

Nick Burns: [00:00:00](#) Good afternoon. Good afternoon everybody. Good afternoon. I'm Nick Burns, executive director of the Aspen Security Forum. It's a pleasure to welcome all of you to green wall tent. A real pleasure to welcome someone I've known for quite a long time. I am Phil Davidson who is commander of our Endo Pacific Command. I'm going to say a word about AML Davidson in a minute, but I just wanted to, there's so many VIP is here but in the front row, my close friend in many ways, my mentor at Harvard and our co-chair of the Aspen Security Forum, Professor Joe Nye is here. I wanted to thank professor knife for his leadership today and then two very important members of the Aspen Security Group and Forum Secretary of State, Madeline Albright who just spoke, I thought beautifully, passionately about democracy over in door hosier and Tom Pritzker, who's been an incredibly valuable member of our group who also spoke this morning. So thank you all. Thank you Elliot Gerson for your leadership of the Aspen Institute.

Nick Burns: [00:01:08](#) We're going to have a fascinating discussion today with one of the most important military commanders in the United States and someone who I think is in the most important region of the world for the United States. That's Admiral Davidson and that's the DOPA. Let me tell you a little bit about him. He's from the Midwest, from St Louis originally, although he has a lot of family history up in the Adirondacks of New York state. He's a 1982 graduate of the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. He's also a graduate of a school that's close to my home, which is the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. He's had an extraordinary naval career from Midshipman to admiral. He has been on forgers, he has been on cruisers, he has been on aircraft carriers, he's had a NATO command. He's commanded the sixth fleet. He's had important staff positions in Washington, and now he is our commander in this vast region.

Nick Burns: [00:02:05](#) And we're hoping that we'll be able to pull some maps up in a minute. That basically extends, um, from, uh, all the South Asia all the way across the Arabian Sea. The subcontinent, the Bay of Bengal, the Strait of Malacca, the Western Pacific, all of the Pacific Ocean, all the way over to Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska to the north, to the United States. Uh, I said to Adam Davidson, uh, just now that Robert Kaplan, who is a friend of ours, wrote a great 2011 book called monsoon. And Kaplan says in that book, this is the strategic power map of the world, Alan Davidson's command. It's where the four strongest military power powers in the world are today. And that's Russia and China in the United States and Japan. And I name a fifth India. It's where 50% of the energy of the world is traffic. There we go, uh, from the Arabian peninsula to the big Asian economies. It's

where 60% of the container traffic in the world swings east, west, and West East. And it's the future of power as Professor Nye and others were saying today. So w Davidson, I thought we'd start with just your command newly named Indo-Pacific. This is the power map. This is a big responsibility. How do you see the major challenges you face?

Philip Davidson: [00:03:27](#)

Well, thank you very much. A ambassador is a great pleasure to see you again and see so many dvs and VIP is in the front to everybody that attends the Aspen Strategy Forum. Thank you for your service. Adding to the discourse, uh, of the national security in the United States homeland security as well. Um, W it's appreciative, uh, appreciated really by everyone. And, uh, my own observation of panels earlier today was extraordinarily helpful to me. If I could just talk about the area of responsibility for a second. Um, my predecessor had a short a sound bite for it, that area of responsibility for Pacific Command. Now Indo-Pacific command extends from Hollywood to Bollywood and polar bears to penguins. I'm appropriating that, uh, myself to describe that it's indeed just slightly over half the earth surface. Um, and if I were to stand up and draw a circle, kind of centered on Vietnam, but uh, encompassing China, India and Indonesia and the Philippines in up more than half the earth's population lives in that circle.

Philip Davidson: [00:04:37](#)

Um, oftentimes when you see the map, if you just pull that up a little bit, when you're looking at Southeast Asia, you think, oh, this is just a small corner of the world. It's actually, you know, huge. Uh, uh, in terms of population, it's growing in economic strength. Well over half. Uh, the globe's wealth is in that area. Um, and when we look at the totality of the whole, of the area responsibility, seven of the 10 largest militaries in the world or in the Indo-Pacific region, uh, the name was recast. Uh, when I took command, uh, just a little over a year ago, uh, in Honolulu, it was, uh, uh, actually, uh, announced by Sven Secretary Mattis, um, at the change of command ceremony in which I was there. It does not include a change in the area of responsibility, but it does more accurately described, uh, the area of responsibility and the important linkage, um, that the Indian Ocean and the Pacific and, um, countries around it, um, are to each other. Uh, through that, um, all important passageway, which is the Strait of Malacca. Um, I can tell you, everybody in the area of responsibility loves the name ended up Pacific except China

Nick Burns: [00:05:53](#)

and the Indians really lovely.

Philip Davidson: [00:05:55](#)

The Indians really love it. And Nepal is, uh, outlier as well. Um, my command, I'm actually the joint commander, so I command

army, navy, Air Force, marine and Special Operation Forces in the Pacific. Um, in total we have about 85,000 of those people forward, but 28,500 in Korea, about 58,000 forward stationed in Japan. Um, we have numbered air forces, three-star led air force components in Korea. Uh, in Japan we have the seventh fleet home ported in Japan as well. We have the third Marine Expeditionary Force headquartered in Dolla. Um, you have elements of First Army Corps forward in Japan, but most of them are back in the state of Washington. And of course, uh, in Hawaii itself or the four-star commanders of Pacific Fleet of Pacific Air Forces have a US army forces Pacific. And then the three-star commander that is marine forces Pacific as well. Um, we have small, uh, uh, basis in Singapore.

Philip Davidson: [00:07:03](#) Um, we have a major base in Guam, u s territory. Whenever you travel to Guam, they remind you, this is where our mayor, America's Day begins. It's just on the other side of the [inaudible] line. Anderson Air Force base is there, and Guam is a place that's growing in population going forward. I'm leaving out the almost 300,000 people that are in Hawaii, the continental United States, uh, in Alaska as well. Uh, but they're all part of those forces. If I could just a comment on the challenges for a minute. Um, five major challenges, um, four of which, uh, are really articulated in the nation's national security strategy and the national defense strategy. Uh, first and, uh, always on my mind, uh, day in and day out is the most immediate threat, which remains North Korea. And we'll come back and talk to that a little bit later. What I consider to be the greatest longterm strategic threat to the United States and the rules based international order, which is China.

