

Planes, Trains, and Military Mobility: Strengthening NATO Through Critical Infrastructure Security

September 28, 2026

Featuring Tom Goffus, Jiwon Ma, and RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery

Moderated by Daniella Cheslow

Introductory remarks by Bradley Bowman

This transcript has been edited for clarity.

BOWMAN: Welcome and thank you for joining us for today's event hosted by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. I'm Bradley Bowman, senior director of FDD's Center on Military and Political Power. It's Monday, September 28, and we're pleased to have you here for this conversation – some in person, some tuning in live, and some listening to our podcast.

The title for today's event is "Planes, Trains, and Military Mobility: Strengthening NATO Through Critical Infrastructure Security." Those of you hoping to see Steve Martin, I'm sorry, you'll be disappointed, but let me comfort you and invite your continued interest by saying that today's topic, in my view, is one of the most important yet most often neglected national security topics.

The United States boasts the world's most capable military, but if we can't get the joint force to the zone of conflict or struggle to do so in a timely manner, that military prowess is less relevant. Our adversaries understand that, and that is why they have been busy.

As me, Mark Montgomery, and Elaine Dezenski argued in our new book on the Axis Aggressors, moving U.S. troops and equipment efficiently and expeditiously is essential to America's ability to project power, deter aggression, and support partners and allies and sustain forces to fight and win wars.

According to March 2026 Congressional testimony by General Randall Reed, commander of U.S. Transportation Command, over 85 percent of U.S. combat power resides within the continental United States. That puts a premium, as he said last year, on resilient transportation networks fortified against malicious cyber-attacks.

That is why he reiterated in March that we must prioritize and properly resource efforts to overcome what General Reed called contested, disrupted, or denied logistical pathways.

Many Americans may not realize that the Pentagon remains remarkably reliant on civilian-owned networks and infrastructure in the event of a major conflict. Civilian-owned rail networks, commercial ports, and aviation authorities handle transportation of the majority of service members and material during a significant, rapid mobilization, as we wrote in the book.

Russia's war against Ukraine offers an urgent reminder that we cannot assume that the civilian infrastructure supporting military operations is immune to enemy attacks. Transportation networks, energy systems, communication infrastructure, and other civilian systems are now all targets.

In the event of a conflict on NATO's eastern flank, equipment would have to travel thousands of miles in many cases and move rapidly across multiple countries and multiple transportation nodes that are heavily dependent on digital networks.

Disrupting a railway's digital control system, for example, can be just as effective at stopping military movement as physically damaging the railway itself. Physical resilience and cybersecurity can no longer be treated as separate challenges.

There's also an important China dimension to this conversation, not only because China and other members of the axis of aggressors are increasing their cooperation and actively supporting each other's geopolitical ambitions, as we detail in our book, but also because Chinese state-linked companies have acquired stakes in strategically significant European infrastructure.

At the same time, Chinese hackers are penetrating critical infrastructure networks to establish persistent access that could be used during a crisis or conflict. It would be unwise to not consider how China could use the access it has seized to impede our responses to Chinese aggression in the Pacific or Russian aggression against NATO.



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The good news is that NATO and Europe are taking these challenges seriously. European allies are finally spending more on defense, increasingly carrying a greater share of the security burden on the continent. NATO's new spending commitments also recognize that strengthening deterrence requires investments beyond traditional military hardware.

Infrastructure, networks, resilience, and other defense enablers matter, too. But simply spending more money does not guarantee greater military effectiveness and mobility. Coordinating across Europe and targeting investments toward the infrastructure NATO most needs to execute its defense plans is a top challenge Europe faces today.

To discuss these complex issues, we are joined by a great lineup today. Tom Goffus is an adjunct fellow at FDD and executive partner for Global Security at Elara Nova. He served in NATO as the senior civilian responsible for oversight of operations. He was policy director at the Senate Armed Services Committee, and he's a retired U.S. Air Force command pilot.

RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery is senior director of FDD's Center on Cyber and Technology Innovation and directs CSC 2.0, which implements the recommendations of the Cyberspace Solarium Commission, where he served as executive director. He previously led policy for the Senate Armed Services Committee and spent 32 years in the U.S. Navy, retiring as a rear admiral in 2017.

Jiwon Ma is senior policy Analyst at FDD's Center on Cyber and Technology Innovation. She is lead author of CSC 2.0's annual assessment of their recommendations and author of the latest 2.0 report examining NATO's military mobility challenges we are discussing today.

Daniella Cheslow anchors Politico's National Security Daily newsletter covering the Trump administration's national security strategy. She previously edited tech policy at Politico and reported for *The Wall Street Journal* in Washington, and for AP and AFP in Jerusalem.

Before we dive in, a few words about FDD. For well more than 20 years, FDD has operated as a fiercely independent, nonpartisan research institute exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. As a point of pride and principle, we do not accept foreign government funding.

For more on our work, please visit our website, fdd.org. Follow us on X and Instagram and subscribe to our YouTube channel.

Daniella, the floor is yours.

CHESLOW: Okay. Thank you so much, Brad, for that introduction. And it's really wonderful to be here with you all and to learn from our panelists, so I'm really delighted for this opportunity.

We are going to be focusing on a new report that Jiwon was the author of, and it's about NATO's military mobility, and it's a really timely approach. We saw just last week the Danish Defense Intelligence Services put out a report.

They're warning that Russia's going to be intensifying its hybrid war by carrying out attacks against the West and NATO, focusing on cyber-attacks and physical attacks on things like transportation of military troops and equipment to Ukraine.

So, this report here from FDD on how well-prepared Europe is for attack gets at what would be necessary to counter these kinds of offenses. And I think we can just get to it. And at the end of this, we'll also have some time for QA [sic, Q&A] from the crowd.

So, Jiwon, I want to start with you. Let's set the stage for why military mobility matters. We usually think about it in terms of transportation, logistics, moving troops and tanks, but you're coming at it from a cybersecurity and critical infrastructure perspective as well. Why is that?

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MA: Well, first, thank you for joining us, and thank you for all the guests joining us as well. So, our team, CCTI, has been pretty laser-focused on looking at U.S. transportation critical infrastructure as a military mobility enabler. So, that is the starting point. And the basic problems really apply to NATO as well, where NATO doesn't own or regulate the infrastructure that it depends on in order to move their troops.

