

**JIM WALSH:**

Well, hello. And welcome to the inaugural virtual Starr Forum. We are thrilled that you can be with us for our discussion of rethinking national security in the age of pandemics. I'm Jim Walsh, senior research associate at the MIT Security Studies Program. And we have a terrific panel for this singularly important topic. Before we get started, I'd like to thank the MIT Center for International Studies and the MIT Security Studies Program for sponsoring this event. And, in particular, I want to thank Michelle English and Laura Kerwin for all their hard work that helped make this happen.

There are other great Starr Forum programs in the queue, including one tomorrow, Friday, April 24, at 1:00 PM, "Amazon Burning, COVID-19, Ghosts of the Climate Future?" It features Carlos Nobre, Brazil's leading expert on the Amazon and climate change. As for this event, we're going to briefly hear from our terrific panelists. And then we're going to have a bit of discussion and go quickly to questions from the audience. You can submit your question using the Zoom feature at the bottom of your toolbar. My goal is to get through as many questions as we can.

Now let's take a minute and meet our panelists. Joe Cirincione is president of Ploughshares Fund, a global security foundation. He is also the host of *Press The Button*, a weekly podcast from Ploughshares dedicated to nuclear policy and national security. He has worked on nuclear weapons policy in Washington for over 35 years and is considered one of the top experts in the field.

Yasmeen Silva is a partnerships manager at Beyond the Bomb. Her work seeks to expose the intersections between the nuclear weapons system and other oppressive systems here in the US. Prior to joining Beyond the Bomb, Yasmeen organized across the country on issues ranging from minimum wage to women's reproductive rights. Finally, but certainly not least, Vipin Narang, associate professor of political science at MIT and a member of MIT Security Studies Program. He is an expert in nuclear proliferation, nuclear strategy, South Asia, international relations, and international security.

Now, each of our panelists is accomplished in a number of different fields, but one might say broadly that each is able to provide a different perspective on this topic. Joe has a nuanced understanding of Washington and policymaking going back to his days on the Hill. Yasmeen brings a perspective grounded in advocacy and how these questions play out in everyday life

for grassroots activists and for citizens. And Vipin has a deep knowledge of the security studies field and what scholars who study conflict and peace are thinking about during this uncertain time. Please take a virtual moment here to welcome our panelists.

I don't know if they can hear, but what the hell. Let's get this party started. Joe Cirincione, you and Bill Hartung have written an op-ed arguing for a new approach to national security. In a few words, what is it? And why is your approach better than what we are doing right now?

**JOE CIRINCIONE:** Thank you very much, Jim. And thank you, MIT, for hosting us here. Bill Hartung and I just wrote an op-ed in *The National Interest* a couple of weeks ago talking about why we need to rethink national security. And here's a little secret. It's not exclusively our idea. In fact, I want to use my five to seven minutes to zip you through some of the arguments that are now being made about why we need to fundamentally alter the way we think about national security, including our budgets, strategy, our allocation of national attention. And to do that, I'm just going to take over the screen for a few minutes and zip you through a keynote presentation that I have on the quotes from these various experts.

So let's start with this one. And this might be the most important one. You never know when you're in a tipping point, when you're actually in an inflection point where you're changing from one course of action to another, but if we are, this March 31 op-ed from Max Boot may be the tip itself. Max is a neo-conservative thinker. He was a big supporter of the Iraq war. He was a promoter of using the military to transform global geopolitics.

And here he is on March 31 in *The Washington Post* saying we have to rethink the whole concept of national security and pointing out, in particular, how insane it is that we're increasing the budget \$7 billion-- it's actually \$10 billion-- for nuclear weapons, but we're cutting it for things like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And what he's arguing for-- he goes on to say this-- is that we have more serious threats. In fact, he argues, the last 20 years have seen us face these threats that do not have military solutions to them. We have to think less about the military threats and more about cyber, climate change, and pandemics.

