

A Conversation with Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis

U.S. Institute of Peace

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Nancy Lindborg:

Good evening. My name's Nancy Lindborg, and I'm the president here at the United States Institute of Peace, and it is my honor to welcome everybody here this evening, as well as everybody who's joining us online and following the conversation on Twitter. And it is #MattisUSIP. I want to extend a particularly warm welcome to members of our board, of our International Advisory Council, and to our Senior Military Advisory Group, who met with us earlier this afternoon, and of course a special welcome to our guest of honor, Secretary of Defense, James Mattis. Thank you for being here with us tonight.

The U.S. Institute of Peace was founded in 1984 as an independent, non-partisan, national institute that is dedicated to reducing the kind of violent international conflicts that pose a threat to U.S. national security, the kind of conflicts that Secretary Mattis has spent a career addressing. And in fact, our most passionate Congressional founders were themselves veterans of World War II and Korean Wars. Their searing experiences on the battlefield in fact created their determination to found and support an institute that was dedicated to how to prevent, how to resolve violent conflict.

So, we pursue this mission by linking training and analysis with action on the ground in conflict zones, here with policy makers in Washington D.C., and with partners in people, organizations, and governments around the world. And over the course of our 34-year history, USIP has worked closely with the State Department, with USAID, and with the Department of Defense. And in fact, by legislation, Secretary Mattis is a member of our bipartisan board of directors. He's ably represented on our board by Under Secretary of Policy, John Rood. And our work with DOD through the years has included facilitating the National Defense Review Commission, which is a body convened by Congress to examine and make recommendations regarding national security, and it includes working together in conflict zones.

In 2007, at the request of the 10th Mountain Division, USIP worked with local leaders in Mahmoudiyah, which was then the most violent part of Iraq, to foster a local peace accord, and local tribal leaders credit that accord with enabling their community to withstand the invasion of ISIS. We are also proud every year to host military fellows. We have three of them here with us in the audience somewhere today. Yes, here they are. Welcome, gentlemen. So, we know these are the kind of partnerships that enable everybody to do their best work, and they remind us what research tells us, that the more inclusive a peace process,

the longer lasting is the peace. And there are few who understand this more than tonight's guest of honor, Secretary Mattis.

In 2003, when then Secretary Mattis was commanding the First Marine Division in Iraq, he prepared his soldiers not only to be an effective fighting force, but also to build ties with the local community. And he knew that fostering that kind of trust, that kind of respect would lead to the kind of strong relationships that would help their mission succeed. In the 2018 National Defense Strategy, Secretary Mattis has renewed this call for building partnerships based on trust, respect, and accountability. And the strategy asserts that the United States will strengthen and evolve our alliances and partnerships in an extended network capable of deterring or decisively acting to meet the shared challenges of our time.

We are certainly in a time of great change. We're seeing changes in the national security landscape, challenges to the free and open international liberal order, the continued challenges that emanate from fragile states, and the resurgent competition with great powers. Certainly these kinds of sustained partnership and alliances cannot be overstated. So, I thank Secretary Mattis for joining us tonight for a very important conversation about the National Defense Strategy at this critical time. He brings the experience of a long and decorated career in the Marine Corps, as well as his deep knowledge of history and an unwavering commitment to public service.

Joining him in this conversation is another distinguished, dedicated public servant, former national security advisor and current chair of the USIP Board, Stephen Hadley. Please, join me in welcoming both of them up to the stage, and enjoy the conversation.

Stephen Hadley:

Good evening, everyone. Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for being with us. What we thought we would do is the Secretary and I will have a conversation on some of the issues of the day. We'll probably go about 35 minutes or so. Then probably the last 20 minutes or so, we'll have questions from the audience. The way we'd like to do that is there are 3x5 cards in the audience. Please write your questions on those cards. We'll also take some from the media. They'll be passed up here, and we'll offer them up to you. We'll try to start on time and end on time.

Let me begin with the National Defense Strategy, which if people have not read, they ought to. It is an extraordinary document. It describes the present time as one of global disorder. It talks about the decline of the rules-based international order, established at the end of the World War II. And we see that disorder today in the headlines, whether it's about Russia, North Korea, Iran, and in a different way, China. All of which has contributed to what the National Defense Strategy characterizes as the most complex and volatile security environment we have experienced in recent memory.

Mr. Secretary, as you survey this landscape, how do you prioritize the challenges to American and global security? And you've talked about alliances as our partner in dealing with those changes, how do you assess the health of our alliance relations today in order to serve that role?

James Mattis:

First of all, thanks for doing this, Steve and President Nancy. It's good to be here. You know the regard that the Department of Defense has for this organization. You have time to reflect and think, which is unusual in this town, so we really appreciate that. How did we look at the threats in the world? We looked at them really from three different angles. One was power, one was urgency, and one was will, because we're in a competition of sorts to maintain this world and turn it over hopefully in slightly better condition than we received it.