Philip Davidson: [00:08:06](#) Russia has, uh, elements in the Pacific at the top of the area of responsibility. There, there is a ongoing counter-terrorism, uh, a fight going on, uh, within, uh, the Pacific Command AOR, which the U S Indo-Pacific Command and Special Operation Forces Pacific specifically provides, uh, extensive support in the Philippines. And of course, you know, you've all been witnessed to the Easter attack and Sir Lanka earlier this year. And then there's the threat of manmade and natural disasters across the regions. Something that's takes a considerable amount of time for the headquarters, uh, to support, uh, not only us territories, Hawaii, um, our allies in the region. Uh, but many of the nations that might, uh, ask for help, uh, in typhoons, earthquakes, volcano eruptions,

Nick Burns: [00:08:56](#) uh, things like that. It's quite busy. Let me just, we're going to talk a lot about China. Obviously we had a day focused on China. I want to talk about Japan first. [inaudible] I worked for

secretary of State, George Schultz 30 years ago. He used to tell us it was very much oriented towards the Pacific. There is no more important American ally in the world in Japan. Joan, I essentially said the same thing today on the great power, uh, panel. Um, we have tremendous forces located there. We have a very tight defense treaty and obviously if we're thinking about working with China, but limiting China's strategic ambitions, it starts with Japan.

Philip Davidson: [00:09:32](#)

It does indeed start with Japan. And I would, I would say not only is Japan our most important ally in the region, they might be indeed our most important ally on the globe. Um, I spend more time talking with my counterpart, the chief of defense in Japan, uh, ammo Quanta and now a general Yamasaki, uh, than I do any US commander of my peers, uh, in the u s armed forces. Um, we, uh, closely collaborate on just about all issues, um, throughout the Indo Pacific region. Uh, of course there is the root of it, which is our, you know, obligation under our, our, uh, defense treaty, um, to help Japan. We have bilateral planning efforts that go on there, but we have multilateral efforts and engagements with other nations in the AOR. Uh, and we spend quite a bit of time talking about the security of course, and the Korean Peninsula, certainly in the east China Sea, the South China Sea, across all of Oceania as well. Uh, and in the Endo Pacific

Nick Burns: [00:10:34](#)

and Americans American strategic place in the Endo Pacific, our predominance as we call it and really begins on September 2nd, 1945 that's the date of the Japanese surrender. The United States stayed in the region. We have a defense treaty with Japan that I think goes back to 1949, 1950, something like that. Um, our allies system with Japan, South Korea, Australia, defense agreements with the Philippines and Thailand. That's the basis of our power. Uh, and in the Endo Pacific. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Philip Davidson: [00:11:05](#)

Um, I remind people in the region quite frequently that one of our oldest treaties in the United States was actually with Thailand, goes back to 1833 and a treaty of Amity. It speaks to the, the length of our presence in the Western Pacific, but it also speaks to the reach that we had way back to the beginnings of, uh, our own republic. Um, those five treaty alliances, um, is a, uh, where I have obligations, uh, either, uh, defensive obligations or collaboration and coordination obligations going forward. Um, they are five critically important countries. You know, when you really lay out the geography of, uh, of it all, um, that kind knit together the Pacific with the Indo-Pacific, um,

and, uh, um, take the lion's share of my responsibilities, uh, my time, uh, to service those responsibilities. So

Nick Burns: [00:11:59](#) for every administration, since President Truman's administration, we've been the most significant military power. We've been safeguarding the flow of commercial goods energy. We've been keeping the peace is that now at some risk, given the threat from China, what is the threat that they're going to build up their own military to compete with ours in this region, that they could even possibly gain a technological edge as they militarize AI and quantum computing and biotechnology. We spend a lot of time in that subject here. Last summer. Is that the most straightforward, most direct risks that we face in the next 10 to 15 years?

Philip Davidson: [00:12:36](#) I think since the end of the Cold War, it's the of the most important strategic risk that we bear. Um, one of the fallacies myths that I think people have is that the size of, of armed forces around the world have been static through the 21st century. That does not explain the explosive growth in navy air force space and cyber capabilities and capacity, military speed capabilities is, you know, 21st century improved technology capacity is numbers of ships, aircraft missiles, things like that. Um, it has grown dramatically, uh, in China and without really extant threat, um, certainly from any of the seaboard nations. Uh, during that timeframe. Uh, if I could give you just one descriptor of how dramatically it's changed, uh, at the turn of the century 2000, uh, China had about two dozen satellites total this year. They will launch more satellites than any other nation on the planet, including the United States.

Philip Davidson: [00:13:44](#) And it will number a hundred. And it starts to explain to you, you know, the extent at which they are expanding their capabilities. They are embarked on global deployments. It's pretty common knowledge that they have a small naval taskforce up near the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Africa. Uh, and you know, in a counter piracy effort, an independent counter piracy effort that they're running, uh, they have a base in Djibouti. Um, but, uh, more extensively, they are sending, uh, maritime and air forces around the world to the extent that they have made more port visits and more continents on the planet in the last 28 months than they did in the previous 28 years. This is describing to you the change that is taking place in the areas, not a status quo. Um, uh, concern.

Nick Burns: [00:14:32](#) The great leader is Singapore and in the late, uh, Lee Kuan Yew, um, used to say he didn't believe at the end of his life and he knew both countries very well. China, the United States, he did

not believe that China was seeking to become the greatest global power. He said, but it's certain that China wants to be the most significant military power in the Indo-Pacific.

Philip Davidson:

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So how would they attain that and how can we do what we want? And that's maintain American strategic power and predominance. Yeah. So the first part, the China's moving quite pernicious Lee across the whole of the Indo Pacific, if the, if not the globe. Um, some of this, uh, you've seen described in the one belt one road initiative, what they called now, uh, the, or excuse me, the one belt one road, what they call now only in English, not in Mandarin, the belt and road initiative. Um, it's a very opaque development process that does not use w a world trade organization or any kind of a World Bank standards. Uh, there, it's been marked by corruption and it's been well articulated by the vice president, secretary Pompeo, myself, others, um, the debt trap, diplomacy swap or excuse me, the debt trap swap that has occurred, um, over time.