And he's not the only one saying this. Uri Friedman in *The Atlantic* talks specifically about how our response to the pandemic has been hindered by the fact that our spending priorities have been out of whack. Catherine Lutz and Neta Crawford from the Brown University Cost of War Project specifically point to how we've been overspending on nuclear weapons, stockpiling thousands of nuclear weapons, but not enough ventilators, as a case in point. In fact, we're set

to spend-- depending on how you count it-- between \$50 and \$70 billion this year on nuclear weapons and missile defense. All of our public health is going to cost \$36 billion. Something is radically wrong with our priorities with those kinds of budgets attached to them.

And you have Samantha Power pointing out how it's not just this current crisis that we're unprepared for. Unless we change course, we're not going to be prepared for the next crisis. That is, the chaos, the incompetence that you're seeing now, isn't just a factor of the particular administration we have. It's the infrastructure that we built up. It's a set of national institutions that we've created. It's where we're putting our money that matters.

And nobody makes this more powerfully than Jessica Mathews-- my old boss at the Carnegie Endowment-- a brilliant piece in *The New York Review of Books*. Last July, we brought her on our podcast *Press the Button* to talk about it. And she points out that 60% of our discretionary budget is going to the Pentagon. Well, of course, you're not going to have enough money to deal with the real threats you face if this is where you're putting 60% of your money.

David Sanger raises a very interesting point in *The New York Times*, that it's not just a matter of some serious sort of academic debate about this strategy or that strategy. There is a well-funded defense lobbying establishment in Washington that pushes for specific programs. So he points out-- one of my favorites-- we've spent billions on missile defense, and we're spending pennies on pandemics. We have spent over the last three and a half decades about \$350 billion on a missile defense system that does not work, often to counter weapons that do not exist, and we're short-changing pandemics, which is why we're in this-- part of the reason our response is short-changed in the current crisis.

And one of the people I pay a lot of attention to is Kori Schake, now at the American Enterprise Institute, a Republican conservative, and she points out that this change is happening. She can feel it. And a lot of people agree with this. We're going to see cuts in defense spending coming, because we simply cannot afford to give \$750 billion dollars-- that's the budget, of course, this year-- \$750 billion dollars to defense when we're facing the kind of global recession we're about to enter into and the kind of pandemic that's going to be with us at least for another year, maybe more.

So this is why you see leading progressives like Representative Ro Khanna, one of the leaders of the Progressive Caucus, arguing about this, making the case for this, that this is not something that's necessarily going to happen automatically. Especially in Washington, nothing

happens automatically. You've got to fight for it. Power never relinquishes without a struggle, never has, never will, said Frederick Douglass. Ro Khanna takes that seriously. We've got to start right now to having a savvier 21st-century definition of national security.

Jamie Raskin, another leader of the progressive caucus, also a member of the House leadership. We just had him on *Press the Button* last week talking about this, discussing how the pandemic has revealed that we have huge holes in our social contract. You may remember people were talking about this virus as being the great equalizer. It is not the great equalizer. Certain sectors of our society are suffering far more than others. Communities of color are getting much harder hit by this than wealthier, white suburbs. Nursing homes, the oldest, the frailest among us, are getting much harder hit by this.

Unless we're prepared to do this again and again in the years and decades ahead, we have to take the opportunity to fix our social contract and re-allocate our resources to where they deserve to be. I think I want to wrap it up here with just, if I can-- I'm having a little problem here. I'll stop sharing the screen. And I'll turn it over to Jim again to bring it on. It's a problem that we have that's not just an ideological one and not just a theoretical one. It's also a political one. There are 757 lobbyists working for defense contractors in Washington.

The last year, we had figures for, defense lobbyists spent, I think it was, \$127 million lobbying to get their programs through Congress. That's the whole game. We don't have anything like that on the other side. So we're going to have to make up for it, but with people power with the kind of organizing that can wrest control even from such well-funded groups as the defense contractor lobbyists. I'll stop there.

**JIM WALSH:**

Thank you, Joe. Quite an assemblage of people coming from very different perspectives. Let me push back to some people in the audience who are wondering, you can't fight a virus with a bullet or a bomb. But if we cut the military, won't that make us vulnerable to threats from China or Russia or Iran or North Korea? These bad actors, they might say, would seek to take advantage of this state of disarray, and we can't afford to let up our guard.