So, that was the starting point. But if you're thinking about a picture of U.S. tanks arriving in Europe, it would arrive through a commercial port and then go through a rail network and, potentially, cross borders and end up in – on a road. Right? And during that whole trip, we're essentially relying on electricity, communications, to GPS and digital systems that really enable this whole function.

So, if you're looking at it from that angle, the problem really just becomes less of transportation, although I guess that is the focus but it's the systems that really enable this movement. And so, I think that's how we were looking at that.

And we sort of thought, you know, US already has a lot of issues when it comes to mobilizing our troops. And it is certainly more difficult when you have 31 members trying to use the same network to do that as well. So, essentially, the question that we were looking at was whether those systems can function enough in order to move the troops across Europe. And that's the conclusion we came to.

CHESLOW: And just to sort of set the scene here, Tom, the administration has told European allies not to count on a permanent U.S. presence. There's a force posture review underway for Europe. If there are fewer U.S. troops stationed in Europe, can other members of NATO cover for their absence by rushing reinforcement? Like, where are we on that?

GOFFUS: Yeah. It's a great question. What I'd like to do is start a little bit with the numbers, and we were talking about this before we started this morning. In 199 – 1989, the U.S. had about 300,000 troops, a little over that, in Europe. And then we reached a steady state between the end of the Cold War and now of about 60,000, give or take, that were permanently stationed there.

And then when the invasion happened in February 2022, we surged up to about – a little over 100,000, and now we're somewhere in between that 60,000 and 100,000 – and in terms of number of troops in Europe – the difference is rotational forces. And so, what I wanted to make clear is since the end of the Cold War, we have relied on rotational forces, moving troops into and then around Europe for our deterrence and defense the whole time.

So, more directly to your question, Europe is investing so that it can generate the combat forces and combat power. The question, and I think that's what we're here to do today, and Jiwon's paper highlights this, is can they move them?

The thing I would leave you with is that combat power without enablement is a parade. It's not real combat power and it's not battlefield reinforcement. So, logistics and support branches took the deepest cuts over the last 30 years. And today's reinvestment is primarily going to the sexy stuff – artillery, planes, ships.

We need both, actually, and the theater enablers are just – they're not there in the numbers that we need them. For example, one of the major rail operators that we would depend on to move things across Europe has so much wagon trains, so many wagon trains that they can move a whole brigade and a half.

When you think about what our plans entail, that means it's going to take forever to get across the continent unless we do something about it.

MONTGOMERY: That was satire, right?

GOFFUS: Yeah. Sorry.

MONTGOMERY: It used to be they had – Deutsche Bahn had 1,000 rail cars. I suspect they're down to about 100.

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GOFFUS: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: And what that means – you know, because they – a commercial rail line doesn't need train cars – cars that carry tanks. But when you're owned by the state in the 1980s or you're directed by the state, you have 1,000.

GOFFUS: Right. And so, essentially, what has happened over the last 30 years is we're moving Mercedes-Benzes and we're not so focused on moving tanks. And let me give you a quick example. This was in 2023. There was a – a U.S. tank part that needed to move from Germany to the eastern flank to get to Ukraine. It was going to take so long to go through the process and find all the vehicles and get permitted that instead, they flew it across the Atlantic in an airplane from the United States because that was easier than moving it across Europe. That's the scale and size of our problem right now that we need to get at.

So just realize too – I wanted to highlight this: that reinforcement is not a military act solely. Ninety percent of what it takes to move things are commercial, meaning this is a public-private partnership, and if we're trying to do this in a crisis, it's going to be triply hard.

U.S. forces, by the way, are going to arrive in places like Rotterdam, Antwerp, Gdynia, and I think that bottlenecks there are an American problem because again, we've been relying on this rotational force concept for the last three decades.

So, the answer directly to your question is, we are readier than we were in 2021, but we are not ready enough for 2027. Enablement has to be treated as a capability target with real numbers, not just as a footnote.

CHESLOW: OK, well, Mark, I'd like your take. You know, when we look at the picture of what Tom was just describing about moving, you know, personnel and equipment across Europe, what's the role now of permanent U.S. troops in that operation? And if there's a force posture review that changes that, what happens?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah, it's – I am worried about this. So, we – as Tom said, we have about 57,000 permanently-stationed troops in Europe. About a third to a half of them are like what we'd call combat troops – you know, Navy ships in Spain, a brigade combat team in Germany, an airborne combat team in Italy. But all the rest of them, 30,000-plus of those are enablers, and as Tom was mentioning, there's enablers for logistics. These are the people that make sure that logistics flow smoothly. They're experts. There's enablers for air defense, enablers for strike, enablers for targeting and – and intelligence reconnaissance. These are all skill sets that you have to – that only really developed militaries have like the United States, China, Russia.

You know, really, it's – the smaller militaries and – and I can't overstate the negative impact, Europe spending 1.5 percent on defense for 25 years was. You know, we – I recognize we're now applauding them for coming off of that, but they're living on a military based on a 25-year under-investment. They can't pick those specialties up.

If we remove those people, those permanently deployed people who do the boring logistics and planning and such that goes into building a major warfighting enterprise, we will not be able to generate forces. There's almost nothing Europe can do to replace those forces in anything approaching a timely manner.

So, I hope we're smart with this and – and we focus on minimizing the rotational forces. I know the rotational forces are important for deterrence, but in theory, a European force could be for – pushed forward into that role, and in practice, the United States could say we'll be there, but we'll be there in 10 days or 20 days, not 10 hours or 20 hours.

So I'm very worried about this, but I think it has much more to do with, you know, there's a way that the Department of Defense can be smart about this later this fall when they put this out, and there's a way that they can – you know, that they can really damage the alliance, and I'm not sure which way they're going to go.

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CHESLOW: Let's talk about some practical – I – sort of, scenarios. You know, we're getting reporting on Russia's expanding new generation warfare, hybrid attacks in Poland, you know, drones in Leipzig. Is this targeted at military mobility and logistics? Like, Jiwon, do you know? You know, what is, sort of, the purpose of these attacks? And how do you defend against it? Is it the job of a Patriot interceptor?

MA: Well, I will leave those specifics to Tom and Mark, but I do think that the whole purpose is disruption, right? It – it is trying to essentially stop the forces even before firing a shot, and I think cyber-attacks are really capable of doing that.

