other things going on in autonomy. You can think about things like CCA that the Air Force is after that are not meant to be attributable. But we're really focused down on these much smaller, generally smaller and certainly less expensive systems. We would expect that we're talking about something like less than .5 percent of the defense budget, but we think there could have a significant impact on the battlefield, and again, can be delivered near term.

DWG: So the .5 percent for Replicator, you mean?

DSD Hicks: Less than five percent, probably in this space in general. The actual, again, the way you should think about Replicator, it's not a program [inaudible] cost. We would be able, once we've selected all the systems and mostly in retrospect be able to say this is probably the total dollar value of systems that we advanced using the Replicator initiative, but that's the better way to think about it than like here's what we're spending on Replicator.

DWG: Where is the funding coming from? Obviously you said this is not [inaudible] money. This is, and Representative Mike Gallagher has said this is some concern that it's going to be, for example, all the munitions needs now, that it could be taken from munitions. So where's the money coming from? And is there a firm distinction between Replicator and the CCA in terms of CCA will have some variants that are, as we said, less attributable. What is the firm distinction in terms of unnecessary duplication [inaudible]?

DSD Hicks: So CCA is outside of Replicator. That's the firm distinction. If that's the easiest way to think of it.

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The money is in the programs. I really feel like I'm about to quote It's a Wonderful Life here, but the money is in the programs. We have across the department, again, think about innovation is happening every day across the department. There are attritable, autonomy programs in the services or the COCOMS depending, SOCOM for example, now. We are already on that path. This is not a new chunk of money. The question in '24 is how could we speed up the delivery of those systems that are already in there? How do we pick the ones that are most relevant for INDOPACOM and that can deliver quickly, and that can deliver in quantity? That's what we're looking at right now.

So the money's in the systems for '24.

For '25, we'll be looking at those systems, and then to the earlier question, maybe an additional tranche of systems that aren't quite that mature today but we think, again, can still deliver within the 18-24 months marked from August, we'll add funds as needed in there, or maybe the services have already put the funds there. We'll be able to tell the Hill what that looks like.

I have spoken with Rep. Gallagher. I have been very clear with him and I will say very clearly here, we are all about the strategy winning. We are not going to go after long-range strike platforms or systems or munitions that are critical to the fight in order to look at another approach here, which is complementary to -- it doesn't substitute for it. All of that is needed. It's a yes-and answer, and it is not a lot of money.

Moderator: Thank you for the holiday film reference.

DSD Hicks: Sorry.

Moderator: No, no. Always a pleasure.

We're at the five minute mark. I always want to reserve time

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for the guest speaker, but the last question quickly goes to Shawn Carberry.

DWG: Thanks.

Just to drill down another layer on Replicator, sort of the capabilities and technology.

I recently spoke with a vendor who is doing autonomous surface vessel work and asked them okay, this ideal of having hundreds of vessels that are doing different things to create dilemmas, doing ISR, self-healing mesh, all of this kind of technology. How close are you to that? They said basically, look, if we wanted 500 vessels to fall in formation autonomously, we could do that tomorrow. To get to the level of complexity that everyone is looking toward, we are a long way away from that.

Can you give a sense of where that gap is, and where Replicator's going to kind of start in terms of those capability levels and how you're going to build to this concept of disaggregated with swarms and craft acting sort of independently rather than just the image of a giant mass?

DSD Hicks: What's happening out in CENTCOM at Task Force 59 is probably the best exemplar of how we can try to get through a DepSecOps rapid iterative, putting together the technologists, the users, the intel community. So much of this -- and the person you talked to is very clear from the way they said it -- is about software. The advantage of software is it iterates much faster than that traditional program that we're used to which is platform centric and we think about how you put the platform together.

The platform in the case of attritable autonomy is largely a bus -- the object upon which the actual technology rides. So software development is key to this and that is where I think, to the point being raised, we have an opportunity to, I'll say again, burn down risk by putting a lot of focus and energy on

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integration of systems, survivability of systems, to the extent that they need to as attritable systems, but survivable enough not to be jammed, for instance.

We're learning a lot. The Ukrainians are showing a lot of how that rapid iteration is happening and how much you have to adjust TTPs, et cetera, as you go. It's not all about the technology and the initiatives that will push through.

Again, they'll be about the systems or the platforms, the systems, but they have to ride alongside ConOps and TTP growth, and that's where things like Task Force 59, not the only place we're doing it, where we can bring all that together and move quickly through experimentation and exercise to fielding is so important to how we're going to get there in that 24 month timeframe.

Moderator: I need to be very respectful of the Secretary's time. There's two minutes left. I reserve that for you for any final comments, and that way your Chief of Staff won't stab me in the back.

DSD Hicks: She would never do that.

I'll just say first of all, the only thing we didn't talk about really was the Tuberville hold. We still are very concerned about that. I said at the beginning, we need to have the trust of Congress in order to get the kinds of authorities and resources we need to move forward, but we're really challenged right now. We don't have appropriations. We're grateful we're not in a shutdown, but that is the bare minimum and we need to actually get what we ask for in '24 to execute our defense strategy.

We've had strong bipartisan support for the supplemental. We still don't have the supplemental. We need that in order to show China and other powers around the world that might doesn't make right, and in fact that countries can defend themselves,

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and that the United States is here to stand with them and won't be backed down. That we're staunch supporters.

And then finally, we need to have our leadership in place and we shouldn't have our military put in the middle of politics. So we really urge the Senate to move forward to get that 360 remaining general and flag officers that are on the floor through the system. The holds are, they're bad for America. They're bad for the military, they're bad for military families, and they need to stop.

Moderator: Great.

Apologies for those who didn't get their questions in, but the tyranny of time is what it is.]

Madame Secretary, thank you for a thoughtful, thought-provoking discussion. I wish everyone a very Happy Thanksgiving.

DSD Hicks: Thank you.

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