Philip Davidson:

[00:15:49](#)

Um, they had their first belt and road forum a couple of years ago. Um, the pushback in the region on this very opaque process has manifested itself either in direct investigations, internal to countries like the Maldives, Malaysia actually pushed back, uh, on deals that a previous administration had made. Uh, all the way to the point that, uh, the second belt and road forum known as the Barf in my headquarters, um, never heard that before. Is that an internal [inaudible] known as the from my headquarters was just in the last couple of months. They had to spend considerable time, uh, trying to convince, uh, those attendees that the bad practices that had been extant in the years gone by. We're not going to be part of the process going forward. Um, there are other examples of, uh, pernicious behaviors including, for example, last year when Australia was just debating improving, uh, their foreign investment laws similar to our syphius laws in this country.

Philip Davidson:

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Um, while it was in debate magically Australian beef and wine, the major place where it goes from Australia is China. Uh, their number one trading began to stack up on the loading docks. So you could see how China is connecting. Do what I ask or we won't do what you desire. A in response coming back. Um, the push back is, uh, in the region. The good thing I like to talk about is there's been a general convergence now around the idea of a free and open Indo-Pacific. President Trump in Vietnam and the fall of 17 announced this vision. Uh, I think you saw a secretary palm peo build on this at the Pacific Business Forum last summer of Vice President Pence, his speech, uh, at the Hudson Institute and then at APEC in Papa New Guinea. Uh,

last fall in 2018, you know, are starting to expand this. Um, Japan has a very similar vision.

Philip Davidson: [00:17:52](#) Prime Minister Modi at the Shangri-la dialogue in Singapore a year ago, uh, put forth a similar vision. Australia has a, uh, a strategic vision that's quite similar. Even New Zealand last year put, put together a very clear eyed, um, uh, uh, document, uh, that spoke to this. Um, and as you know, ongoing right now, Indonesia is leading an effort within azan, uh, to describe a free and open and inclusive Pacific. Now, this is all goodness. I'm seeing a general convergence and support in the military space. And I think the United States is actually seen support in the diplomatic and economic space from these nations and others. There are other strategic opportunities across the area of responsibility to help, uh, in this regard. So part of your job is to be a diplomat and you and the assistant u s assistant secretary of State for East Asia and mentioned even, sure that job is filled.

Philip Davidson: [00:18:43](#) It is, you just fell down. Yeah, assistant secretary, Dave Stillwell. He's going in there just a few weeks. So the two of you are the two senior officials outside of the secretaries of state and defense and the president, vice president who are managing our relationships. Certainly Randy Schriver and the Department of Defense as well as the secretary there. So you, you travel a lot. I do spend quite a bit of time in the area of responsibilities, allies, absolutely. Uh, advancing those relationships. But speaking of the Hollywood to Bollywood, I've been as far as India all the way down to New Zealand, uh, already in the first year. So let's talk about two places where we're competing with China. The first, maybe we can pull the map up. The first is the south China Sea. There are six claimants to the Spratley and parasail islands. China's one of them. Every country owns 12 nautical miles out and under the UN Convention Law of the sea.

Philip Davidson: [00:19:31](#) But you don't own beyond that. China's pushed several hundred nautical miles out. They've effectively militarize these islands. You've in the United States and our allies have countered by these freedom of navigation exercises. You take American and other vessels through these three of these disputed waters, which we believe are national waters to prove the point that it's not a Chinese lake. What are there, I know why you do it and your right to do it. What are the risks in doing that? How do you manage those? Certainly. Um, the United States itself has long had freedom of navigation operation policy, uh, to enforce the United Nations Convention on the Law of the sea. Really decades, if not centuries of maritime practice and law. Um, to be frank and fair, the United States is run a more assertive program than any other nation on the planet and always has.

Um, it is not a new, uh, posture or policy for the, uh, for the United States.

Philip Davidson: [00:20:27](#) We do it all over the globe. I tell people quite frequently, we run freedom of navigation operations on Canada because of the United States and Canada have conflicts in the maritime and claims [inaudible] claims, excuse me. Uh, in areas in which we have a near territory, um, we've been running freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, um, to assert not us claims to these waters or assert a US position other than the international position that these disputes should be resolved peacefully. And then we assert, you know, the mode of operation that the convention of law on the sea dictates military ships would operate. Again, there are multiple nations down there with claims. We don't do these freedom of navigation operations against Shidah. It's really as demonstrations to all those nations that are indeed down there. Now I would tell you, uh, China protests, uh, these claims most vehemently, we rarely get a protest, uh, from any of those other nations down there.

Philip Davidson: [00:21:31](#) And in fact, um, many of the nations support our freedom of navigation operations quite strongly. I would say, I would tell you right off the Vietnam is the most vocal and they're one of the claimants in the parents. They are one of the claimants in the parasails, um, no doubt about it. Um, during the course of the last year, however, we have been able to garner more international support, uh, with operations, uh, perhaps not freedom of navigation operations as we define them and conduct them, but certainly operations within the nine dash line. Um, a large area in the south China Sea that China claims as their own, um, nations like Japan, Australia, Canada, the UK, France have all conducted operations either independently or would the United States or with others. And I would add India and some other nations to this as well. Um, to demonstrate that this is international water and to demonstrate really how critical the south China Sea is.

Philip Davidson: [00:22:27](#) One of the things we didn't talk about was, you know, that critical waterway and what it means. Um, \$3 trillion in goods, uh, traverse that waterway aboard the map each and every year. The Strait of Malacca from the Strait of Malacca, you know, in the South Tennessee between Vietnam and the Philippines. Uh, see, you know, up a south end, either head to Japan has to China, certainly heads to Korea, heads to the United States and Canada as well. Indeed, all the way over to South America. Um, what's frequently left unsaid is the collection of underwater cables, Internet, telephone, uh, that

traverse the south China Sea. Um, cables, flop follow civilization, many of them terminate in Singapore, spread through the South China Sea from there, and of course, again, terminate into the kind of same places I just described. Uh, trillions of dollars of financial information, uh, trillions or not trillions, but, uh, you know, highly detailed.