In terms of raw power right now, I look at Russia and the nuclear arsenal they have. I look at their activities over the last 10 years, from Georgia and Crimea, to the Donets Basin, to Syria, I can go on, and on, and on, their violations of INF, for example, but in terms of just power, I think it's clearly Russia that we have to look at and address. In terms of urgency, there's two. One is the current fight against the violent extremists. For example, the defeat ISIS Coalition is 70 nations, plus four international organizations working on that fight that is ongoing. We must continue that character of warfare that is very unusual, we call it irregular, but at the same time in terms of urgency is the DPRK, the North Korea Nuclear and Missile Programs are clearly a violation of international sanctions, are clearly a threat to peace and stability.

In terms of will, clearly it's China. Now, in China's case we look at it as different than Russia. Russia wants security around its periphery by having insecurity with other nations. They want veto authority over the economic, the diplomatic, and the security decisions of the nations around them. China, on the other hand, seems to want some sort of tribute states around them. We are looking for how do we work with China. I think that 15 years from now we will be remembered most for how did we set the conditions for a positive relationship with China.

And in that regard, we look for where we can cooperate, and we will cooperate where we can. You see that in unanimous Security Council resolutions on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, that we will confront them where we must, for example, freedom of navigation in international waters and that sort of thing. I've met my counterpart both in Beijing and in Singapore 10 days ago, and he will be here a week from now to continue that dialogue as we've sorted out.

How do we look at our real strengths here? Our real strengths are the network of alliances and partnerships around the world. And in that regard, quietly below the radar, below the radar of what is often in the public domain, I'll just run through what I've done in the last 30 days. In the first week of October, I was at NATO, our most important alliance, 29 nations that work together. Every one of them has its own interests, its own perspective, but at the end of the

day, NATO is stronger than ever in terms of 27 nations clearly raising their defense expenditures, nations that were aligned with us when I rolled out the Nuclear Posture Review. I can go on. It's a strong alliance, and it's getting stronger.

My next trip was down to Cancun where I met with the Latin American, South America, Central America, Mexico ministers of defense. I looked back on 2017. I thought that was a pretty crummy year for democracy around the world. Not so in South America. Not so in Central America. Not so in Mexico. Imperfect it may be, full of economic headwinds. Clearly, the American appetite for drugs and European is dumping a lot of money in that corrodes our institutions, but democracy is alive and well. They're holding elections. They don't know who's going to win. That's the way it should be in a democracy. It's going well down there.

First time I heard my position as being described as minister ... You'll love this, President Nancy. ... Minister of Peace, not Minister of Defense. I went out to Singapore, met with ASEAN two weeks ago, where we are welcome, where many nations in private will tell us why they need us engaged out there, because they're concerned about what China is doing and the piling of massive debt, to quote Prime Minister Modi, on nations that they know, China knows cannot repay it. Then you see what happened in Sri Lanka, where they lost sovereignty over their own harbor —one of those issues I'll be talking obviously with my counterpart about here in Washington shortly.

Then two days ago I got back from the Manama Dialogue in the Middle East, where we were talking about how we move forward on a security architecture that maintains peace, or what passes for peace, right now in the Middle East, and restores peace in several key areas, Yemen being foremost, obviously Syria, moving towards the Geneva process against Russia's example, frankly, but we're at least all on the same sheet of music about it. So, there's a quick rundown on how I see the threats and what we're doing with the alliances and partnerships.

Stephen Hadley:

Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Let me shift to another problem, which is I know on your agenda. Congress charged the USIP to convene a Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States to try to address the root causes of violent extremism, a big task, needless to say. In its recently published interim report, the Task Force noted that the time is right to adopt what the 2004 9/11 Commission called a preventive strategy that is as much or more political as it is military. How do you see the military's role in a strategy for dealing with violent extremism, where non-kinetic measures focused on strengthening fragile states and building resilience are the priority?

James Mattis:

Yeah. As we look back over these difficult years, we just recognized the anniversary, the 35th anniversary of the attack on the French Paratrooper Barracks and the U.S. Marine Peacekeeper Barracks there in Beirut 35 years ago last week. And you look at what has happened since that time, and you recognize that in most cases the breeding ground for this is not something that

can be addressed by the military. Our general view is that the State Department has to lead with AID, and we lead with ideas, we lead with the example of our own country, and we work with like-minded nations in this regard.

My personal view when I joined ... the three years I was out of the Marines and I was on a university campus, had time to think about what had happened. I believed that the U.S. foreign policy had become militarized, and so I come back into this job, and my view was that we had to have State Department in the lead, and the military had to be an enabling, supporting element to this, because you simply couldn't shoot your way out of this problem.

