

Anja Manuel ([00:01](#)):

That was a fantastic optimistic note to end on. We now have a very important session for you on the future of United States Special Operations. We're lucky to have us with here, General Richard Clarke, who's the commander of US Special Operations command. And of course, our Special Ops are deployed all over the world. I think one article said in 70% of the world's countries, there are US Special Ops Forces, from Africa to the Middle East, to Asia. These are the folks who are really on the front lines of keeping us safe, of working with local military forces. They've been at the front lines of counter terrorism. And General Clarke is a great leader of this group. So General Clarke and Michèle Flournoy, will you join me up here, please? Thank you.

Anja Manuel ([01:11](#)):

So as commander of US Special Ops, General Clarke is responsible for the training and employment of all Special Operations Forces, including the Navy Seals, the Army Rangers, the Green Berets, the Marine Raiders, and the Air Commandos. He's been in the US military for his entire career. But what we learned backstage is that he was also born in Germany and went to high school in Berlin, so near and dear to my heart, because that's where I'm from as well. And there's no one better to be in conversation with General Clarke than Michèle Flournoy, who one of the great defense experts and great Patriots that has been serving for us in the US Pentagon.

Anja Manuel ([01:57](#)):

Most recently is Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from February, 2009 to 2012. She, of course, is also the co-founder and managing partner of West Exec, and the co-founder and CEO of the center for New American Security. And really no one knows more than these two about our mission. So we'll let you take it away. Thank you.

Michèle Flournoy ([02:20](#)):

Thank you. And a proud member of the Aspen Strategy Group. So there we go.

Anja Manuel ([02:24](#)):

And a proud member of the Aspen Strategy Group. Thank you for adding that.

Michèle Flournoy ([02:28](#)):

[crosstalk 00:02:28]. Thank you, Anya. Well, I have been looking forward to this. First, because I think this is a really fascinating and important topic. And second is one of those rare instances where I get to ask questions of my dear friend, General Clarke. Great to see you all today. I want to start with some setting the scene. We all talk about a paradigm shift, 20 years since 9/11. We've had a focus on counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, Afghanistan, Iraq, the broader counter-terrorism fight. And now we're really in a new situation where we've got the rise of China and other powers.

Michèle Flournoy ([03:13](#)):

We've got this, as we were hearing in the previous panel, a period of profound technological disruption. So I wanted to just give you an open-ended question about, how do you see the security environment today, in contrast to the last 20 years in terms of, how we need to be thinking about special operations?

General Richard Clarke ([03:33](#)):

Thanks, Michelle. And Anya, thanks for the introduction and Michelle. You said about me, but I pay it back, you've been a great leader for inside the Pentagon and for National Security. It's an honor to be here with you. First I think it is important to talk about where we've been and what we've learned from it. And the past 20 years for our force, that's been heavily involved in the counter-terrorism fight and the counter-violent extremist fight, that shouldn't be forgotten. We have now built over 20 years of battle tested great individuals, who we specially selected and assessed. Now what I look at as probably one of the most credible, integrated, capable forces that we've ever had and we should never throw that out.

General Richard Clarke ([04:30](#)):

And we've got to continue to learn from the things that took place and the missions that they accomplished to keep our nation safe. What I think in the security environment in which we go forward on that, the counter-terrorism mission is still going to remain. There are still going to be folks that want to come into our country. There's going to be folks that, if they had the opportunity would take a shot at the United States. I'm not saying the next 9/11 is around the corner, but I do think that we always have to be vigilant and be prepared. So that's one thing that I think we got to keep to the forefront.

General Richard Clarke ([05:09](#)):

And General Milley was here yesterday, and he talked specifically about the counter-terrorism aspect. But the other piece that I share with the audience and it's the *raison d'être* for so common, how we got started was for the crisis response. And that capability that we provide for our nation, to really reduce the threats abroad that we could actually respond, whether it's a hostage rescue mission, or whether it's reinforcement of an embassy, or whether it's counter proliferation that could take place or something's coming near us. I don't think we should ever discount the ability of Special Operations to respond quickly, to give our national decision-makers a bit of a hedge and a bit of insurance.