Philip Davidson:

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Um, you know, telecommunications, uh, information travels, uh, on those cables throughout the world. Um, so the freedom of navigation operations is not about two destroyers passing safely in the night. This is about the game world's access to the most critical, you know, waterway on the planet. Um, in order to facilitate global trade communication, financial flow is so critical to everybody's peace and prosperity. Right. And to its credit, the Trump administration as the Obama and George W. Bush administration has been conducting these exercises to demonstrate our commitment to international safe passage. The Chinese don't like it. Chinese ships shadow yours. Yes. What are the risks of a conflict that ships could collide? There could be a misunderstanding. Do you have, um, do you let the Chinese know ahead of time where the ships are going and when they're going? Yeah, no, we don't generally, um, let ships know where we're going or when we're going, excuse me.

Philip Davidson:

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Uh, other nations know where we're going and when we're going. Um, uh, there is a, uh, a code agreed to between China and the United States and, uh, many other nations, uh, called the code for unplanned encounters at sea. Uh, which describes the communications that would transpire between two ships. Um, when meeting on the high seas. As I intimated before, you know, Chinese ships have grown exponentially over the course of the 21st century here. Um, uh, where do we interact with those ships really around the globe? Um, it's true. They shadow are our ships whenever we're operating within the, uh, the east China Sea or the South China Sea. Um, they shadow many nations ships, uh, when they're operating in the east China Sea and south China Sea. Um, so the tactical communications is happening, uh, ship the ship, uh, ship the aircraft, uh, in the region, in English, uh, in accordance with this code.

Philip Davidson:

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Um, the rules of the road as all agreed to by a [inaudible] clause and, uh, the, the coal rigs, the international code for ships, um, conduct when they're inside of each other, um, is excellent and, uh, keeps the rest fairly low. I would tell you the vast, vast majority way up in the 99th percentile of all these encounters are, are safe and professional and routine. Um, the unsafe professional ones make the news then continue, uh, tend to continue in the news whatsoever. But I actually think the risk for

miscalculation is somewhat low and we have decent shift to shift communications between Chinese officers and American officers. We do. Yeah. Yeah. So the, the risk of profit, the probability of a conflict is quite low. Oh, over freedom of navigation operation. Absolutely. Um, if you could put the map up again, we'd be, you've been dealing with this crisis in the South China Sea as your credit assessors dead. There's also a crisis in the east China Sea, south of the Japanese home islands where the Japanese have administrative control over the Senkaku islands. Chinese call them the Diu islands. The United States recognizes that because we transfer these islands to Japan in 1972 we, we had administrative control from the Second World War from 1945 President Obama was very clear in March, 2014 that in the

Nick Burns: [00:26:44](#) event of a conflict between Japan and China over the uninhabited Senkaku Diu islands, the u s Japan defense treaty would be enforced. Yes. Is that clear? The Chinese, is that a state, a stable region right now?

Philip Davidson: [00:26:59](#) Yeah, I mean the, the document itself, the treaty itself, uh, makes specific mention of islands under a admitted or, uh, features under administrative control of Japan. And then as you said, President Obama's, um, uh, further clarification of that is well known across the region. Um, we have bilateral planning, uh, responsibilities, Japan, the United States. My headquarters is a key to that. Um, and a routine rhythm in which we review those plans with Japan. And uh, I can tell you, uh, in the last five years that that planning and the clarity and transparency between the two allies, Japan and u s, uh, has never been better.

Nick Burns: [00:27:41](#) Yeah. Over the long term, the Chinese are building a blue water navy. They're developing potent ballistic missiles designed to push your carrier task forces away from the South China Sea outwait way out into the Pacific towards Guam. How do we have effective countermeasures to that? That's a big great game. Power struggle underway right now between the two nations. Yeah. Yeah.

Philip Davidson: [00:28:04](#) Um, the, the, the nature of warfare has always been about orphans, you know, counters, counter, counter and moving forward. Um, while, you know, certainly they are developing capability that we have not seen before and he shipped ballistic missiles is the newest one. Um, these are not, um, mandalas that cannot be defeated. And, um, uh, when I, uh, talk to the department at the Pentagon, um, make our requirements known, I can tell you that the conversation that we have is very

focused on the capabilities and the capacities that we need to handle such threats, um, now and in the future. And we're going to continue to, to articulate those things. Um, if I could just make mention for a minute, um, speaking of China and its long term strategic threats to the region, uh, the Shangri-la dialogue happens, uh, annually in Singapore, uh, right around the 1st of June.

Philip Davidson:

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Um, for the last several years, China has been actually attending at a rather low level, uh, thinking that they would host their own forums and dominate the conversation there. Uh, this year administer way their defense minister, uh, gave a speech, uh, which I thought was quite chilling for everyone in the audience. Um, not only did he make it clear that, uh, he didn't think, uh, Asia and the Western Pacific was any place for America. He basically said that Asia wasn't even for Asians. It was for the Chinese. Um, within a 24 hours of that, uh, they tested a new, uh, nuclear ballistic missile. I'm not nuclear necessarily. Um, that was, um, uh, made public somewhat, uh, quickly, I would say then, you know, just a couple of weeks ago, uh, minister way, again a speaking to a forum of Latin American and Pacific island, uh, defense ministers, uh, from Oceania, um, made it clear that the one belt one road belt and road initiative to use, uh, their term, uh, was indeed, uh, a way to put a military foothold in other places around the globe. Within hours of that, they shot six anti-ship ballistic missiles, new ones that they have developed, uh, into the south China Sea. Uh, the first time they have done an Etsy test. Um, it's, uh, you know, one might be a coincidence, but seeing this happen twice is indeed a message, uh, mentally to the United States. But indeed, the whole globe.

Nick Burns:

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I also just want to go back to what the Chinese are doing to build up. They're a new modern technological base. They're investing billions and Ala AI, the militarization of it, machine learning. As we said before, quantum computing. A lot of people feel fear at our conference here last year that Joe and Madeline and Tom and I attended at the Chinese might be slightly ahead in developing a new generation of military technology. You mean, do you believe in our lifetime we're still young guys, we could lose our competitive military edge, that China could actually overtake us, that we could become the number two military power on that math?

Philip Davidson:

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No, I think, you know, having a conversation about these, uh, technologies now I think is critically important. Um, investing in these as a matter of national security, um, thinking above the defense plane, I think is critically important to the nation and how we should be thinking about this problem. When I look,

when I pulled out of the operational level and all my problems within the military, um, we're seeing essentially China surpassed the capability that Indo-Pacific Command, uh, commands and controls, uh, in the area of responsibility. I described earlier in numbers here in the next couple of years. Uh, and that capability in terms of just what we see, air, maritime, land space, cyber, um, we run the risk if we don't take proactive action that China will indeed, uh, surpass our capabilities by the middle of, uh, this next decade.