At one point I was frustrated enough with some aspects of State Department's budget that in my testimony I said, "If you don't fully fund ... " up on Capitol Hill, my testimony, "If you don't fully fund the State Department, please buy more ammunition for me, because I'm going to need it," as a rather blunt way of saying why we needed to keep America's foreign policy and our diplomats foremost in this effort. But at the same time, I have also dealt with this adversary that we're up against in the Middle East since 1979 in one form or another, and I've watched it morph since that rather eventful year in the Middle East.

It is very clear we are going to have to get better with our allies on the military side, feeding information to police off the battlefields, and collaborating together, so that we buy the time for diplomats to amass the larger effort, and it's going to take a big effort to blunt this hate-filled enemy, because I'm under no illusions about what they're like. They did not arrive where they're at through a rational process, and in some cases, too many cases perhaps, we're going to have to deal with that in a military and police manner, but the next generation, we're not going to address it in a military manner.

We have to address that one with education and economic opportunity. We have to give people hope, and hope cannot be unilateral anywhere in the world. If it is unilateral, you're simply breeding the antibodies to what you're trying to do. It's going to have to be multilateral. It's going to have to be inclusive, and the military's got to remain steadfast while supporting in every sense of the word, not just with its military alone activities, but with its enabling military activities. It's going to have to be supporting State Department.

Stephen Hadley:

Let's follow up, if we can, with a specific example. In Afghanistan, the U.S. South Asia Strategy called for a political settlement to the war in Afghanistan that protects the U.S.'s friends and allies from transnational terrorist threats. Key to this strategy was increased support for the Afghan National Security Forces, including more robust U.S. counterterrorism operations. More recently, Ambassador Khalilzad was appointed to lead a diplomatic effort to initiate talks between the Taliban, the Afghans, and the United States. So, how can our military strategy and operations in Afghanistan support and not undermine the peace effort, and do U.S. and NATO military forces have a role in Afghanistan after a peace agreement is reached?

James Mattis:

Well, any U.S. military coalition role after the peace is reached would be conditions-based, worked out with the Afghan government, and depend on the threat. But when we put the strategy together, ladies and gentlemen, what we did was we put something together we called the Four R's Plus S, S being sustain it. The first R was to regionalize the approach. You did not start with Afghanistan, come up with a strategy, say, "Well, I guess now we better look at the countries around it and see what do we do as far as their inclusion." We started outside and worked our way inside.

Next, we recognized we had to put more troops in, but the reason we had to put more troops, reinforce it, the second R, was for the third reason, realign those troops to supporting the Afghan security forces directly by training, advising, and assisting. What we had done is created an army, and then we pulled the training wheels off too early. And in that I mean that only the Afghan Special Forces had mentors from NATO nations with them, and every time they went against the enemy, the Taliban, they won against the enemy, but spread out in penny packets around the country were Afghan Security Forces that we had pulled all mentoring away from. So we were going to look at this as a regional problem, reinforce the troops, and realign them, so that more Afghan forces had our mentors with them with NATO air support.

As you know, for those of you who've been there, when you fight in mountainous country, the high ground is very tough ground to take if the enemy's got it. With NATO air forces overhead no longer prohibited from supporting the Afghan Army, and I did say prohibited from supporting them, we would be able to always own the high ground, and that changes the tactical situation. It is protection of the people is what we're trying to do there, so in some cases, we surrendered ground where few, if any, people lived, since it's not a matter of militaries holding ground.

The Afghan lads are doing the fighting. Just look at the casualties. Over 1,000 dead in August and September, 1,000 dead and wounded in August and September, and they stayed in the field fighting, and the Taliban has been prevented from doing what they said they were going to do, which was to take and hold district and provincial centers, also disrupt an election that they were unable to disrupt. But the most important R was the fourth R, reconciliation. And on that you saw Ambassador Khalilzad has been presented with the portfolio. He's working it.

Those of you who know him know him as a force of nature, and he is hard at work on this, on an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation effort. So, this is the approach we're trying to sustain right now. It is working from our perspective. What is heartbreakingly difficult to accept is that progress and violence can be going on at the same time. And I understand those who are disheartened by this, but we never thought in the military this was going to be an easy job, but we are there because if we want to protect ourselves from what happened on 9/11 and so many other countries, this is worthwhile.

So, that's where we're at right now. The president, when he put this forward, I can guarantee you that he challenged every assumption. He challenged every sentence. He challenged every aspect of what we were going to commit to, and it was a very robust discussion in every sense of the word. As allies realized we were going to stay, what had dropped from 50 nations in the fight to 39 has now reversed, we're back to 41. By the way, the two nations that rejoined are both Muslim, Arab Muslim nations, and we also have over 1,000 more troops coming from our partner nations and NATO allied nations that have been added, in addition to the 3,000 that we added when we reinforced the force there.