General Richard Clarke ([06:06](#)):

And for us, with only 2% of the total joint force is SOCOM. And about 3% of our budget, it's a pretty good return on investment and what you get. And even if I just go back within the last 90 days, when there were forces required for the Afghan retrograde that happened in short notice, SOF responded and gave options in Kabul. But what a lot of people don't realize is that while that mission Afghanistan was ongoing, there was an earthquake that took place in Haiti. And the force that responded in a humanitarian disaster was actually a Navy Seal, that was part of the Special Operations South that took a small cell and he went to Haiti and he provided capabilities. And so, that ability to respond quickly for whatever footprint is needed, is something that SOF can do.

Michèle Flournoy ([07:12](#)):

We're all anticipating the new National Defense Strategy coming out. I'm not going to actually ask you to preview that before it's published, but, it's very clear that it's going to focus on the rise of China as a, if not the primary challenge. And the competition with China, particularly in the end of a Pacific theater, but also more broadly. And so, as you think about that larger context as part of the framework, or if you will, or the framing context for the next 20 years, how does that change your thinking about the roles and missions for SOF. Are we sort of going back to the future from SOF's origins and World War II and through the cold war? How are you thinking about this for the roles and missions in the future?

General Richard Clarke ([08:06](#)):

Yeah, no thanks. A couple big things I think are worthy of looking at first. Well, having my last job in the Pentagon, there's the J5 and looking closely at the strategies that have come. I still remember General Dempsey, it was four plus one. It was China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, and then it got refined to two plus two plus one. And so I think your piece on it's really going to be one plus four now. China as a pacing threat, and the capabilities are developing and the activities that they're undertaking, I don't think can be overstated.

General Richard Clarke ([08:49](#)):

But to your point for SOF's role in that, in the competition space, a couple things is, this is a little bit back to the future. The origins of SOF with everyone, I think most people who study history understand, Wild Bill Donovan who's stood up the USS and what he did there with really the origins of SOF and the CIA, of both Intel collection, but also discreet operations. And most people immediately point to the European theater. I think it's also instructive to look at the Pacific theater and things that took place, by both, General Donovan, but also other elements.

General Richard Clarke ([09:42](#)):

And one thing as I look historically, is everyone remembers what MacArthur said when he left the Philippines. What'd he say? "I shall return." But very few people know the history of at that time, Captain Major Russell Volckmann who, when MacArthur left the Philippines, he raised a Gorilla Force of 22,000 Filipinos and fought in insurgency until the time MacArthur returned. And he then wrote a book that said, "We Remained." And I think as you look at history of what SOF can do from an unconventional side, not just in the European theater, but into the Pacific theater and wherever we're able to partner with like-minded individuals who had the same interest and work resistance networks and build resilience within that.

General Richard Clarke ([10:49](#)):

And at that time Captain, and then subsequently Brigadier General Volckmann was really the emphasis of some of our Green Berets and our special forces. As we look at this and in competition as a continuum and really continuous campaign, it's not a phase and you do competition and then you have crisis and then you have conflict. Competition is woven throughout this.

Michèle Flournoy ([11:20](#)):

But you started by saying that even as the shift is happening and you will be part of supporting that, it's not like the terrorism threat has gone away. It's not like some of the other challenges have gone away. So as SOCOM commander, how do you think about the trade-offs in balancing across continuing a focus on counter-terrorism where it's needed, but also freeing up more of your, not just your people and your resources, but your mental bandwidth to really think about shaping the future vis-a-vis China?

General Richard Clarke ([11:53](#)):

Great. And I'm glad you specifically use that word of balance because first and foremost, we're looking at the rebalance. And we are prioritized towards the counter-terrorism fight for those threats. So we have to provide a sustainable priority towards the violent extremist. So that our country, our homeland remains safe. So what I would say is that we've really looked hard at where the specific threats are. And we've really changed some of our operating models where I can point back to 2009, 2010, 2011, when I was in SOCOM, there was network, to defeated network and where anyone would raise their hand and say, "I'm a violent extremist." It'd be, it, let's send a team there. Let's make sure.

General Richard Clarke ([12:50](#)):

And we don't necessarily need to put our forces everywhere. We need to put them where the threat is the largest would be priority, but then we also need to look at other capabilities of our partners, of our allies and where they can look at the violent extremist threats. But then as it looks to the capabilities in competition, as we've been able to really bring back some of the force and really focus on a regional alignments for our elements that have cultural and have language expertise, and that can work in specific regions and go back there again and again and again.