Nick Burns: [00:32:06](#) So this might be the single most important decision we have to make in American foreign policy that we're not going to lose our military edge to the Chinese because everything else depends on that we want to do.

Philip Davidson: [00:32:17](#) Absolutely. And it's more than just a tech thing. It's a whole government approach that has to address these things. This is about education. It's about opportunity. It's about, you know, policy positions around the globe. How these, uh, uh, new technologies will be treated, um, is very, very important.

Nick Burns: [00:32:32](#) So, final question on Shyna. Um, we're not enemies, we're but not enemies and Washington these days. Most of the Democratic Party politicians and most Republican politicians have swung away from engagement with China to an entirely competitive relationship. And a lot of us have been asking, I asked it here yesterday, uh, Joe referred to it today. A number of people did. We've, for 40 years, we've had a balance of engagement and competition with the Chinese. Every president, we seem to be in an entirely competitive mode. Do you worry about that? I mean, we're going to have to have some kind of relationship with China on the global economy, stabilizing it on climate change, avoiding war. And so you have to have your level of communication with the Chinese government. Do you worry we're in too competitive phase where the Chinese right now?

Philip Davidson: [00:33:23](#) Yeah. I, you know, I get troubled frequently by some of the things I read in the open media. Um, you know, a very careful reading of the, the national defense strategy. And I can tell you all my dialogues within the department, nobody is talking about confrontation and nobody is talking about containment. You know, that's frequently dialogue I hear reflected back coming from China who is trying to, to shape everybody's perceptions, uh, in the region. Um, there's no doubt about it that we've talked about a competitive strategy. Competitive does not mean don't engage. Um, we do engage at the military level. Um, uh, I'll s you know, I, I painted for you that the kind of dialogue

that happens at the tactical level, um, in the theater there's actually more than that. There's plenty of aircraft to aircraft communications that go on as well. Um, we in, uh, Indo-Pacific Command, my army component has an annual exercise on humanitarian assistance, disaster relief with China.

Philip Davidson:

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Actually we sent a company plus, you know, a a hundred odd troops to China, uh, earlier this year. And my four-star component actually went there. Um, there is a formalized military to military exchange program. Um, who goes, what goes and what reciprocal visits will, uh, will happen in that timeframe. Um, my, uh, the chief of navy operations, uh, just had a video teleconference with the PLA chief of navy to talk about some of the issues that we've talked about here today. So this is an ongoing dialogue. Could it be improved? Absolutely. Um, the United States has a long standing request with China for me to have crisis communications with the southern theater commander who manages the South China Sea and their sister and theater commander commander their commanders. Yeah. Um, they have yet to respond to that ask. Um, so, and I make it clear to all my allies and partners in the regions that, that talk to China that uh, this is a standing ask and we'd like to see it fulfilled. I think it would reduce the, the threat of miscalculation certainly, and I think it would help reduce the idea that there's any kind of confrontation or, or a conflict going on or containment going on. Excuse me.

Nick Burns:

[00:35:35](#)

Thank you. The other major strategic that's occurred since you and I were junior officers in the military and the State Department is the development of our big strategic relationship with India. Um, on the, in, in the air on the sea, our economic relationship, our political ties, and also the development of a military partnership, Tokyo Deli, Washington. I know that no one uses the c word that we're trying to contain Shina but the I word limit or am manage, this is a big initiative. It's very much in our interest among the three countries to work together. How's that going in your estimation? How important is that to you?

Philip Davidson:

[00:36:13](#)

We talked about Japan as the most important alliance and then I talked a little bit about the free and open Indo-Pacific. What binds the free and open Indo-Pacific together. Most importantly, it's not just usual security concerns. It's a can't absolutely be everybody's economic interest. It has to be more than that and includes those values. And when you knit together, great democracies like the United States, Japan, uh, and the potential that is the 1.3 5 billion people in India. Uh, I think every great democracy on, on the planet would like India. Long alongside last year, within the Department of Defense

Realm, we signed a very important agreement that was months, if not years in the making with India. Uh, that helps us, uh, exchange information and intelligence is really a technical agreement. Um, but it allows us, has allowed us to do some operational, uh, collaboration and some planning with any of that has opened their eyes and to improving our relationship quite quickly to the point they're telling me now to hurry up.

Philip Davidson: [00:37:13](#)

Those of you with experience in India, no, you seldom get a hurry up. A call from India, um, but are also buying a number of u s equipments. India is the largest buyer and the largest possessor of sea 17 lift aircraft, uh, in a globe besides the United States. And they buy those from the United Ca. New Maritime patrol aircraft. Uh, the p eights they fly C1 Thirties Apaches, uh, new Houts or that kind of thing. Um, we like to see, uh, like a US defense equipment's there. It helps drive tactics and doctrine together. Um, that would advance our relationship, uh, with any, uh, greatly, you know, men, my peers in India, you know, they grew up under Soviet training and then Russian sustainment for years and years and years. They certainly see the value of the engagements, uh, with us and are interested in moving forward with us. Our there rifts in that, you know, certainly there's the issue of s 400 out there.

Philip Davidson: [00:38:11](#)

Um, we're still in dialogue with them about that as 400 India acquiring the s 400. Uh, it's a Russian, uh, uh, air defense system, uh, from Russia. Um, uh, that's a bit of a problem. Will you continue to dialogue? I, I think they intend to do that. Um, I'm trying to clarify for them that the tactical and technical case that's so important here, um, that like equipments together a sense of compatibility and interoperability that really can't be beat. Um, and really, you know, u s equipment is outperforming, uh, on the globe and you see this periodically, um, come up against a Russia and US equipment is outperforming India's quite proud of their nine to nine aligned policy status. Um, they view this discussion about the s 400 as a, as a policy issue and not a tactical and technical one. So we've got a little bit of ways to go there.