And in our report, we list all these cyber incidents where Russia has targeted energy systems. Russia has targeted communication systems, and it is very successful in stopping movement, whether it is, you know, a couple hours to several days, if not weeks.

So, I think that purpose is really – has been, like, one of the key things that this report highlights, but also up to Mark and Tom to add to that.

MONTGOMERY: So Russian new generation warfare is like hybrid warfare with a – with a little Russian spice, and that Russian spice is they blow shit up, right? They put explosives that they try to put on Lufthansa flights. They – they'll fly drones towards Leipzig, but with a – or place drones at Leipzig with actual ammunition on it. You know, the Russians are a little more blatant or blunt than the – say, the Chinese are with their cyber-enabled economic warfare.

Now, I think a lot of current new generation warfare or hybrid warfare by Russia is about distracting NATO and getting Europe to stop focusing on assistance to Ukraine. So doing these things into the Baltics, into Germany, into Scandinavia, into the Balkans, it's all about pulling Europe and NATO off the – off the focus of Ukraine.

But if I were to think about a crisis to break out where, you know, Russia was going to do something in Eastern Europe, you know, the Suwalki Gap or some other move against Lithuania or Poland or Estonia, if they were going to do that, they would run this new generation warfare against military mobility ahead of time because military mobility's already, as you can see from Jiwon's report, extremely fragile. You throw a few extra kinetic events in there, cyber events in there, a narrative, you know, disinformation operations, you can – you can really cripple the program. And we know this because as Jiwon averred to, some of the stuff when they're practicing new generation warfare right now are against those exact systems. So, I suspect they will exploit this military mobility challenge that we lay out here aggressively.

CHESLOW: I was really struck by a statistic in that report, which is that in 2024, there was a study estimating moving a standard brigade from France to Romania would take 60 days, and then last year, military planners got that down to 30 days.

But Tom, I wondered, you know, who is responsible when you're moving people from France to Romania across what you are saying; these different rail lines, these different borders, these different authorities? Who is responsible for getting the brigade there? Is that a job for NATO, Brussels, national capitals? Is there any one clearinghouse?

GOFFUS: So legally, the sending nation, is how SACEUR [Supreme Allied Commander Europe] would refer to it, is responsible for paying for it, for contracting it, for getting it from point A to point B. Practically speaking, though, it's what you said: It's all-hands-on-deck to get it across the continent, including via NATO.

And so, like I said, 90 percent of what it takes to move stuff is commercial. Doctrine says NATO – the NATO commander must have sufficient authority over logistic resources to sustain the force. But in practice, SACEUR just has coordinating authority and he can ask for stuff. But the nations are the ones that are supposed to deliver. So that's the bottom-line answer.

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But it also, in our doctrine, it says all that logistics information should be available to the commanders. But currently, we're still working towards a single data layer that can see the whole system at once. That's also, you know, in one case, putting it all in one place so that the commander can see it and that somebody like Mark can actually move things around is great, but it's also a vulnerability. As Jiwon's report points out, this becomes an Achilles heel unless you can protect the cyber that goes behind that.

So, let me give you an example. This was at the Vilnius Summit in 2023, and a friend of mine from one of the NATO nations said, "Hey, I want you to come meet my prime minister." I'm like, "Wow, I'm important. I'm going to see the prime minister." And he goes, "Remember you tried to send those military trucks across my country?" And I said, "Yes, sir. It was an operational mission for NATO." And he goes, "I had to pull an all-nighter."

So, then I got lectured about how the prime minister pulled an all-nighter because they showed up at his border without the right paperwork. It was contractors instead of soldiers, because that's how you move things, doing the driving. So now there are fees associated with that because you hit a different set of rules. And he goes, "I pulled an all-nighter." And I went, well, so much for my day in the sun. But that's just, you know, how it worked in reality.

Now, he pulled an all-nighter, and he got the things through, but that should be seamless, right? That's what we should actually be able to do.

The other big piece on this that it highlighted was, he goes, "I didn't know if the trucks were going to make the bridge collapse." Because in the good old, bad old days of the Cold War, every bridge that a tank driver or a heavy truck driver pulled up to, there was a placard on the bridge that said, carrying weight. And he looked at the placard, he looked at the placard in the truck and said, "I weigh this much." He goes, "I'm good," or, "I'm not good." We've gotten out of that practice. That's what 30 years of neglect has done to our ability to move things.

So, there is some good bottom-up work going on right now. The Dutch, the German-Polish corridor they signed that in January of 2024, and that harmonizes the permissions, assets, infrastructure, and info sharing, and others are about to copy that as well. So, it's good progress, but it's still in progress.

And the other piece to your original point that you made right up front is because everybody's responsible, nobody's responsible. Until someone is accountable for the whole string, we're going to have to pull a lot of all-nighters.

CHESLOW: Yeah, Tom, it strikes me that if you have contractors and you have a prime minister pulling an all-nighter, like, that feels like a security, like, open book, basically.

You know, who's responsible for, let's say, the digital security of that kind of thing for all that?

GOFFUS: Well, a lot of those reside in national systems right now. Now, NATO did, under Secretary Mattis, did create a joint support and enabling command, JSEC, in Ulm, Germany. And hypothetically, that's where we're pulling stuff together and pulling information together.

So, they're trying to get at this but again, right now there's a lot of national feeds into a NATO system, and so each one of those is its own vulnerability.

MONTGOMERY: I would also say for us, the – if you go look at our war plans, our transportation annexes tend to become unclassified pretty quick, because you're going to have to work with the rail companies, port companies, you know, air operating authorities like Columbus Airport or something. And in the end, you need to be unclassified.

So unusual for the rest of military planning, logistics and transportation can – becomes unclassified. That doesn't worry me as much as the idea that you're at the vulnerability of the cyber defense of the actual network, the switching network of the rail systems, the air traffic control, you know, the servers that run your air traffic control system.

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Are they being defended as if they were a critical national security asset? And our concern across – it – they're not in the United States, so I don't know why we would – you know, and we spend a trillion dollars on defense and other things. I don't, you know – our – my suspicion is that the rest of NATO is also poorly – largely poorly defended. Not completely.

GOFFUS: And I think one of the things to point out is all of these systems were built before cyberattacks were a big thing. So, they were built for convenience, not for security, which adds more vulnerability to the system than you would otherwise have.