General Richard Clarke ([13:36](#)):

And I think that's really important for our force with an emphasis, not just on the direct action, but looking at all the core competencies that SOCOM provides. Because one of the biggest, and Michelle, I've heard you talk about this, most people when they think about SOF, they immediately think about the direct action, counter-terrorism, the things that-

Michèle Flournoy ([14:05](#)):

Kicking down the door.

General Richard Clarke ([14:06](#)):

... yeah, right away. And so what I just focus is that SOF provides unconventional warfare. It provides foreign internal defense, security forces, assistance, military information, support operations, or PSYOPs in civil affairs. When I get to travel and see our teams that are globally employed, and to see a Green Beret team, that's co-located with the civil affairs team, is co-located with the psychological operations team. And they're working inside an embassy to forward US interests, I think that's what right starts to look like. And it's part of the competition.

Michèle Flournoy ([14:50](#)):

Do you see a migration back to more traditional division of labor? The demand was so high in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the broader thing, you had end up having Seals who are Maritime Force ending up in landlocked countries doing all kinds of, at a very high tempo of operations. But, in this environment we're moving to, is part of the rebalance reemphasizing the advantage of Green Berets doing the work with partners and advise assist, or Seals in a more the Maritime environment missions? Do you think going back to that more traditional division makes sense, or are we still going to expect everybody to do everything?

General Richard Clarke ([15:39](#)):

No, I think going back to that more traditional is exactly where we are already moving to. You bring it, the Seals is as one example. For a long time, it was small last big L and the acronym of SL land. And now, we're getting the big S back in Seal with an increased emphasis on Maritime. But when you think about the Seals in the Maritime domain, what I think about, it's still not just a direct action or just working independently. I got to watch our Seals a few months ago, working with the Norwegian Special Operations Forces, building up their capabilities and capacity and triply learning something from the Norwegian partners who are great in the maritime domain.

General Richard Clarke ([16:28](#)):

So we're also learning and training, but we also have seals working in the maritime domain with Ukrainian SOF. But also in the Philippines and Thailand and other places that are all maritime powers. And so, it's that continued training.

Michèle Flournoy ([16:52](#)):

So let's talk about training a little bit and education training. So as you think about where you're trying to take the force in the future, does it change how you train people? Do we need to invest in more Mandarin speakers? Do we need to invest in more technologists who are going to do all the integration of the cool stuff that was talked about in the panel before? How do you think about educating and training the force?

General Richard Clarke ([17:17](#)):

A couple things, first on the actual training of our people, you mentioned Mandarin. Okay, nice. But how about tag along and tie and all the partner regions, I'm more interested in our folks learning those languages and taking the time with culture and to become regionally affiliated. So when they are in another country, that they understand. And so it's gaining an through education and that's sometimes higher level of education, but sometimes it's just day in, day out training. And actually their deployments is probably the best training that they get when they're actually deployed in that environment.

General Richard Clarke ([18:01](#)):

But the more they can be attuned to the specific cultures in which they're working is one of the most important thing. So there's a training part to that, that's really important. But then there's, our special operations are part of a larger joint force. And also working with the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, Marines, and some of their higher-end exercises, and making sure that we can show and work with and integrate with the joint force is absolutely critical. Because we want them to see us as an enabler and a capable force that helps them. Whether that's through joint forced entry, because we're already in a country.

General Richard Clarke ([18:52](#)):

We may be the only ones in that country that we can provide them access and placement for the future. And I think that, that's really important. And then obviously, our individuals learning, how do we pull this all together? The technology and learning and higher education, is absolutely critical.

Michèle Flournoy ([19:12](#)):

When we talk about new strategy, new focus, a lot of times we immediately go to the bells and whistles of the new technology, the new equipment, new procurement, and that's very important. But in my mind, the real long pole in the tent has always been operational concepts. How do you actually change how you're thinking about approaching mission in a different environment with a different challenger, et cetera. And the process for doing that? Because I think oftentimes, the department of defense is a very top down hierarchical deductive organization.