Philip Davidson: [00:39:08](#)

I tell people all the time, we are on a 10,000 step journey with India and we're on step 10, nine, 10,000. Yeah. And you know, this is what alliances are built on and you just have to get to 10, 11, and 12 and keep working forward. I will tell you, India, Japan, the United States working closely together, not only, uh, in the Indian Ocean region, but really, uh, in the western Pacific and throughout Oceania is welcomed. Um, throughout all those areas. Um, India is a key collaborator with Japan and myself. Um, we have an annual maritime exercise, the Malabar exercise

last executed about, about this time last year, a little, a little bit over that. Um, we're looking to continue to advance those opportunities going forward. Um, we now have some information sharing, uh, assistance between, um, maritime headquarters and um, we, uh, are capable now of deploying on an urgent basis, uh, tactical, uh, communications equipments between maritime patrol aircraft and ships that will help advance our interoperability when it comes to threats under the sea on the scene above the sea and the Indian Ocean going forward.

Nick Burns:

[00:40:26](#)

I was in Delhi last month. And I can tell you that the new Modi government that is just taking shape right now, deeply values our military relationship. In the old days, 20 years ago, if you'd walk into any office in Delhi, in the foreign or defense ministry, the Prime Minister's office, they say, let's talk about Pakistan. And now it's, let's talk about China. And they perceive that we, the Japanese, the Indians and Americans have the same dilemma. We all want to live in peace with China and work with China and yet not be dominated by China. So they're looking at that. And you've developed personal relationships that came into use this past March when India and Pakistan exchanged fire across the Line of Control, two nuclear weapons powers. You engage with the Indian government. Tell us about that.

Philip Davidson:

[00:41:08](#)

Yeah. And uh, late February, uh, you know, to help manage the crisis after the initial exchange of fires, the shoot down of, uh, aircraft, um, I made multiple calls to the chief of defense then Adam Alon Ba, uh, now been replaced, uh, back in the, uh, late February timeframe. Uh, my counterpart at Central Command, uh, then General Joe Votel, uh, was in a close discussion with the chief of army staff within Pakistan to help manage these threats. Certainly the secretary of defense and secretary of state were involved with their counterparts, um, as well. Um, I, I think in my own assessment and dialogue with Ab Nalanda, I think it helped him raise his confidence, um, that we were interested in their security as keenly as we were interested in Pakistan's security and we were able to run some things on ground for him to provide some assurance, um, that I think, uh, went a long way to help and advance our relationship as well. And we just have to continue to build on things like that.

Nick Burns:

[00:42:09](#)

Thank you. Two more quick questions and then we'll go to the audience for questions. You and I met in 1993-94 when you were in the military aid to Vice President Al Gore and I was a special assistant to Vice President Gordon, President Clinton. We traveled together to Russia. We were building a big strategic

relationship with Russia, with the Yeltsin government that never really managed to pan out. Now you've got to deal with the Russians in your area of responsibility. They've got a lot of territory in the Russian Far East. What kind of a relationship do we have with Russia in the Russian Far East and the Pacific [inaudible]?

Philip Davidson: [00:42:44](#)

Um, the, the Russian Far East capability is maritime really in nature. Um, they have the very latest, uh, nuclear ballistic missile submarines, um, to home ported there. Um, they have others, uh, and over the course of the next two years, they'll be, uh, gaining new capability when it comes to frigates and a land attack cruise missile, a submarine that's quite quiet, uh, called severance. Um, they continue to patrol. Uh, they sent a task group across the Pacific, uh, just a couple of months ago, uh, actually passing through the EEZ of Hawaii, uh, on its way to the Panama Canal. Uh, and then has been operating in the southern command in the northern command, uh, ever since it's on its way to St Petersburg. That maritime threat, uh, you know, represents an existential threat with those nuclear ballistic missile submarines. Um, and so there's new capability there. Interestingly, last year, uh, and we're seeing it to this day, uh, some increased operational collaboration between Russia and China.

Philip Davidson: [00:43:53](#)

So last year, the exercise Bostok stock, which is mostly a land based, uh, exercise takes place, uh, in eastern Russia, there, um, included both Russian and Chinese formations and Russian and Chinese, uh, command and control headquarters for those formations. Um, that was a first of its kind on Russian territory. And in just the last couple of weeks, the Russians flew two bombers, uh, from the Far East spaces around Taiwan and back. Um, they were not to be marched by China. And I will tell you, China demarche everybody else on the planet that does such a thing, um, which just makes you believe that they had the tactical cooperate tacit approval of China either before execution or, uh, during it. Um, I think that, uh, that is not an outcome. We want, um, an align China, uh, in Russia opposing the international order. Um, that's a spousing these free and open Indo-Pacific. And indeed, you know, the whole of the global orders, um, uh, concerns.

Nick Burns: [00:44:53](#)

So this is a tall list of challenges that you and your men and women on your command face every day from Honolulu. Last question. Uh, in 2017 at this security forum, people were talking about war with, between the United States and North Korea. Mercifully, we're not talking about that. The president has put us on a diplomatic path. I've supported, obviously a lot of us

have supported him meeting Kim Jong Un no real progress in terms of denuclearization or even identifying the nuclear weapons stockpile. But you've got a part of this in terms of enforcing the sanctions against North Korea. How intense, how intensive is that? [inaudible]

Philip Davidson:

[00:45:29](#)

yeah. Um, certainly, um, just had a, a third meeting between the president and KGU there at Panmunjom here just in the last few weeks, uh, at the end of the G 20 summit. Um, so the points, uh, uh, I would say that tensions are greatly reduced. You are not seeing nuclear testing today, nor are you seeing a medium range, intermediate range, intercontinental ballistic missile testing as well. Now, I'm not Pollyannaish about this. There is no doubt in my mind that North Korea is continuing to develop nuclear weapons and continuing to develop, uh, you know, long range ballistic missiles, uh, to fire them. Um, we had, uh, an incident in the May timeframe in which they, they, um, shot some short range ballistic missiles. Uh, um, we view those as tests and not a provocation so to speak. Um, but we have a ways to go here in this negotiation to get to the denuclearized, uh, DPRK. Um, my obligations are one to support diplomacy. Secondly is the readiness of the forces on the Korean Peninsula as well as, uh, the readiness of the forces that would, uh, come to their aid. Um, one of the, I think the international triumphs that's going on is the enforcement of UN sanctions, um, to prevent the illicit transfer of refined oils into North Korea and the export of North Korean coal, uh, throughout the region.