CHESLOW: Jiwon, I would imagine this is a rolling topic, evolves all the time. The – and the allies just met in Ankara.

Did they materially change any of that division of responsibility or, you know, whether for the physical logistics or for the cybersecurity of these troop movements?

MA: So, I think Tom said it really well, where he said everyone is responsible, so no one is really responsible.

So, I think that still stands. I think for the Ankara summit and their declaration it certainly set the right priorities, and it has made it very clear that NATO has to be able to deploy its forces, you know, enable them, sustain them. But I think that as a result of NATO not being able to regulate its, you know – the European infrastructure and it also cannot determine how nations, you know, I guess, operate their customs procedures as well. The only thing you can really do in this scenario is to set the military needs, so the requirements.

So, I think the Ankara declaration really helped in sort of telling allies what we need to do in order to meet those requirements, which also includes, like, identify and protect the key transport corridors and meet these border clearance timelines and also protect these, like, key route systems from cyber and other disruptions.

So, I think that's pretty material, and I think, you know, EU has been also working on new military mobility rules where it's going to work on, like, faster clearances and potentially designating, like, a coordinator that deals with military mobility for each of the EU nations. But ultimately, I think it's more setting the priorities rather than really changing the ownership of the problem.

CHESLOW: Yeah. Did NATO put any timelines on there?

MA: No.

(LAUGHTER)

MONTGOMERY: One of the things, one of the things I'd say is NATO had this great summit a year ago where they set, agreed to 3.5 percent on core defense, 1.5 percent on supporting defense investments. The real problem is it's going to take real leadership now, leadership by three groups.

One, Secretary General Mark Rutte, the political leader of NATO, General Alexis Grynkeiwich, the SACEUR commander, and then the leaders of the – of the participating nation states. And here's what I mean by that. That 1.5 percent, if I could go to any country and they could justify that 1.5 percent on existing programs that have nothing to do with NATO war plans. I'm repaving the road from Oxford to London. Eventually, a tank will run on it. There we go. You know, I've done it for NATO.

The reality is that the NATO war planners at SACEUR have a war plan, and they write a transportation logistics annex to it. In there, you can identify very quickly your top 30, 40, 50 places that need to be defended and secured effectively. The ports that that Tom mentioned, the airfields in Poland. We basically have to figure out how to get the major combat forces, which are American forces, UK forces, French forces, German forces, from where they are towards Poland and the Baltics or towards Romania, depending where the threat is.

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To do that, you've got to – the places that need to be – have their act together are in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Scandinavia, the Poland and the Baltics. They need to be investing in those defense things. So Rutte needs to visit those prime ministers and say, “Are you – are you defending the things that are in the war plan with your 1.5 percent? Are you spending it on something that helps you get reelected?” Because generally speaking, it's number two.

You know, its infrastructure. You know, just like in America, infrastructure is used as a tool, you know, to buy votes in these countries, and that 1.5 percent basically is just validating that one – you know, that they're spending money on infrastructure. It needs to be spent on the right infrastructure. That's real leadership. It's leadership that says to the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, “Hey, you got to spend more money protecting the Port of Den Helder because I plan on dropping two brigades there in the first 72, you know – you know, first 96 hours,” or whatever it is. You know, wherever the British Army's coming across.

CHESLOW: And you've made this case to Congress. But I wonder, like, who – is the US having this conversation with NATO? Who that matters is listening to this case?

MONTGOMERY: I don't think we're putting our political bandwidth in NATO into this discussion. I think we need to. And I think if on the one hand you're saying, “I'm removing my forces, you need to replace me. I'll come in an emergency. I'll show back up in an emergency,” then you ought to, on the other hand, be saying, “By the way, all the logistics to support this need to be there.”

And there is no congressional hearing for NATO per se. You know what I mean? In other words, there's a congressional hearing for Congress to complain about NATO, but there's no, like, NATO parliamentary, you know, get together.

So – and they don't really want it. I mean, honestly, if I went to NATO and said, give me your top 32 logistics issues, they'd give me one from each country. And that's bull, right? The top 32 logistics issues are in that tier of countries across the Black – across the North Sea, Baltic Sea, Atlantic Ocean area there to get our forces into the theater. And, you know, that – NATO's a wonderful – you know, alliance structure, but it is extremely consensual, and the idea that all 32 are – can equally benefit from any, you know, from any attention is how they look at it, and that's not always appropriate.

GOFFUS: And I'm 100 percent on board with what Mark is saying. That 1.5 percent, having lived through putting that together, was designed to be ambiguous up front to get all 32 allies on board. And we had one really honest – it was one of the Nordics. He came up to me, he goes, “I – I'm not sure we can spend 1.5 percent on that.” And I'm like – I gave him the same story about the ring road around his capital, and I go, “And you're thinking about putting a tank on that?” And he goes, “Yep.” That counts.

I think he's exactly right, though. What we should get to is to tie every qualifying 1.5 percent investment to a named reinforcement plan deficit.

CHESLOW: Is there...

(CROSSTALK)

GOFFUS: And if we did that, we get that accountability, that's how we move forward.

Now, when I left NATO about eight months ago, we were in this conversation, and I – and I revisited in July and I said, is there any appetite to really, you know, neck this down and – and make it good? No. They're not ready for the discussion yet. Because getting 32 allies to agree what's in and what's out is really hard. Once we do that, now we have an accountability tool, and I think that would do well.

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The other conversation that is ongoing is logistics or enablement. Enablement is the NATO word, by the way. Military mobility is the EU word. And both of them use the – them interchangeably even though they're not necessarily. And so, what there is is the potential to do common-funded reinforcement-kind of capability. It hasn't gotten super far because it's always been a national responsibility but there would be a test for this as well. So, a test for the 1.5 percent, a test for common capabilities. It needs to be, one, alliance-wide; two, unaffordable nationally; and three, decisive in the first 30 days of whatever conflict we would have. So those are some ideas.

Things like bulk fuel, pulled rail, roll-on, roll-off, force protection of logistics nodes, that's going to be a huge issue. And I think we've got a lot to learn from Ukraine on that score. How do you protect a factory that's vital to your war effort? That's – again – becomes a public-private kind of game.

So, we've got a lot of things. I think it's just a really rich topic that you went down. And I'm glad that Mark brought up that 1.5 percent because that's going to be critical. The only accountability is going to be NATO.