So, right now that's the way we're going forward, but the goal is reconciliation, and Ambassador Khalilzad has been a very welcome addition to the campaign.

Stephen Hadley:

I want to switch to Syria, if we can. USIP has been advising the 10th Mountain Division during its missions in Iraq and Syria over the past year, as the United States and its coalition partners seek to decisively defeat ISIS and prevent its re-emergence. We also see in Syria a despotic regime, sectarian strife, humanitarian disaster, and great power competition in terms of Russia and of course, Iran as well. In February of this year, U.S. forces found themselves in a firefight with Russian contractors that left as many as 300 Russians killed and wounded.

How do we sort out and how do we think about complexity of this sort, and what are the lessons learned from how to confront challenges in non-state actors like ISIS in fragile states, while meeting the threat from great power competition at the same time? And how do we operationalize deeper cooperation, as you talked about, among our diplomatic, defense and development establishments to respond to these complex conflict situations?

James Mattis:

Well, no one said this was going to be an easy evening, but this is a tragedy that has grown beyond my ability to articulate it. I've seen the refugees in the refugee camps, and I've seen refugees in Bosnia. I've seen them in Southeast Asia. I've seen them in Africa. I have never seen refugees as traumatized as coming out of Syria, not even close. If it were not for Russia's regrettable vetoes in the United Nations that marginalized the UN, I think we would never have gotten to this point, and certainly if it wasn't for the Iranian regime — not the Iranian people — the Iranian regime giving full support to Assad, he would have been long gone.

And when that support was not even sufficient and Mr. Putin came in, we see the reason that I think eventually Assad will have to be managed out of power. I don't think any election run under the auspices of the Syrian regime is going to have any credibility with either the Syrian people or with the international community. But what have we learned along the way? One point I would make is it has been a partner, a non-state partner, the Syrian Democratic Forces, about 50/50 now between Kurd and Arab that has done the bulk of the fighting in Syria. Remember that at the same time, the Iraqi security forces and popular militias were fighting in Iraq.

When we came into office with the administration, we reviewed the situation and determined that we would have to change what was going on. I had gone early to NATO and sat down there in Brussels with my counterparts talking about a host of issues and Syria, Iraq, and ISIS loomed large, and it was clear the foreign fighters returning home, with the veneer of civilization long rubbed off them, were going to be a strategic assault basically on our European partners and other parts of the world, Africa, Southeast Asia, that sort of thing.

So, we changed tactics from what I would call attrition warfare, where you pushed them out of one place, and they fall back, then you push them back out of that place. We took the time to surround West Mosul, Tabqa, Tel Afar, Raqqa, surround it first, and then move against it, and trying to get the civilians out of the way, the non-combatants, the innocent out of the way, because every battlefield we're in over there is also a humanitarian field. We were not always successful at that. Remember, we're up against an enemy that is merciless and used in many cases the locals, the innocents as shields. And we did our best to avoid those deaths, but some of them, as a consequence of war, were more than we ever wanted to see happen, but it was part of the fight.

As we moved against them, and they're now down to less than 2% of the ground they own, we can see that the most important effort is the sustaining. In other words, after we go through and we push them out of the area, you must immediately create local security forces in order to hold the ground and then get locals back into positions, community councils, so that locals feel like they're now in control. The international community has actually been very helpful. We do have the money to help the people who are trying to recover, but it's just emergency services inside Syria. Inside Iraq, where we have a government and they did go through an election, as you're aware, they're putting a government together, there we have a government that we can support.

In Syria, we have to support the locals, and then we're going to have to work through the Geneva process to make a way forward for Syria. We are committed to it. Russia's best efforts to divert it into an Astana process or Sochi have not produced anything worthwhile, and so we're calling on Russia to support the UN Geneva Process and Staffan de Mistura's efforts there. Will they do it? I think eventually it's in Russia's best interest that Syria not be the cauldron of violence that it is now. So, we're going to keep pressing on it and supporting the UN in their effort.

Stephen Hadley:

Let me ask you a related question. There's been a lot of discussion about Iran wanting to create an arc of influence, if you will, from Tehran all the way to Beirut, and the possibilities that that could be disrupted in Iraq and particularly Syria. Could you say a little bit about what we're doing to counter Iranian influence in Syria and to frustrate their ability to establish this kind of strategic arc?

James Mattis:

Well, our authority to be in Syria right now is clearly on the defeat ISIS campaign. That is the authority I have from the president. That's the authority

of the Congress, under the authorization for the use of military force. And that is the only specific military purpose that we're undertaking there. Now, at the same time, Secretary of State Pompeo, taking the lead as he should in something like this, has doubled the number of diplomats in the liberated parts of Syria. Brett McGurk has been magnificent at orchestrating the international coalition, including the funding for the emergency services. And that continues to go on.