Michèle Flournoy ([19:49](#)):

So you have the joint operational concept starts at the joint staff level work their way down. But a lot of times the real intellectual format comes from the bottom up through a more competitive process where people are trying different approaches to solving specific problems. So as a SOCOM commander, how do

you think about the work that needs to be done on operational concepts and how do you structure that effort or incentivize that effort so it's really productive?

General Richard Clarke ([20:18](#)):

First, and I think you just hit, it starts with people. It starts with people. You've got to bring the right people on the force, and then you absolutely have to empower the people that their ideas will be accepted. That they'll be listened to. They'll be brought up. It's not, lost on me that Stan McChrystal, as he describes how he took on the entire find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, and turned it into a man hunting machine. That was a bottom up, and pulled together and refined. We have to create really the leadership has to be attuned to, and listen to those ideas. Because the best ideas come out of necessity and come from being forward and employed.

General Richard Clarke ([21:08](#)):

And so the more we can take what's required from the top of resources that the forces need, but then take the bottom up and then derive what those concepts to be the better. And what we're looking at specific in SOCOM is stealing a page from the Navy of actually coming up with key operational problems and then taking in the best inputs from across our theater special operations command and our service component, Army, Navy Air Force and Marine components to go, how do we solve this as a joint force?

Michèle Flournoy ([21:47](#)):

Great, well maybe we can zero in on one particular problem, which is strengthening deterrence. If you are in Beijing at the moment and you turn on the nightly news, all you see is a narrative of US decline. Look at January 6th, look at their mishandling of COVID, look at their polarization, the failure of democracy, they're down, they're out. This is our moment. And in that environment, there's a real risk of, at some point the leaders in Beijing drinking their own Kool-Aid and thinking, "Okay, maybe we can take a risk and use military force to impose our will." Be it in the East China sea, the South China sea Taiwan, et cetera.

Michèle Flournoy ([22:33](#)):

To me, the real watch word of the day is deterrence. How do we strengthen deterrence? And that's obviously a big question, way beyond SOF, but I'd love to hear you talk, think out loud a little bit about, when integrated deterrence is going to be a central portion of the new Defense Strategy. Secretary Austin's been talking about that a lot recently. How do we think about strengthening deterrence and what's the role of SOF in that?

General Richard Clarke ([23:05](#)):

I think one of our roles is undermining the adversary's confidence. Undermining the adversary's confidence so that he or she does not believe that the things that they want to accomplish can be done so. And I think SOF can play a tremendous role. You've studied deterrence, understand that much of it has to be in the mind of the opponent. And what SOF brings into that, I think are several things. One, we're responsible for the joint force for military information support ops, the information ops.

General Richard Clarke ([23:45](#)):

So what is out in that information space? What do our information operations professionals message? Everything from public to private. How do we ensure we're pointing it in the right directions for both our

adversary, but then also to pull in partners and allies into the information space would be one. The other one is, we as SOF through strategic reconnaissance, through operation preparation in the environment to have an understanding for what the adversary holds dear. And if they hold that dear, what can we hold at risk? Our adversaries in some cases are global, and so you don't necessarily have to hold something at risk inside their territory, inside their country.

General Richard Clarke ([24:40](#)):

And I think as we look at SOF, as a global combatant and command against global adversaries, we're looking across the whole spectrum. And I think that's really important, that through our strategic reconnaissance, we can see what is important to them, and we can see where other bases are or where they may have in some cases, paramilitary groups, that are outworking in the fringes that we can make sure that we call out and that we understand what activities they're doing.

Michèle Flournoy ([25:15](#)):

When the secretary talks about integrated deterrence, he obviously talks about all domains. So not only under sea maritime, air, space, land, but space cyberspace space. But he's also been talking about integrated with allies and partners as you noted. And one of my favorite recent SOCOM commander quotes was from your predecessor, Tony Thomas, who said, "Our job working with partners in a place like Europe on frontline states is making the Baltics look like indigestible porcupines for the Russian bear." And I just love. So what does it look like to make Osteon members or Taiwan, an indigestible porcupine for the Chinese dragon.

Michèle Flournoy ([26:02](#)):

But there's a very rich history of SOF working with partners in enhancing their own capacity to defend themselves, complicated adversary defense, the planning and so forth. So can you talk a little bit about that dimension?