Nick Burns:

[00:46:57](#)

And that's your responsibility to track that. And

Philip Davidson:

[00:47:00](#)

yes, and so we have a, an an enforcement coordination cell and international headquarters and Yokosuka Japan, uh, that the Japanese, uh, Co host with us. It's staffed by Japanese, the United States, Koreans, South Koreans, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, the UK, France has been there as well. Um, those nations have also periodically provided ships and maritime patrol aircraft to help identify, uh, not only the North Korean ships that are receiving this oil, but feeder networks that are providing it. And it's happening from commercial entities all across, uh, the region, uh, different flag states, uh, different business entities that are providing this thing. The transfer of fuels at sea is a quite common practice. Um, there's a lot of legal, uh, transfer of fuel going on. It's how shipping companies ships avoid port costs, uh, and expensive ports that they don't want to go to. So, you know, this is a, this is a needle in a stack of needles kind of work.

Philip Davidson: [00:48:02](#) Um, but it's been important. I can tell you Vietnam and Indonesia are helping on the export coal. Where we're not getting help is China. So China has dozens and dozens of these maritime militia ships operating in the south China Sea to serve Chinese ends when they could be up helping, uh, on a denuclearization effort of, uh, North Korea and helping monitor these situations that are principally happening and in Chinese territorial waters, in their contiguous zone or up in North Korean waters, uh, itself. And that's the United Nations mandate. Are you at Security Council resolutions? Yeah, Sean to doing that. Try. It could be doing much more hammered. Davidson. Thank you for your service to the United States. Thank you. Thank you.

Speaker 3: [00:48:46](#) [inaudible]

Philip Davidson: [00:48:50](#) she does for Admiral Davidson. We'll go right here. Two questions. We'll ask them right together in the second row. The mikes are going to come right here to this side of the second row. Great microphones please.

Speaker 4: [00:49:02](#) Oh, thank you. Thank you. Thanks Sherri Goodman at the Woodrow Wilson International Center with Jane Harmon. Thank you Admiral Davidson for your service. And thank you nick for your leadership here. Um, one of your predecessors, Adam Warlock Lior, uh, said that among the most serious threat in the Pacific region is climate change. Uh, and you've, you framed it as, as natural disasters. Um, we have, uh, some of the Pacific island nations could be uninhabitable due to sea level rise in our lifetime producing the first generation of climate refugees. Many of our allies in the region like Australia and New Zealand are already preparing for that eventuality. Extreme weather events and natural disasters also hit the region very hard. Uh, you've been supportive through, uh, with New Zealand of the Pacific Environmental Security Forum to address some of these concerns of French have also been very active in their part of the Pacific. How are you using, uh, climate security to support your partnerships? Um, and to address the concerns both of increasing Chinese influence in these vulnerable areas. And, uh, also to help our allies. Thank you very much. Just for

Philip Davidson: [00:50:16](#) the question and, and your interest. Um, the Indo-Pacific man has stepped up. Our engagement is across the Pacific island chain. This is Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. Um, you know, it's 10 million square miles, uh, and about 6 million people. Uh, and when I talk to my peers, whether they're military folks, uh, law enforcement folks or political leadership in these countries, I asked them all the time, can you see the

changes, um, extant on the ground, on your islands from when you were a boy to today when it comes to climate change? And to a man and woman? They have all said yes. And um, they, uh, and then in combination with this as the effects of, uh, um, a higher level of storms, uh, and I'll, I'll give a description of that here in a minute. Lower level islands, you know, key, uh, starch, um, provision is the Tarro route.

Philip Davidson: [00:51:17](#)

Um, it grows in very low areas in many of these places. If it takes a storm surge, whether that's a, a typhoon or a tsunami, and that gets into dated with saltwater, that ground is ruined for decades. Um, and becomes a problem, uh, to them. We, at Indo-Pacific Command, we have a center for excellence in disaster management. This is a course that we export not only for military folks, but versus civilian folks. And we host people certainly in Honolulu as well. We actually exported all around the globe. Um, uh, this is an area in which we're helping advance, um, a crisis. Uh, excuse me, a disaster management skills, uh, both at the political level and at the law enforcement and military level and many of these nations going forward. We actually also provide a lot of direct support. So last year, I'll tell you, we had a 500 year storm inside pan and Tinian.

Philip Davidson: [00:52:08](#)

Um, the, the existing population, uh, did not have the capacity to do much more than take care of their own. Um, so to clear roads, uh, fixed roofs, um, make sure that power and water was flying, uh, fell on actually a title 10, you know, active duty people. Um, we, uh, we conducted out operation for some five and a half months. Um, it's been, you know, a Commonwealth of the northern Mariano's. It's actually FEMA's u s FIMAs responsibility to help there. Um, FEMA didn't have the capacity giving other things that was going on on the west coast, the United States, nor were they able to contract for it, which is the next level. Uh, so title 10 actually stepped in there. We had hundreds of troops on the ground from all the services for some five and a half months to help, uh, um, clear debris and fix roofs and do all that kind of thing.

Philip Davidson: [00:52:57](#)

Um, we're going to be doing more and more of that. My engagements with political leadership across the Pacific island chain. Um, one of the things when we talk about development, we talk about development that matters to their future, um, because the idea that their population may have to leave, um, I don't think is a, you know, an effective future for those nations. Um, they, I, I would say, I think if China was truly interested in helping in these nations, they would make investments along those lines as opposed to building the largest office building in Fiji or whatever they do. It's also something we can do with the

Chinese. Yeah. If we get into Coopa, absolutely. To balance the competition. Yes. Right here.

Audience Member: [00:53:37](#) Thank you. I'm Deborah Haynes from Sky News in the UK. I'm on North Korea. The North Koreans have said that they will scupper the effort to resume dialogue and maybe even resume long, long, long range missile tests. If the United States and South Korea take part in military drills, what do you make of that threat? And are those doors going to go ahead and if you'll allow me a question about something not in your area of responsibility, but as a senior military officer, um, how likely is it that the crisis between the U S and Iran in the Gulf is going to end in conflict? And do you believe that, um, efforts,

Philip Davidson: [00:54:12](#) can I answer that question for you? [inaudible]

Audience Member: [00:54:15](#) do you believe that effort is the suggestion by Donald Trump that countries like China and Japan that rely so heavily on, on tanker traffic through the state of homeys, we'll actually get behind his, um, desire to build a coalition of militaries to help escort tankers there.