Now, will that in itself, by getting the locals empowered to represent their own communities, to defend their own communities against a return of ISIS in itself stop the Iranian influence? No, it will not, but that is where the Geneva Process comes in to say, "Iran, you have no business in Syria. You've not been helpful there. Your militia that is destabilizing in Lebanon against the government, the Lebanese Hezbollah and their fighters inside Syria, and ones like that need to get out of Syria if we're going to have peace."

Inside Iraq, I think it's a matter of United States and NATO training mission Iraq, a NATO element that's going to make the Iraqi military something that stands up for Iraq and is not reliant on the good will of the Tehran regime. Again, this is not a contest with the Iranian people. This is a senseless war for the Iranian people to be in Syria or to be trying to make Iraq into a rump state of Tehran. It's not going to work, and it's just wasting a lot of the resources that would help the people in Iran, if that was not a revolutionary regime, if it was really a government that cared about its people.

So it's more about the long-term view than anything we're going to do with the U.S. military to rebuff the Iranian influence in those places. That is best led by diplomats and political leaders who represent their own people and our diplomats, and the international community supporting them.

Stephen Hadley:

Let me ask you one other regional issue, and then we'll move to a couple other questions that come from the audience. One area where we see increased challenges in managing partnerships is in the Red Sea, for example, in Djibouti and along the coast of Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan. There's a proliferation of military bases and deployments sponsored by the Gulf states, Turkey, China, and other external actors. How do you see this region? What priority does it have for you and what is the administration's approach?

James Mattis:

Yemen has had more problems than any people deserve to carry, and we're calling on all the parties, specifically the Houthis and the Arab coalition, to meet in Sweden in November and come to a solution. Not talk about subordinate issues, about what town they're going to meet in or what size the table is they meet around, but talk about demilitarizing the border so that the Saudis and the Emirates do not have to worry about missiles coming into their homes and cities and airports and ensure that all the missiles that Iran has provided to the Houthis are put under international watch, in a park somewhere where they can be kept accounted for, that sort of thing, as we set the conditions for a return to

traditional areas inside Yemen and a government that allows for this amount of local autonomy that Houthis or that southerners want.

This has got to end. We've got to replace combat with compromise and we are working as we speak with Mr. Martin Griffiths, the UN Special Envoy. I've met with him myself, Secretary Pompeo, is talking to him frequently, as we try to amass the international support. We just met in Manama, in the Manama dialogues and this was brought up forcefully, not just by myself, but by others as well, that it's time to stop this.

And right now, what the Iranians have done by bringing in anti-ship, missiles and this sort of thing is interrupted freedom of navigation. They are the ones who keep fueling this conflict and they need to knock it off. They may do it through proxies as they do so often in the Middle East, but they do not escape accountability for what they're doing through proxies and surrogate forces. We still will hold them accountable.

Stephen Hadley: Thank you. The president has said the U.S is leaving the INF Treaty. How does this decision affect the military's readiness plans? How does it affect the role of nuclear weapons in our strategy, and how will it affect U.S. posture in Europe and the Pacific Rim?

James Mattis: I was going back through some papers when I came into office and I noticed that Rose Gottemoeller, who was then the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control in 2008, 10 years ago, called out the Russians for violations of the INF. I can go through — matter of fact, I can take 10 minutes going through year by year, the efforts of our diplomats to try to get Russia to come back into compliance. Through denial and deceit, Russia has continued not just to do research and development, and fielding, but now standing up multiple units that are armed with a weapon that is clearly a violation.

And eventually Russia, I believe through a slip, revealed that the missile they said did not exist, it did exist and once they realized that it was revealed, they then said, but it doesn't violate the treaty. And by the way, you're violating the treaty over some things that we cannot make sense out of.

We have done everything we can, I think, diplomatically. The diplomats are still trying, by the way, as we speak. We have made it very clear that when two nations sign a treaty and one violates it and even denies the violation and then continues violating as they field the weapon, that is an untenable situation. It also jeopardizes the trust you need for any other treaty. So, right now, where are we? We came out with our nuclear posture review. We went around, talked to all the nations in the NATO alliance, plus other partner nations about what was in it. Took their ideas on board and when we rolled it out it was received generally across the board and in the U.S. Congress with support.

As far as the INF, as a follow-on issue, we have briefed the NATO council and the nuclear counsel in NATO more than once. We have had detailed briefs by our technical experts. And my last time there here a few weeks ago, I said, if any of you have any advice, please send it to me. I want to know what options you can find, because the only ones I see are highly unpalatable.