And the – so you – we talk about this – I talked about this with Secretary-General Rutte, and I said, "You know, we don't have enough weapons in our magazines." Back in – a decade and a half ago in Libya, Europe ran out of munitions for Libya in about three days.

And he goes, "You know what my problem is, Tom?" He goes, "When I was prime minister, I never went to where we have that big stockpile of un-sexy things" – and I've got to say, logistics, other than for this panel, is in the un-sexy category – "and go, 'Wow, would you – would you look at my munitions? Aren't these great?' On the other hand, look at my F-35." So, what does the prime minister invest in? The F-35.

So somehow, and maybe somebody in this room has the idea, we make logistics and enablement and military mobility sexy.

CHESLOW: Yeah. Make a hat for it.

I did wonder – you know, I can't stop thinking about all of these AI – you know, the hacks, the jailbreaking. There was just – you know, there was just a report today that the actual amount of OpenAI and Anthropic is in – incidents where their agents went rogue was much higher than anything they're – had been reported previously.

You know, we've been talking, kind of dancing between the physical and the digital. To what extent are these AI attacks making you re-think where the 1.5 percent needs to be spent?

MONTGOMERY: I'll take a whack at that. So, look, my general feeling on AI is it's going to punish the stupid, right? And so, what it – what that means is if you haven't been investing in cybersecurity for 20 years, these agents are going to be able to rapidly identify your flaws, your vulnerabilities, and allow a perpetrator to penetrate them and disrupt or delay your systems.

So, if anything – you know, my take on AI is initially, it's going to give the attacker the effort – you know, the ability to more rapidly bring you to your knees. Now, long term, AI is also going to be used – useful in cyber defense.

But again, you have to invest in cyber defense, and, you know, we're 25 years into an under-investment, and that includes the United States in that grouping. So, both the United States and Europe have not defended their critical infrastructures because – Tom mentioned it earlier – critical infrastructure is built not for security but for efficiency and cost.

Companies are rewarded for being efficient and cheap. They are not rewarded for being secure. So, as a result, rail lines, air operating authorities, port systems, and the power grids that support them have generally been under-invested in.

So, I think AI will initially make things worse. There's an opportunity over the long term that it – if – it'll inform defensive systems and recovery systems that make you more resilient. But I expect more pain first.

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GOFFUS: Yeah, because I – you know, the – sometimes, that's referred to as the tech – the tech deficit or the cyber deficit, that we've under-invested in. And now we're going to pay for it because AI is going to be able to exploit it.

The other side of that coin is using AI to look at an entire system and figure out the cumulative effects, how they pool together and – to come to an answer. We saw that in NATO. We were really good at logging them all – A, B, C, D, E, F, and G – and then I would watch 32 ambassadors go, "So?" And then watch, you know, a four-star go, "I think the impact is moderate," and everybody goes, "Oh, OK." What does moderate mean?

And we did this for a space exercise with SATCOM [satellite communications], where a ground station got taken out, one kinetically, one cyber, and then a couple satellites – SATCOM satellites – just so happened that a Russian satellite flew by and it stopped working. And so, we had this log of events, and allies were like, "OK. How bad was it?" And the military authorities said, "Moderate." And nobody knew what they meant, not even the officer that had to say that.

So, AI can help us figure out what that is. And when things start adding up and getting to the red zone, the decision-makers need to know. And you can use AI for that. Digital twins – I think that's a really important use of the same tool that can be – you know, it – it's a two-edged sword and – but I don't think it's a two-edged sword that we can afford not to pick up.

CHESLOW: Jiwon, in your report, you point to Chinese companies' stakes in European ports and energy systems, and I was really struck by one statistic that you wrote. You said that Chinese state-linked firms hold stakes in more than 30 European port terminals, including facilities designated to receive U.S. military forces and equipment. You're – and the report has some recommendations. One of them is for screening future investments.

But, like, is there something that can be done now, you know, sort of in those ports? Do you consider us those all vulnerable to state-linked – some – you know, espionage?

MA: So, first, I don't want to overstate, I guess, the threat that this poses, especially because just because China has access to port systems doesn't mean that it could just flip a switch and shut down a port when we need it, right?

And so, something our – I guess I'm more worried about is the access controls. So, what kind of data do they have visibility into? Is it the cargo manifests where it's being routed to? And who has access to those? And also, like, if we can't rely on these systems, whether it is because of these access controls or the system is down, does NATO actually have the alternative system that it can rely on to actually move the troops?

So I think that's kind of where I'm thinking about, and I think that some of the things that, earlier, Tom and Mark mentioned about AI is something that I also thought about, was just that systems that lie to you can also be just as dangerous as systems that are potentially down when you're trying to use it, right?

So, whether it is pointing to a different or wrong GPS location when you have to be somewhere, but it tells you that it's not. Or some terminal is available to do X but then it is actually not. So that's something that I'm thinking about.

But in terms of what they can be doing, which I think, you know, European partners are already partially doing – so I don't want to say that they're not doing this at all – is just tightening the access controls and just doing, like, cybersecurity investigations and just double-checking that everything is OK.

But again, like, planning alternate routes and making sure that those systems are available and testing them as part of the NATO exercises, I think, is really key in solving this issue in the future.

GOFFUS: And I'd – the first person to point out to me, Chinese ownership and operating on port facilities, was not NATO. It was actually the CEO, Keith Svendsen, of APM. They're the sister company for Maersk out of Denmark.

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And he actually asked for a meeting with me at one of the Munich Security Conferences. And I'm like, "A CEO wants to meet? Of course I'm going to meet with the CEO. Why do you want to meet with me?"

He goes, "One, I'm really worried about this Chinese ownership, Chinese operating in these ports, and – because that makes me uncomfortable, just as a citizen, but also as somebody in the shipping industry."

So, they're the first ones to see this kind of thing.

The other thing he said was, "You know, nobody has talked to me about moving a bunch of equipment and U.S. troops across the Atlantic." And he goes, "That's probably us, but nobody has talked to me about this. Nobody has talked to me about these logistics enablement plans."

And we haven't exercised this in a long time. They're starting to. And they'll never get to the scale, the full-blown thing. But you can at least come close to that.