Philip Davidson: [00:54:30](#) Thank you. Um, I, I made comment about the responsibility to support diplomacy and provide for the readiness of our forces in Korea. We run two major exercises, uh, a year on the peninsula, February and August timeframe. Um, I could tell you my orders or to execute that exercise in August. Um, and I'll say this about, you know, North Koreans rhetoric, rhetoric, they have neither lowered nor raised their own exercise profile from before this negotiation as well. So they have little to complain about. Um, uh, to the second point, I, I'm not gonna comment on, uh, Irfan that's the business of the Central Command commander and the national leadership here or the country. I will say this about international waterways. These are not great power issues. These are international order and the rights that everybody has come to over years of maritime practice and law and agreed to under an clause, um, to have access to these places. Um, it's not solely the United States responsibility to enforce, uh, the international sea and airspace. It is indeed the responsibility of all nations to do that. The United States approach and what we've been talking about in a freehand Indo-Pacific is the season airways are the important, uh, areas that bind us together. Others around China, other dialogues, they use these areas as barriers that they want to close off. That's not the kind of international order and free and open Indo-Pacific that we want. Thank you. We'll take questions from over here. Yes, right here.

Audience Member: [00:56:05](#) Numerous senior, uh,

Philip Davidson: [00:56:09](#) pilots

Audience Member: [00:56:10](#) from the navy had been reporting significant UFO activity.

Philip Davidson: [00:56:16](#) You take questions on UFO Samara. There was a reporting process for that and an office that handles

Nick Burns: [00:56:24](#) that.

Philip Davidson: [00:56:25](#) Uh, it was, uh, happening over a pretty finite period of time, uh, several years ago. Um, I'll leave it at that.

Nick Burns: [00:56:32](#) Let's go from the left wing of the audience to the right wing over here. All the way in the back. There's an advantage for sitting in the very back row of the entire Greenwald tent and the Mike's coming right to you.

Speaker 3: [00:56:46](#) [inaudible]

Audience Member: [00:56:49](#) hello. Thank you for doing this. Uh, I'm Kathy Gill, stand with the Atlantic. I'm also from St Louis, so we could talk later about where you went to high school and no blues, um, given the dynamics you described and, and the potential risk of China overtaking the United States and capabilities within the next couple of years. You said, are you at all worried about, uh, to get back to the Iran question, are you at all worried about this, the shift of resources to the Centcom area of responsibility? Um, and what that does to the requirement for Indo pay comm to build up as well?

Philip Davidson: [00:57:23](#) Yeah, no, that's, I mean, I, secretary Maddis made it quite clear in public and certainly in private to me that uh, the Endo Pacific theater was the priority theater. And I think if you watched, um, uh, secretary espers testimony just this past week, he affirmed that as well. Um, I'm not, uh, concerned about the resources right now. Uh, give me the second question again.

Speaker 3: [00:57:45](#) Okay.

Nick Burns: [00:57:46](#) Yeah. That was it. Trying to just create a military edge. I think she referred to that. Yeah. Okay. Yes sir. Right in the back here in the blue shirt. If you can stand up, the Mike is going to come right down to you. Why don't we do this? Why don't we, you asked your question or you ask your question and we'll make those, the last two questions. Okay. So question about the

Philippines. Has Duterte is apparent, turned closer to China, affected any of your operations at all? I'm sorry, can you say that one more time? Sure. It has Duterte is a apparent turn towards China affected your operations at all?

Philip Davidson: [00:58:18](#) Well, it's, one of the things we didn't talk about in depth was the counter terror, uh, advise and assist mission that we've had ongoing for the Philippines now for almost 20 years. Um, I could tell you in the wake of the fight, uh, uh, in Miralee in 2017 in which armed forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police Force, uh, special action forces fought incredibly bravely, bravely. And I tell you, this is no village. Murali is a city of 200,000 people, um, and the u s a assistance provided to that energize the military to military relationship in a way that it hadn't been accident. Um, probably over the course of the previous decade. Um, I have bilateral planning efforts with my counterpart, uh, General Madrigal general matter ball was in my headquarters here earlier this week, Monday and Tuesday, um, for, uh, for the counterpart visit and for us to speak about these issues.

Philip Davidson: [00:59:08](#) So our coordination and collaboration is quite close. Um, we also have a trilateral planning effort that has just begun, uh, here in the February time frame between Japan, the Philippines at us, uh, to worry concerns wider than just those individual nations securities. Uh, but wider, uh, across the Indo-Pacific. Um, so I, I feel well supported, uh, at the military level there. Um, and I think Secretary Palm payos clarification of the mutual defense treaty we have with the Philippines in the February timeframe has gone a long way to improving that relationship. So, um, the United States is in extraordinarily high standing with the Philippine populace and, uh, most of the political apparatus there. And I've, I take a little worry, um, from that

Audience Member: [00:59:55](#) please. Thank you sir. Uh, Steve Shapiro with the Atlantic Council in Benz. You've made a few references to the importance of unclogs the law of the sea treaty. Of course the United States hasn't ratified the law of the sea treaty. So my two part question, the first is, does that hamper your work in any way? The fact that we haven't ratified and if the answer is no, because essentially it's become international law, which the U S has accepted. Might that have future implications for things like the Paris climate treaty?

Philip Davidson: [01:00:24](#) Um, yeah, to the point about on clause, I mean the u s conduct has always been when it comes to military operations, freedom of navigation, uh, has always been in accordance with UN clause. That was something that, uh, uh, President Reagan and

his ministrations made clear that we would follow. And we have, uh, ever since that timeframe, um, every senior naval officer in the United States has, you know, advocated for, and I'm on the record, uh, during my confirmation hearing is saying that a ratification on clause would be a good thing for the United States. Uh, no, I don't think so.

Nick Burns:

[01:01:02](#)

So my takeaways from this session have more fun. The conversation are that you have this extraordinary breadth of responsibility, not just geographic in our most important strategic command, but also the, the incredible number of things that you do from typhoon assistance, to counter terrorism, to being the critical force in trying to manage the return of China to power in the Indo Pacific, the incredible competence of the United States military. The importance of our allies and the importance of having great soldier statesman, sailor, statesman. Uh, so thank you for what you are doing for our country.

Speaker 3:

[01:01:47](#)

[inaudible].