So where are we right now? The national security advisor carried the concern directly into Moscow. Secretary Pompeo is engaged with his foreign minister counterparts and NATO, the foreign ministers meeting goes, I think it's December fourth, and this will be, I'm sure, a front and center topic. I was just in Prague the day before yesterday and I met with two of our NATO nations' ministers there. I met with two other NATO nations when I was in Manama on last Saturday. And we are doing everything we can to try to find any option. And if any of you have any good ideas, please send me an email, it seems like every nut in America has my email address so I'm sure you can find it and send it to me.

I don't think this is the military, this is the U.S. military, we belong to you. We're accountable to you, if you have any ideas, please send them. And that goes for our allied officers in this room as well. I don't think all the great ideas come from the country with most aircraft carriers. If you have ideas, please tell me what you recommend, but we will continue to collaborate very, very closely with our allies and consult with them and that's both through the ministers of defense and the ministers of foreign affairs.

What does it do to us in terms of military terms? I don't want to go into too much detail, but there are options, both symmetric and asymmetric, that are available. So I'm not committing to anything right now. That's a grave decision that the president will take counsel from all of us and it will be up to President Trump. His views on nuclear weapons I think are pretty well known that he hates them, and we'll be working this issue with him.

Stephen Hadley:

Thank you. This is a question from our audience. Currently, I see competitors and adversaries relying on illicit trade, influence and messaging to win their national goals without military conflict. How do you see DOD and the U.S. government competing and winning in this very different age? Illicit trade, influence and messaging?

James Mattis:

First of all, I have an organization that's probably got 95% of our cyber capability in the U.S. government called, U.S. Cyber Command, obviously. And the number one mission that U.S. Cyber Command has right now is the protection of our election infrastructure and blocking, or aiding the blocking and identification and blocking, of the influence campaign. So, we reveal obviously a lot of this information. We keep track of it. We've worked with private Internet providers, content providers, you know their names, and we alert them via the FBI, the police, the law enforcement effort.

But right now, it is a all hands on deck at Cyber Command effort to keep our democratic processes free and unencumbered. It's very difficult because we have freedom of speech in this country. And how do you ferret out, what's going on from foreign countries that are actually using basically biased information or false information to incite cleavages inside our own society. It's going to take an informed electorate in order to maintain this. This is not something that the military does alone, but certainly the military has an obligation to protect the country from that sort of thing. And they'll alert the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security when we see it coming.

So, we're working hard at it, but it's, it's an area that we have got to balance our constitutional freedoms and not inhibit those even as we try to maintain the integrity of the election and of the campaigners' messages, so they're not having their, their message a misconstrued by others. A tough issue, but we're up for it and we're looking forward to it, because when it comes to protecting the country in this day and age, it's not just about, you know, guns and ships and that sort of thing. This is a very powerful weapon in the hands of people who know what they're doing and our adversaries do.

Stephen Hadley:

And Secretary, I want to move to space for a moment, and this is a question from the audience. With space now being considered a war-fighting domain, what do you think our objectives should be? And from a planning perspective, what are some new factors planners should think about when considering space, time and force?

James Mattis:

Space has definitely become competitive. We watched when the Chinese shot their obsolete satellite out of the air, blew it to pieces and we've watched other nations putting capabilities into space. And I would just tell you that it's basically two pronged. One, it's defend. We have to defend what we have in outer space that is used for navigation, communication, peaceful purposes, commerce, banking, all these kinds of things. And military intelligence, surveillance satellites we need, we're going to have to put satellites up that can be defended or can be resilient against attack, resistant to attack, or it can be replaced swiftly, that sort of thing.

So, we're going to have to defend what we have, but also we're going to have to be prepared to use offensive weapons in space, should someone decide to militarize it and go on the offensive. You cannot simply play defense, no sport in the world, a competitive sport, in the world can just play defense and win. And this was not an area that we want to be second place in. So the points I would make: first, we're going to need some sort of have, I would call it a concept, of how we're going to conduct ourselves in space. That's all of us, internationally. What are we going to do=?

Now, we're going to have to recognize if nations are not willing to live by those rules, such as we've seen on this planet down here below, we're going to have to have the ability to defend and the ability to do offense. In that regard, the president has been very clear that he wants to organize accordingly. So, what

we will do is put together a command that can compete in space on whatever level an adversary wants to compete, chooses to compete.

And then we're going to ensure that we go to Congress with how we believe we can best organize, not for a bureaucracy, but for the capabilities the president, the vice president have rightly directed that we have. So we don't surrender what we do in space, using space for commerce or navigation or anything else. It's critical to our economy, it's critical to our way of life, now, we've grown reliant on it. So we're organizing appropriately and we'll go forward — with, obviously, with Congress right alongside us, since they have to enable it with legislation — and carry out the president's direction.