So, I think that – the other thing that gets pointed out is alternatives. And I think the USS Abraham Lincoln, and I know I'm treading into Mark's water, so to speak, on this one, that ran out of certain kinds of supplies.

And why did that happen? Well, the number one thing was, our one point – our one port in the Gulf, where we resupplied the ships in Bahrain was hit. And so now instead of Bahrain, which is relatively a day and a half sail, something like that, if you can get through the Strait of Hormuz, is now 2,200 miles away in Diego Garcia. Now, it's a five-day one-way trip, a 10-day round trip. And they had to start prioritizing.

And so, some of the things that we take for granted, hygiene products, you know, that all had to get put aside so that we got the vital stuff there.

I believe we have the same problem at NATO. Antwerp, Rotterdam, and Gdynia; if those three go down, how do we get troops in and out of Europe? It's going to be really hard.

I don't know that we have an alternative. But again, I haven't read the logistics annex. And if you did this with AI and did an assessment, a modeling and simulation, I think you'd go, oh, red dot, red dot, red dot, we need a backup plan of some sort.

So, I think what Jiwon points out is exactly right. We need to have alternatives, and we need to exercise them, because if you don't exercise them, they're not real.

CHESLOW: It strikes me, this is like a very tall order of the number of problems that the report points out that we're talking about here. Maybe we can kind of turn this toward a conclusion of, like, would each of you have one top priority of, like, if you could – if there's one thing Washington could do in the next year to move toward better mobility for NATO, what would be the first thing you would do?

MONTGOMERY: I'll go ahead.

So, NATO is set up – they've done some good things. And I would say, you know, first, when I was U.S. European Command, you know, our war plan for a coalition of the willing was probably – with annexes was six or seven feet high in terms of paper.

The NATO plan for the same mission was about four inches. I was told there was no details in it.

Now...

(CROSSTALK)

CHESLOW: Four inches is still huge.

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MONTGOMERY: Yes. No, no. Not in military planning, I would say.

CHESLOW: OK.

GOFFUS: The skinny version. Yes.

MONTGOMERY: Now it's – you know, now I think NATO is a couple feet. You know, they've got real planning going and they're working and they need to do it.

So, my one thing would be, I would align, like, NATO's integrated cyber center, which is something they brought online. It was in the last two years. I'd keep it at SHAPE [Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe], which is supreme headquarters under the NATO military command, and align it – operationalize it to the war plans.

In other words, say, look, NATO, your governing vision for how you do – where and how you do cybersecurity needs to be aligned to a war plan. And this is taking – this is mixing, like, peanut butter and chocolate, which is to say, you know, the NATO likes to keep all these nice little centers of excellence kind of as a political thing with 32 hostages exchanged between all the countries.

And then, there's a war planning side, that's the military thing – you have to bring these together. You have to bring your skill sets, you know, and your investment strategies in alignment with your operational war plans.

If you do that, you'll identify gaps, because there are tons of them, and those gaps can either – can then – you can have oversight, that's where Secretary Rutte then comes in and says, "Look, you have 14 problems in your country. You tell me you're spending 1.5 percent. I don't care how you spend it as long as you fix those 14 gaps and get at them."

And, you know, there's going to be a lot more gaps in the Northern, Eastern European area, and probably a lot less in the – in the Southern part, just because they're not as aligned to these more dangerous war plans.

My point on this is operationalizing NATO's infrastructure to support war plans. If you can do that, you're going to get through this.

And by the way, we need to do the same thing in our country, where Jiwon and I wrote a report last year on U.S. NATO military – U.S. military mobility kind of sucking. And I've seen no – minimal efforts to repair – to fix that.

A lot of rhetoric, a lot of Congressmen that tell us they like the ideas, but, you know, near impossibility in fixing them. And so, if we can't fix them as a standalone country, I don't think NATO can. Therefore, they need to do it as an alliance, right? Not as – waiting on individual countries to fix things.

CHESLOW: Do you get a sense that the US is making that request from NATO, especially where there's forced posture?

MONTGOMERY: I think we're saying stuff like do better. You know what I mean? I don't think – do I think General Grynkeiwich, who's a U.S. officer – U.S. Air Force four-star, says this internally? You bet. He's a smart guy. I worked with him closely at U.S. European Command in a previous life. And he gets this, and he's a good planner.

The problem is, even though we've seen NATO as a military organization, it's a political organization. And that's – and – there's – you have to have the consensus of the members.

So – and it's hard for the United – you know, United States, we have a problem right now. We kind of walk around saying we might invade Greenland. You know, we're going to – we divest from Ukraine. We kind of slap around the leaders of Europe – of Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom to no real advantage.

And it's very hard to then turn to them and say, "By the way, you all need to get your act together and do what we say."

As we found out when we invaded Iran, you know, people keep receipts, and if you treat them poorly, they respond poorly.

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So, right now, I would say, it doesn't really matter if Bridge Colby is telling them, "Do this." The way his boss has treated the Europeans kind of speaks for itself.

CHESLOW: I was just at the United Nations in New York. And on a side panel, the Polish foreign minister described the relationship between Europe and the U.S. as a marriage in which there is no more love. Like, he just kind of acknowledged, there's no more love here, but we're still married, so let's just keep it functional for the sake of the kids. You know, but there was kind of an acknowledgment of what you just mentioned.

Jiwon, let's go to you. What would be your next recommendation for Washington?

MA: So, I think this is kind of the do better statement that Mark just said, which I will say it.

So, I think it's just identifying the routes that the U.S. reinforcements will use and protect those against cyber-attacks and China's control before a crisis hits.

CHESLOW: So, sort of pick out the central arteries that are the top priorities and make sure that those get – are those also priorities for Europe?

MA: Yes, I believe so, especially because, you know, U.S. military is really the heavy hitter with the big guns. And I think they do need U.S. support in order to protect any sort of Russia invasion or, you know, Article 5 triggering crisis. So, yes, I believe it is.

CHESLOW: Okay.

GOFFUS: Yes, I think it's either way. Either it's the US that they need to move in and around, or their own troops as they build real combat capability. They know they need to do this. So, it's both sovereign and to enable the US to help them.

Mark took mine, which is – again, I'll repeat the words of – tie every qualifying 1.5 percent investment to a named reinforcement plan deficiency. I think that's absolutely critical.