General Richard Clarke ([26:17](#)):

Tony Thomas is great and I love him. And he has a way with words and I think his description, everybody can envision that. But what was fantastic for me is just this past summer, I had the opportunity to go to visit the Baltics, to see what really Tony, and even before him, his predecessor have set in motion with really building resistance networks. That we want an adversary to think that behind every rock is an IED and up in every tree is a sniper. That if you were willing to attack this country, you're going to be fighting all the way through. And the Baltics is just one example, but that same building up resistance is really important in both the population, but also with the various forces.

General Richard Clarke ([27:22](#)):

And we don't always necessarily work with the SOF Forces. It could be the paramilitary forces, it could be others. It's really depending on what, what is best for that specific country. Just next month, actually in two weeks, it's November now, in two weeks I'm going to Europe to go specifically to a resistance and resilience conference that's being hosted there by our special operations. And bringing together some of the key interlocutors in really some of the concept development of this. I think the last thing I'll say on this, Michelle is resistance. You can understand, but I put a finer point on resilience. There's a resilience, it's the ability to take that punch and then get back up.

General Richard Clarke ([28:12](#)):

And what we have found within SOF, one of the best ways to do that is actually to the medical aspect, that if someone knows that if they're going to be hurt wounded, something's going to happen, that the medical capabilities are there. They can be treated and they're going to be taken care of. And so, as we build these networks, we put an incredible amount of emphasis on that training, those networks. What were the field hospitals going to be?

General Richard Clarke ([28:47](#)):

Where are covered sites that they can all go to and they'll know that they're there, they know there'll be taken care of. And that builds the confidence. And once you give a force confidence that they can accomplish the mission and there'll be taken care of. Now, you're going to have a well trained force That's willing to fight a little bit harder than some others.

Michèle Flournoy ([29:06](#)):

Great. I'm going to switch gears and ask one more question myself, and then just put you all on notice. I'm going to open it up for the audience to be thinking of your questions for the general. So, SOCOM has a great reputation, and I think it's pretty well deserved for being very forward-leaning in it's a more agile approach to demonstrating new technologies, prototyping, getting them into the hands of the operators, playing around with things. And then, in many cases, very quickly fielding new technologies, new capabilities to the force. I think the larger department is really suffering with this problem of the valley of death, where you had, Mike Brown up here and DIU has done a great service in improving the department's ability along with people like Doug Beck to scout for new technologies and solutions.

Michèle Flournoy ([30:02](#)):

But we still have a really hard time going from there to adoption of innovation at speed and at scale. So what can we learn from the SOCOM experience? Granted it's a much smaller ecosystem, but are there things that we could import into the department that would be helpful?

General Richard Clarke ([30:25](#)):

People and partners. Some wise person told me if we want to develop our force, one, you've got to bring the right people in which we do through our assessment and selection process. But in some of the specific things we need, we're bringing in interns now during the summer months to help us with coding and AI. And we're bringing them in through some private organizations, but we're also bringing through local colleges and others. But they come into our formation, work on problem for four months. I in brief them and I outbrief them. When I in brief and say, "Who wants to join SOCOM and wants to work for DOD beforehand?" And usually nobody. When I outbrief them and they got to work with our people, they got to solve some real world problems.

General Richard Clarke ([31:23](#)):

Usually the hands go up at the end. I say, "Who wants to come?" In fact, some of them, we actually ended up hiring. So you got to bring new people in, but we also trained our force. And this is part of the partnership, I went to MIT two years ago, met with the Dean of engineering from MIT and said, "Where can we partner?" He set up a course for 400 of our mid and senior grade officers to understand the basics of artificial intelligence and machine learning and data and what they had to do. So that neophytes like me and the rest of the force would start to grasp and not ask the dumb questions or waste the talented people's time. So that's part of the partnership. But then, Chris Lynch was just up here on stage, from Rebellion.

General Richard Clarke ([32:20](#)):

I met with Chris two weeks ago, in Boston with his company with a venture capitalist and a couple of other companies. Because we're always looking for partners of what's out there and I'm constantly learning. So with private industry, with academia. Went to MIT but I also stopped by Harvard Business School and tops, and go out to Stanford. And Carnegie Mellon is a great partner with us. So try to pull in the best from across our country. And I'm just doing it that at my level, but this is happening down in the formation with business, academia, and then truthfully, some of the labs that are out there. They're not government, that we work with.