**JOE CIRINCIONE:**

Yeah, three things on that. I was just quoted in a *USA Today* article yesterday about-- the headline was US adversaries are taking advantage of this to press their advantage. I don't think that's true.

And you can look at places like China, like North Korea, like Iran. They're not doing anything fundamentally different from what they've done before. And guess what? They're hit by the

pandemic, as well. So some of the things you're seeing, like Iranian naval patrol boats harassing US destroyers, are part of their defensive crouch, not an offensive crouch. So that's number one.

Number two. I think we could easily this year cut \$30 billion from the NDAA, from the defense budget request. And not only would that be low risk, it would actually make us safer. That this is the case, we're taking that money away from weapons we don't need and putting them towards the threats that we really face would make us safer.

And one of the reasons for that is not just the enormous waste that's there in the Pentagon budget, but the fact that we spend so much. We spend more than the next eight or 10 countries combined. And of those eight or 10 countries, only two of them are adversaries, Russia and China. The rest are part of our allies.

We outspend China three to one. We outspend Russia more like six to one. We have an enormous military advantage over the rest of world. That's why we can safely cut the budget, transfer to the threats we really are facing, and be safer, not riskier.

**JIM WALSH:**

Terrific. Well, we'll want to get back and talk more about that, but I want to get to Yasmeen. Yasmeen, you've raised the concept of safety versus security. What does that mean, and how do people outside the nuclear priesthood or the national security establishment, how are they thinking about these issues out in the country?

**YASMEEN SILVA:**

Thanks, Jim. I think that that's a really fantastic question. What we're confronting today is something that we have known for a long time. Nuclear weapons, a strong military, they make us feel secure, but they don't offer safety, as Joe just mentioned. We are actually less safe. And due to this misplacement of priorities, we're seeing that we are not able to meet the threats of the 21st century that actually make us unsafe.

And in fact, our security priorities have been shaped by an administration that has created the threats in the first place. We're pulling out of so many different treaties. We've slashed our State Department. And as Joe said, we are creating an ample amount of military solutions that can't be solved. Or we're attempting to solve and create solutions through the military when that doesn't actually exist.

And I want to go to a point that we're talking about national security within the context of COVID-19. But it's really important to highlight the fact that people within the activist

community and organizing community within the United States have been calling for these things, have been calling for a cut in the defense budget, have been saying that our priorities have been out of line for a really long time.

To cite one statistic, Columbia actually put out that within a year, over 200,000 people die of poverty or adjacent causes. 200,000 people die of poverty or adjacent causes in the United States. And we're talking about the lives we've lost to COVID-19 already. We're not talking about the fact that the reason that people are dying of poverty, of hunger, of lack of access to health care, these are all preventable deaths. And we need to be preventing them, and the way that we can be preventing them is by cutting the military budget.

And so this isn't, again, something that's new. And so when we're talking about safety versus security, if you're thinking of the everyday American, we are sold on the idea that these nuclear weapons or that this inflated military presence makes us feel safer. But everyday Americans, what really makes them safe at the end of the day, is having a roof over their head, being able to feed their families.

I just found out that on tribal lands in the United States, most don't have running water, which on the best of days is a fundamental necessity in the United States. But beyond that, when we're looking at COVID-19 and the coronavirus, that is one of the main ways you can battle this, is by having running water. And so we've invested billions and trillions of dollars into our military, and yet we cannot within the United States of America find a way to get running water to every community.

So that makes us safe, right? Having access to all of these things makes us safe. And so as Joe mentioned, we cannot keep funding these weapons and the military at an ever-increasing rate that we have. It's really time to reassess how much we're allocating for national security and what the threats actually are.

Because for an everyday American, it's how they're going to get food on the table. It's whether they have a roof over their head. And we can't lose sight of that, because if we do, we're not going to be able to assemble that pressure that Joe was talking about to really highlight to legislators and to the government that this is what matters at the end of the day.