So, my backup to that then would be some NATO common funded logistics capability. And I talked about some of the criteria for that. But the idea would be, you know, fuel – bulk fuel, pooled rail capacity and move that to a NATO responsibility, the things that are alliance-wide that are critical in the first 30 days. I think that would help.

And then, the one final thing is this public-private thing. If we learn nothing else from Ukraine, we've got to get that right. And that means bringing very senior people from the companies that matter into the tent and going, we want to plan with you, and then we want to exercise with you on top of that.

So, I think NATO common capabilities for logistics, as well as, public-private. Those would be the two other big things. I know you said one.

MONTGOMERY: Yes. I would say, you know, Jiwon's report has six recommendations. We've just mentioned three or four of them.

I would say the three big ones, we – or the ones that the three of us mentioned, they – three smaller ones is about pooling rail systems, which is just, we – they do it for aviation, but don't do it for rail, it makes no sense.

Building some GPS resilience, making sure that they're ready to deal with jamming and spoofing. We know from Ukraine that's a big one.

And then, finally, getting your cyber workforce, investing your cyber workforce to get these things right.

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I mean – so there's kind of three strategic things and three tactical things make up Jiwon's six recommendations from here. And we need to work on these, and to the degree to which – you know, you gave a great point that the United States needs to demand this.

Like, if we're going to flow – set aside forces, train them, prepare them, keep them on a short leash to deploy, they need to have made the investments to receive. Otherwise, we're burning readiness dollars on our end to no avail. And I think that there's very little appetite for that in the United States right now.

CHESLOW: I would love to hear some questions from the audience. So, if you've got a question, raise your hand and let's see what you got to say.

How about you over there?

(OFF-MIKE)

OSYPOWICZ: Hi. My name is Lieutenant Colonel Rob Osypowicz, Embassy of Poland. I have a question. With, of course, military mobility operations, you know, working on them, getting troops and stuff through the border – European borders. We have to work on that.

What is your view on APS – setting up APS's, army prepositioned stocks? We had one open in Poland two years ago. There are plans of another one also in Poland. Do you think that is a good way to supplement, you know, enhancement of military mobility? Thank you.

MONTGOMERY: You're talking to the two – I mean, Tom and I were both policy directors at the Senate Armed Services Committee when we set this up and financed it.

This was a, you know, \$18 billion effort.

By the way, the base of this is a – we stationed in something called European Deterrence Initiative, or European Defense Initiative, depending which presidency you're talking about. We put about \$14 billion worth of equipment spread from Luxembourg to Poland, with a chunk, big chunk of it in Poland.

By the way, the reason we had to do \$14 billion is that we foolishly withdrew 20,000 troops during the Obama administration. Despite everyone saying this is a mistake, President Obama wanted it. His team did it. We withdrew two brigade combat teams. And the penalty – we saved, I remember General Odierno saying, "Well, we just saved \$400 million." The bill in the end that Tom and I ended up funding was about \$14 billion to \$16 billion.

I'm not sure President Obama got the big money savings he wanted out of that, because it turns out that your enemy gets a vote. And our adversary, Russia, voted by invading Crimea in 2014 and blowing up all of Obama's plans to get out of Europe.

Again, we're in the middle of an invasion and we're thinking about withdrawing forces. How smart is that? So, the answer on the APS is I'm all for it. The chance that the Trump administration would do it is zero degrees Kelvin. I mean, they're trying to figure out how to get out of this place and storing – and leaving behind U.S. gear is not in play.

I will tell you I love the idea. We have several brigade, armored brigade combat teams. And our brigade combat team will have 1,000 pieces of tracked and wheeled vehicles, not just a couple hundred tanks. And we have them spread throughout Europe so that our troops can fly in and see C-17s and be there in 48 or 72 hours and fall in on the gear and be ready to go.

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My one concern – so I'm all for it – is not going to happen under this administration, might happen under a future administration. But more importantly is Europe better start learning to defend that stuff. I'll tell you gently, none of our European partners are properly defending those sites against the current drone and missile threat of the Russians.

CHESLOW: Mark, just for anyone who doesn't know, what is APS?

MONTGOMERY: It's a – these are, well, APS is Advanced Pre-Positioning Systems. And, you know, different actors, there's an afloat one at sea. There's ones ashore. But they're, basically, 1,000 pieces of gear stowed in different warehouses and special warehouses because some of this stuff has ammo loaded in it, fuel loaded in it. So, you have to have a lot of safety and security around these. And there's men and women doing maintenance on them every couple of weeks to make sure they're ready to go on a moment's notice.

And they're usually near an airfield that can take C-17s. They land with like 5,000 American troops who pile out of them, run over to the gear like a NASCAR race start, you know, and start getting their stuff ruined. The doors all open like tons of garage doors, and out pour a brigade combat team, and it goes into action.

It's a fantastic idea as long as you can protect it. If we've learned one thing from Ukraine, it's that we're getting our butt kicked in drone and cruise missile warfare that we absolutely can't protect ourselves.

By the way, we're also learning it in Iran, in case we're confused and think somehow the U.S. military is better than the Ukrainian military, we're getting our butt kicked worse in the Middle East against, at least, against the Shahed drones. I think we're handling the ballistic missiles pretty well, but we've got to figure out.

And really, that's on our partners. I mean, you turn to these countries and say, we bought all this stuff, we stored it in your country. And when I say partners, I mean, all of NATO, it doesn't be that Poland has to defend everything in Poland or Belgium or anything in Belgium. But our NATO partners have got to buy a hell of a lot more drone and missile defense.

And this thing called the Eastern Front Defense Line, the defense line we're going to build to defend against Russian drone and missile incursions needs to absolutely come to fruition.

My big concern there was one American general got this and he was kicking ass. His name was General Chris Donahue. And for no apparent reason, this administration fired him and dropped the job down from four star to three star and forced his retirement. And, you know, which is just insane.

But, you know, so we're in a position where we need to get smarter at it. Our European allies need to invest in it. So, I believe in it, I believe in what we have. I don't think another dollar will be spent on it by the US till we get a new administration.

GOFFUS: Yeah. The, the, the benefit is you have a lot of stuff forward, the – forward, relatively speaking. If you don't protect it and you just think of yourself as a Russian planner, I'm like I can take out one whole garage full of a brigade of tanks with a couple of weapons, a couple of missiles.

It's one of the juiciest targets out there and we can't afford not to protect it. And I don't think we've thought that way about protecting these things.