General Richard Clarke ([33:07](#)):

Where it's Lincoln Labs or Draper Labs or Langer Labs, because they're developing some great technologies that can help us. So I think pulling that all together and then, last, then having our SOF acquisition team. And who comes with me on all those trips? Is our SOF acquisition executive to follow on and then make those connections to go, "Where can we go."

Michèle Flournoy ([33:33](#)):

And they've had to be retrained and incentivized differently too, to move more quickly [crosstalk 00:33:38].

General Richard Clarke ([33:38](#)):

To move faster to get things done.

Michèle Flournoy ([33:40](#)):

All right. The floor is open. We're going to start right here, the young lady in the red sweater, please tell us who you are, where you're from and ask the question.

Tara Chandra ([33:49](#)):

Great. Thank you so much. I'm Tara Chandra. I am one of the rising leaders. I'm also a PhD candidate at UC Berkeley and my dissertation studies insurgency and counter-insurgency, which by looking at this conference, it might be a little bit overshadowed by rising China. But, I've just really appreciated your thoughts here. And I've a two-part question. So, you mentioned that there's a real importance of understanding local cultures. And I really appreciated, especially your point about learning languages other than Mandarin, and engaging with local partners.

Tara Chandra ([34:20](#)):

And that's been a real cornerstone of the coin doctrine as we have known it, or at least in my lifetime as I've known it. And I'm wondering if you could speak to how that will be prioritized. And then also what you see the future of counter-insurgency doctrine looking like for the United States, given a shift away from land operations and more towards countering a rising great power. Thank you so much.

General Richard Clarke ([34:45](#)):

No. Great. When I gave the Russell Volckmann example, do you know who I was talking about? Okay, good. I hope you can show your interest in that. No, it's an important question. And I think not just special operations, but our entire joint force has to remain. It has to still have capability for counter-insurgency because it's not going to go away. And what I do think is going to be, it's going to be, where

do we have to prioritize that effort depending upon US national interest of where that is. And I do think that the Department of Defense did a great job by including an irregular warfare annex to the National Defense Strategy that helps pull some of that and identifies that it is not just so calm. And special operations forces that conduct coin or conduct a regular warfare. So I hope that gets your question.

Michèle Flournoy (36:00):

I was aiming for one of your fellows, but you raised your hand.

General Richard Clarke (36:04):

If want to turn into one of your fellows, you can.

Michèle Flournoy (36:05):

Okay.

Doug (36:09):

So you already answered one of the questions I was going to ask. So I will pivot to a little of a different question that's tied to something that you didn't talk about. The Special Operations Force that we have today worldwide is unbelievable bar none. And that is forged by 20 years of experience, and an incredible amount of reps and a talent base is just incredible. And at the root of that talent base is a culture that's incredibly powerful. So I guess the question I'd have for you is, as you think about that culture now, and turning it to the challenges that you talked about that are emerging, which parts of that culture do you want to double down on? And which parts of it do you think might need to change to meet the new threats?

General Richard Clarke (36:53):

Hey, Doug, thanks. Good. And always great to see you. The culture that I never want us to let go of, and whether that's doubled down or tripled down is the fact that our individuals are problem solvers and that they will continuously adapt and look for those problems to overcome. Because I think that's really, as we sat down with all our commanders and talked about what's the SOF unique value to the joint force. It was that. And that we can quickly get to solutions. And then also look at long-term solutions.

General Richard Clarke (37:32):

I think that the aspect of, what do we want to, and I won't say get rid of it completely, but I think the thing we had to be careful because of the 20 years of engaged combat, that everyone starts to look at direct action as the only thing that we do. And I talked about that, but, for a good part of that 20 years, that's what we also recruited to. That's what we also assessed to. That's what we also train to. When I came into the command and I would go out and see our forces training and prepping, it was always the direct action mission that they were training to. It was what some of the assessment courses were built around and I think we modified to that. But it's something we've got to continue to take a look at.