Stephen Hadley:

If you did not see it, the Secretary had some very interesting remarks at the Manama dialogue in Bahrain about Yemen, about the killing of Khashoggi. And I want to pick up on that thread in one of the questions that has come from the media: in the wake of the death of Jamal Khashoggi, and a continued uptake in civilian casualties in Yemen, do you believe that Saudi Arabia has made a good faith effort to reduce harm in this conflict? And what do you hope to see Saudi and the UAE do to improve as the State Department looks toward another certification of U.S. refueling support to those two allies?

James Mattis:

Well, what was referred to the killing of Khashoggi, I'd say the murder of Khashoggi, I would separate it out from the Yemen situation that stands unique by itself. The president said, we want to get to the bottom, we will get to the bottom of it. And as you know, Turkey has so far provided evidence for every allegation that they have made about what happened, and so no one nation controls all the information. And I spoke to the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia two days ago in Manama, and he said there would be a full investigation.

Let me swing over to Yemen, separate issue. What we have been providing since the last administration, or in the last administration... We reviewed it when we came in very carefully... in regards to this war that's going on there between the Arab coalition and the Houthis. The last administration agreed to provide certain information, refueling support, so that pilots didn't feel they had to make a hasty decision about to drop or not to drop, that sort of thing. We refuel, probably, I think, less than 20% of their aircraft, they have their own refuelers by the way.

But what is it that we are pushing for at this point, for months? We have been holding classes on how do you actually establish no fire areas. What do you do for restricted fire areas? How do you calculate the effects of bombs? How do you then investigate what happened? Some people have a very high expectation, as demonstrated by the U.S. and the NATO air forces, of what can be accomplished, and what we have achieved through enormous effort, training, technology and putting it all together. Even then, we've had mistakes, but in our forces, we have set a standard that is very high.

The commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force has been going from base to base, as we continue the training and the conferences for them, and he's looking his pilots in the eye explaining that there is never a reason to drop if they don't think they can hit the right target. Now, war, I will just tell you, I've got a little experience in it, is basically one tragedy piled upon another tragedy. Welcome to war.

But our goal right now is to achieve a level of capability by those forces fighting against the Houthis that they are not killing innocent people. The longer term solution — and by longer term, I mean 30 days from now — we want to see everybody around a peace table, based on a cease-fire, based on a pull back from the border, and then based on ceasing dropping of bombs, that will permit the special envoy, Martin Griffiths — he's very good, he knows what he's doing — to get them together in Sweden and end this war. That is the only way we're going to really solve this. Improved accuracy of bombs is still a war.

So we've got to move toward a peace effort here. And we can't say we're going to do it sometime in the future. We need to be doing this in the next 30 days. We've admired this problem for long enough down there. And I believe that the Saudis and the Emirates are ready, and in fact, had the Houthis not walked out of the last effort that Martin Griffiths had going, we would probably be on our way there right now.

Stephen Hadley:

Secretary, this is a question from Peter Neilson of the Embassy of Denmark. "You spend a lot of time and energy in strengthening cooperation with allies and partners. What do you see as the major accomplishments in this area and what are the challenges and opportunities looking forward?"

James Mattis:

It's been eye opening as I came into this job that I never aspired to. I'd never met President Trump before. He called me back to Westminster as president-elect, and met with him. I had my views. I was out at Stanford University and I was a ... had time to study. I did not realize just how much other nations ... I mean I'd read about it. I did not realize how many other nations look to us as a calming or a confidence-building partner for them. And wherever I go, I find from South America to the Middle East, certainly to the Pacific, certainly in Brussels at the NATO meetings, that they all want us to stay. They all want us to keep at it.

So where are we right now? I went to NATO. My first, my first meeting there, I'd been a supreme allied commander before in uniform. I knew many of the people that are on the staff, knew many of the principals sitting around the table, from my previous days. And I assumed when I went there I was going to lose some, some rapport with nations' representatives who represented their own nations, their own nations' interest. So when I said, there was no way I could go back to America and ask American parents to care more about the freedoms that European children enjoyed than European parents did, that they were going to have to pay a modicum for the best defense in the world, and what is that modicum: 2%.

I recognized that only leaves 98% for everything else. But I think we can afford 2% for what grew out of the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, to survive in this world. And I think we have to recognize, after 2014 especially, that things began changing, that it was no longer the same Europe that it was before Putin began his adventures and terrorists began shooting up the streets of Paris, Brussels, and elsewhere.

I expected to lose rapport. I did not. Now, ladies and gentlemen, I'd heard this first when I sat behind Secretary Perry when I was his executive secretary in 1990. Rudy, what was it? Back in the last millennium? 1997, I think. I'd first heard him say, "That you have got to be paying more. We cannot continue to carry this all." I heard it also from Secretary Cohen. I heard it from Secretary Rumsfeld. I heard it from Secretary Gates, as a four star, when I was a NATO supreme commander. This was not a new message. The difference was the extremely strong a statement of the president that it had gone on long enough.