And it's the same with our ports. I was at a one of the major European ports. I was giving a talk, and I had the whole port authority was in the audience. And I said, "What would you do if a hundred drones, both airborne and on the water and under the water attack this port tonight?" And they went, "Hmm, we haven't thought about that since World War II."

That's where we are up here. And that's why I think Jiwon, she points this out in the paper, is you've got to protect these pieces parts that are behind, and you've got to plan for alternates. And I think we've done very little on both those scores yet.

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CHESLOW: Next question. Who else has a question? Let's go to the gentleman back here.

LANE: Great. Thank you. Rory Lane, co-author on your 2025 military mobility paper. So, I wanted to ask you guys, as you described, given the number of countries we're dealing with, the number of entities, commercial, national, and the number of transportation providers, it seems to me that the attack surface in Europe is much wider than it is here, which is already a very wide attack surface we have in the U.S. for military mobility.

So, what NATO structure or initiative could be stood up the quickest to improve the public-private partnership between so many commercial entities, national entities, and the actual NATO command itself?

GOFFUS: I would – I'll take a quick swing at, and I would just say, I think JSEC is the place to do that.

MONTGOMERY: They're supposed to be in the logistics.

GOFFUS: Yeah. It's the logistics headquarters for NATO. It's the Joint Support and Enabling Command. And that's what they're supposed to do. They're supposed to get as many of those strings together and have the commercial interface. They should have that, that part of the equation. We just haven't built it out yet. I think is part of the problem.

We have some smart generals there that are doing good work and they're doing the plans. Now that we have the plans and, you know, our four-inch plan is now up to two-foot plan, making that real, to your point, is getting after that attack vulnerability surface area.

The other thing I would say, though, is it's both good and bad, right? You can be attacked from anywhere, but you have – as long as you have resiliency and redundancy, you're going to be okay. We don't quite have that yet in space because NATO hasn't done space capability targets yet.

And what it means is you've got 32 allies that could be all buying from the same contractor. If it's SATCOM, what is more vulnerable? Attacking one U.S. SATCOM provider that takes out a bunch of U.S. stuff that provides everything for NATO, we're trying to go after 32 different contracts.

I'd rather have the 32 different contracts because that gives me, you know, the ability to do. As long as they're coordinated so that we do that right, I think that's really important. And I think we can do that.

So, JSEC would be responsible for bringing that – those capabilities to fix it along with the cyber capabilities that NATO is supposed to be working on.

CHESLOW: Do you want – Jiwon to add to that?

MA: Yeah. So, I think Mark mentioned this earlier. The NATO integrated Cyber Defense Center, I think that's another opportunity. They won't be operable until 2028, but they are designed to provide commanders with sort of the operational landscape threat overview for transportation sector and other sectors. So, I think that's a, you know, a key place that could help with, you know, planning for defense in this regard.

CHESLOW: Who else has a question in the audience? Okay, I have one for you.

You know, when we look at the war right now with Iran, and we see some of the damage, especially to American assets there, how much does that affect the way the Americans can make demands of NATO allies? You know, you look at what happened to the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain. To what degree is that kind of a reputational black eye?

MONTGOMERY: Well, you know, I don't worry about the reputation. I mean, it's a black eye, but I don't worry about the reputational part of it. I mean, it certainly terminated – my opinion, our inability to do air and missile defense is why we terminated the war at 40 days.

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We were – our bases were getting hit. We could have moved. We eventually strategically relocated, gave ourselves depth on our bases, but our bases were definitely getting hit hard. But we couldn't protect our partner.

We or our partners couldn't protect their critical infrastructure. That's Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, and eastern Saudi Arabia were getting hammered, and there was water desalinization plants, power grids, they were all going to get hit. And it was, basically, the Shahed drone problem.

I would say it isn't like the Europeans are sitting on like a goldmine of a solution. They're equally dorked up. And, you know, the Ukrainians have their act together, but even they get challenged, you know, as the Russians made it a change in the Germans to rocket propelled – a rocket assisted grenade, a rocket assisted drone. They are now, you know, struggling to shoot it down.

The bottom line is every country has a vulnerability to this right now. And I think what it is, it's a learning point for us. It's a learning point that if you're an American ally or partner, you need to develop these skills. None of our allies and partners have developed this because the U.S. didn't.

One thing about being such a dominant partner in any relationship, military relationship like this is if we don't do something, our allies don't do it. So, when we started to not care about low-cost cruise – air defense and not produce the systems to replace it, all we have is this high-end stuff like Patriot and THAAD.

Our partners generally walked away from it. When we didn't emphasize drone defense, our partners haven't emphasized it. We're 10 years behind on delivering something called IFPC [Indirect Fire Protection Capability], which is how you defend against low-cost cruise missiles.

For three years, we've observed – three and a half years, we've observed this condition in Ukraine and not delivered. Both the Biden administration and the Trump administration failed to defend our forces against this kind of threat or conceive of the need to do it.

Now, look, a lot of this belongs – blame belongs with the Army, but we're not ready. So, from my point of view, the Europeans need to observe what happened to us and then work together with us to make sure it doesn't happen to NATO. That's that eastern front defense line I was talking about that we're going to need to invest in defending.

But I don't worry about it. I mean, it is a reputational problem, I think for the United States military and the Army, particularly. But it's something that we really – we need to fix and then the Europeans need to also invest in this.

CHESLOW: Yeah. And did you say we've terminated the war in 40 days?

MONTGOMERY: Oh, no.

CHESLOW: It's still ongoing...

(CROSSTALK)

MONTGOMERY: No, no. I'm talking about we terminated full scale military operations.

CHESLOW: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: But the reason we did that before we'd achieve whatever the strategic objective is – I'm not sure what that was – but we definitely terminated was because we were feeling a lot of pain and our partners were feeling a lot of pain. And that's something the United States military is not used to.

CHESLOW: Well, I think that is a good point for us to wrap up. I'm so grateful for this opportunity to learn from all three of you. Thank you so much to Tom Goffus, to Mark Montgomery, and to Jiwon Ma. Thanks to the FDD for hosting me. Thank you – all of you for being part of the audience and on the livestream. Thank you so much.



Planes, Trains, and Military Mobility: Strengthening NATO Through Critical Infrastructure Security

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(APPLAUSE)

END