Michèle Flournoy (38:29):

Yes, [inaudible 00:38:30].

Charlie Dunlap (38:36):

Sir, thank you very much for coming. Charlie Dunlap, retired Air Force officer, now teaching at Duke Law School. And I hope we add Duke to your list of visits. Sir, you might be aware that, Jill Hazelton, from the Naval War College has written a book called, Bullets Not Ballots, where she challenges the whole notion that winning hearts and minds is a key to successful counter-insurgency.

Charlie Dunlap (39:02):

In fact, she studies five different counter-insurgencies and she finds that the more brutal the counter-insurgencies are the more successful they are. And she probably could have added Sri Lanka and frankly, Syria to that list. A, what do you think of that? And B, is SOCOM trying to grapple with that particular perspective? And I just want to add for Jill's sake, she's not advocating that we become brutal, she's advocating that we not become involved. Thank you, sir.

General Richard Clarke (39:36):

I have not read that. So, I'm a little bit of a disadvantage, but I still think that regardless, we have to go with our values Obviously we'll always go with the rule of law, and that we have to know the long-term implications to our forces and to the policy. And that, we'll fall within that. And so, I understand the premise, but I'm not the favor of brutality in all circumstances, we have to do what we have to do, but we're going to do it within the comfort of that rule of law. And most importantly, our values. Because the moral injury that could come from a brutality is something that none of us want to have to live with.

Michèle Flournoy (40:28):

Yes, right here.

General Richard Clarke (40:29):

I think there was one in the back.

Michèle Flournoy (40:30):

Okay.

General Richard Clarke (40:30):

There was one in the way back [crosstalk 00:40:31].

Michèle Flournoy (40:31):

Okay. Why don't we go here and then we'll go in the back. Okay. Yes.

George Nicholson (40:42):

Sir, George Nicholson. Great to see you both again. Quick question, Michelle, is your son still in the Seals?

General Richard Clarke (40:51):

I know nothing.

Michèle Flournoy (40:52):

No comment.

George Nicholson ([40:54](#)):

I was at a breakfast last week with General Eric Smith, who is the assistant combat and Marine Corps. And he talked about one of the common [inaudible 00:41:03] that General Berger may speak to it our next panel is, basically the recruitment of individuals. And he said, training what they've done down at Quantico, their new modeling and simulation center to provide the basis for requirements. But then he said, "One of our highest priorities is retention." And he says, "I've got people who've got 18 years of service. We've spent millions and millions of dollars on them. And, they're getting out." And he says, he's calling them in and saying, "Why are you getting out?"

George Nicholson ([41:32](#)):

"Well, I'm not going to get promoted to full Colonel. I'm not going to be promoted to general officer." How do you keep those people? What initiatives? And he said, "We're looking at what kind of changes in policy or doctrine." Are you having the same kinds of problems of SOCOM of retention?

General Richard Clarke ([41:49](#)):

Honestly, George I may have lagging indicator, but we're not. Our folks are still focused on the mission. Yeah, we lose some, but it is not significantly changed in the few years that I've been watching this. So now we're not seeing it George because our people I think are enthused by the mission and the things that they get to do.

Michèle Flournoy ([42:12](#)):

I think there was somebody in the way back. Did I see a hand? Yes, back here. Sir, you can stand up and then mic will come to you.

Chris ([42:25](#)):

Yes. Thank you very much. Chris [inaudible 00:42:26]. Question about our counter-terrorist capabilities in Afghanistan, what do we lose with withdrawal and to what degree can that be compensated by with over the horizon operations?

General Richard Clarke ([42:40](#)):

Yeah. I think that the biggest thing that we've lost with that is our intel, our actual ability to see and sense without having humans on the ground. Michelle and I have talked about this and that's the piece that is going to be the hardest to make up for. I won't say it's impossible, but it is going to remain a challenge to be able to see and sense where are the various groups within Afghanistan and what they're doing and where they're going. It doesn't mean it's an impossible task, but it's going to be more challenging going forward.

Michèle Flournoy ([43:23](#)):

Well, I can just say for myself as an American taxpayer, I feel good that our Special Operations Forces are well led and in great hands. And please join me in thanking General Clarke for a great conversation.

General Richard Clarke ([43:36](#)):

Thank you.