So I think one way that this is really highlighted is we're now seeing that folks that are fighting for water for everyone, folks that are making sure that people have access to health care, are understanding that if we are to cut our military budget and really realign our priorities around

what makes us in America safe, we can make movement. And so one thing that I wanted to highlight really quick, something that Beyond the Bomb has signed on to this platform and this agenda is the People's Bailout.

So we're seeing stimulus packages. We're seeing bailouts in succession. But we're seeing a lot of them-- I believe the figure was \$10.5 billion go into the military with the last stimulus. That stimulus was meant to bail out everyday Americans, not an already inflated military contract.

And so realistically, if we're talking about that, the price of oil has fallen. The military is going to be saving so much money within their budget already. And we're asking Americans to tighten their belts and pick themselves up by the bootstraps, but we can't ask the Department of Defense to do the same. Something's wrong there.

So the People's Bailout has five key pillars. The first is that health is a top priority for all people with no exceptions. The second is provide economic relief directly to the people. Third is rescue workers and communities, not corporate executives. The fourth is to make a down payment on a regenerative economy while preventing future crises. And five is protect our democratic processes while protecting each other.

And those five things are a backbone of how we can move forward in a way that sets an agenda for true safety and security, and not this inflated idea of what that means in the 21st century. And I think that final pillar is super important on democracy. We're talking about how to use democratic means-- at least, Joe and I were-- about how we can really fix this problem. And we're looking at a moment when Americans have to decide between their health and public health and voting, which is a fundamental right here in a democracy.

But part of the reason we're being told mail-in ballots can't happen is it would be too expensive. It would take too much time. It's too much of an overhaul. We just gave \$10.5 billion, in addition to the already inflated budget. I'm sure we can figure out a way to make this democracy function in a way that allows every voice to be heard and allows us to as a group voice what we believe our national security priorities are. And I'll leave it at that.

**JIM WALSH:**

Part where you're talking about strategies. I'm sure there are people in the opposition, activists who are working against all that and for something else. Because we live in this time of hyper-partisanship, in which it's virtually impossible to get anything done.

As an organizer, someone with an organizing background, how are you thinking about getting around that? Are you thinking that it's about persuading people who haven't thought about this before? And how do you do that in a setting when it's a noisy environment? Elections, climate change, COVID, obviously. Lots of things going on. So just tactically, how are you thinking about that?

**YASMEEN SILVA:** That's an important framing point. So I think two things on that. One, so the People's Bailout that I was mentioning before, that platform has been signed onto by hundreds of organizations, which represent thousands of people across the United States. So that's no small thing.

The other thing is, as Joe alluded to before, I think what we're talking about is people power versus money power right now. If you look at a nuclear policy that I'm really familiar with because Beyond the Bomb works a lot on first use specifically, over half of Americans believe that if we don't already have a no first use policy, we should. And what that means realistically is the majority of folks are on our side for that and budget measures.

And when you look at movements in the past, or any people-powered demands towards a government, this is a fascinating figure. It only takes 3.5% of the population to actively engage - and that means calling Congress, writing letters, writing letters to the editor, talking with their friends and families-- for any of the major legislative wins we've had since the founding of this country. So that's civil rights. That's gay marriage. That's really any movement forward you can think of.

And so what it really is about, it's not only reaching out to those folks who might not necessarily be on our side yet, because we know most people are with us. It's those folks who haven't yet taken that step to raise their voice and take an action that can move the needle.

**JIM WALSH:** Great. Thanks for sharing that perspective. Let's get to my good friend and colleague, Vipin Narang. We've heard from someone steeped in Washington and policymaking, someone embedded in the activist community working with citizens on the ground. And it's time to hear what our friends and colleagues in academia have to say.

Vipin, I see that our colleague, Barry Posen, has an article out in today's *Foreign Affairs* entitled, Do pandemics promote peace? And it suggested pandemics are often associated with less violence between governments. Other scholars who write and teach about international security are starting to have these conversations. And looking at the implications of COVID,

what are you hearing in your discussions, and where do you come down on all this?

**VIPIN NARANG:** Sure. Thanks, Jim. Great to see everybody virtually. Thanks for having me. It's good to be here. Hope everyone is healthy and safe, wherever you are.