I was trying to think of how to put it to our allies where. it was not adversarial. It's not about being adversarial or antagonistic. And I was coming out of Denver on my way east to go through Senate confirmation, and you've all heard it 100 times, you know what I'm going to say? The stewardess got up and she said, "In the event we lose cabin pressure, the mask will drop. Put your own mask on first and then help those around you." What I would call this is, we are, when we talk about America first, it's not America alone. We are trying to get our own economic house in order, our own fiscal house in order, we're putting our own mask on first. So we can help those around us.

We are not a worthy ally, we are not a worthy partner for you allies in the audience if we are not on a fiscally sustainable, economically vibrant path, because no nation has maintained its military wherewithal that didn't keep its economic and fiscal house in order. So that's the approach we're taking. It has not cost me the rapport I anticipated. In fact, and the alliance today, like I said, early on, 27 of 29 nations are raising their funding. And in fact, all 29, if you look at the overall, what they account for in terms of defense spending, all 29 today are raising the amount of money they spend, they commit to defense.

So I'm. I'm relatively optimistic about where we're at right now with allies, with NATO being, I think, a very representative example of where we're at. It hasn't been easy. There's been a lot of strong words, but that's what democracies do with each other: they stand up and say where they stand. At the end of the day though, we're together 100% when it comes to putting a German battalion into the Lithuanian forest and a dozen other NATO nations are there under the German lieutenant colonel's command, who is serving under the Lithuanian brigade commander's command. You can see NATO working from the front edge of the Baltics all the way back to Brussels and in the nations' capitals.

I went on a little bit at length, but you can see I only have three lines of effort. Make the U.S. military more lethal, build stronger partnerships with our partners and allies and reform how the Defense Department does business, so I

can look you all in the eye and say we're spending your money properly and we're getting more lethal out of it. And I would just tell you, in that regard, for the first time in 70 years, we're having an audit done of the U.S. Department of Defense. So I can look you in the eye and say, in the midst of all this, we're not taking your money and flushing it down the drain.

We're going to find a lot of problems in that audit. We're going to fix every — we're going to tell you about them — we're going to fix every one.

Stephen Hadley: Secretary I want to ask a last question and then-

James Mattis: Oh, thank God.

Stephen Hadley: It's been quite a tour of the world. And we thank you for the time. And, and I want to suggest, maybe, a fourth line of effort, because when you've talked about Syria and Iraq and Afghanistan, Yemen, and the issue of fragile states we talked about earlier. There are a lot of people will say that if you're going to deal with those kinds of problems you need yes, defense. But you need development, you need diplomacy. Some would say you'd need democracy, but in any event you need some kind of good governance.

So are we, are we adequately resourcing all elements of that, that Pentateuch, if you will, and how are we doing within the government about coordinating all of these so that we can apply them against the challenges that we see in fragile states that are so often sources of conflict?

James Mattis: Well, we can always coordinate inside the government better. As we look back in history from that nasty argument with King George III, we decided to set up a government that could never be a king over us. It would not be efficient, and we set it up intentionally that three different branch of government would be co-equal and compete, and one of them had a bicameral legislature just add a little more fuel to the fire.

So for those of you who are our allies and partners in the room, who we frustrate, often I will just tell you we are accomplishing the very purpose of our founding fathers because we frustrate ourselves even more. So we can always collaborate better. One thing that Bob Gates, when he was secretary of defense, Dr. Gates used to say to us, the only thing that allows government to work at top level is trusted personal relations between those at the top. And for all you young people in the audience who wonder sometimes about going to work in the government: if you put others first, if you decide to go into government, don't forget what Dr. Gates said, a long time civil servant, because we can make this experiment in democracy work, but we're going to have to work together on it and we need young people to come in to do it. We can always collaborate better and a spirit of collaboration has always got to be there if we're going to make it work. I don't know, when you said, are we providing enough in development funds?

In Germany, they have to provide for every dollar that goes into national defense, they have to provide a dollar to development funds. In Norway, they have very robust efforts to teach good governance and reward it with development money. They actually, it's a very disciplined process. My point is one of the reasons we need allies in this world, it's very simple in history, nations with allies thrive, nations without them die. Our allies have many of these issues worked out in a much more coherent manner because their programs are developed from the ground up, in a much more, I would call it less complex government than we have, a smaller government.

So, it's easier for them to apply their resources in areas that we can come in and reinforce what they're doing. We can work together with them and get a much better return on the effort. We're going to have to work with allies. No one nation on its own can defend itself. No one nation on its own can deal with bad governance or transnational criminals, or something like that. We're going to have to work together. So are we doing enough? I think together we probably are, but we could be a lot more coherent on the national and international level. And we're going to have to stay committed to it. But thanks very much Steve.

Stephen Hadley:

It was a tour de force. Please join me in thanking Secretary Mattis for his time tonight. Thank you so much.