I was going to raise a couple of points in no particular order. I think maybe I'll start with the broader long term trends or choices and move to some immediate concerns that have come up, especially in the realm of military affairs, security, and nuclear weapons.

I think the first point is that there will be a fundamental transformation in how we think about pandemic identification, response, and preparedness. And hopefully at the global level. This requires cooperation between China, European partners, the Middle East, India, East Asian countries, the United States, to set up early monitoring capabilities so that when this happens again-- and it will.

Because of broader issues like climate change and development, these zoonotic viruses are going to jump to humans again at some point, and we need be better prepared to identify novel potential pathogens that may make that jump, and then have stronger responses. And that will require money and cooperation. So hopefully, this becomes a transformational moment in terms of pandemic response.

With respect to coronavirus right now, one assumption-- and this underpins Barry's argument today in *Foreign Affairs*-- is that the economic consequences right now are going to be long term. And there I think was some initial optimism that if and when the world turns the ignition back on the economy, it'll just go back to the way it was.

And I'm much more pessimistic. I think this will be a very, very, very long, slow recovery in some sectors. Some sectors will be forever transformed. The airline industry, cruises, higher education, the restaurant business. So many small businesses are being hurt across the world with this shutdown and the longer it goes. The gig economy.

And so the economic consequences of this will be with us for a while. And as countries are dealing with that, it's certainly possible that there's more peace. But I leave open the possibility that some countries that face significant economic downturns may turn to old playbooks at them using the past.

And I'm thinking primarily of South Asia, where Pakistan, which is primarily military-run, if the

legitimacy of the military starts waning because of an economic crunch, the time-tested playbook for the Pakistani military is to provoke India. And we saw last year what the consequences of a crisis between India and Pakistan could be, as it came very close to major escalation on a conventional level. And that always runs risks of running up on Pakistani nuclear red lines or deployment of nuclear weapons in South Asia.

And so I don't take it for granted that economic shocks necessarily lead to peace. That's one argument, to be sure. But there is an alternative argument that you can have diversionary war incentives also, if this economic downturn really starts undermining legitimacy of some countries and governments.

With respect to the United States, the economic downturn will lead to some really hard choices. And when it comes to nuclear weapons, the US has capitalized a \$1.7-- who knows what it'll end up being-- trillion modernization program for its nuclear arsenal. And I'm agnostic as to what the future form of the nuclear arsenal, whether it should be a triad or other potential deployment modes, but there will be hard choices as to whether the US recapitalizes all three legs of the triad.

There are some huge cost potentially to be saved on the land-based leg. One version could focus on eliminating the land-based leg entirely, and you'd have significant cost savings. And former Secretary of Defense Bill Perry at one point advocated that.

There's also a possibility, instead of investing in a brand new ICBM-- which I jokingly and lovingly refer to as the most expensive warhead sponge on the planet, whose existence is literally just to bait Russian warheads-- there can be significant cost savings if we just extend the life of the Minuteman 3, instead of investing in the ground-based strategic deterrent.

So there are going to be some really hard choices when it comes to especially the nuclear enterprise, which is what my area focuses. And there are some costs to be saved there. Major costs, if we radically approach the future of our nuclear force structure. But I think some significant costs if we think about how to more carefully allocate resources to best achieve deterrence at levels that aren't excessive.

And I think a lot of countries are going to face it. I think the modernization programs in Russia and China will also be affected by the contracting economies of all of these states.

Two immediate issues that have come up because of coronavirus. One concerns both the

conventional but also the nuclear enterprise, and one is specific to nuclear command and control specifically.

So the reports coming out of France and then on the *USS Theodore Roosevelt* suggest that the impact of coronavirus on US military readiness is not something to be overlooked-- or global military readiness. In the case of the *USS Theodore Roosevelt*, 20% of the crew that was that it had tested positive for coronavirus. And there were reports that it started with an incapacitated-- a large portion of the crew that focused on the nuclear propulsion piece of the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier.

And it's a very highly specialized crew. It's a very highly specialized capability. And that can have real consequences on a CVN's capability to move.

And God forbid coronavirus get seeded on an SSBN, which would have significant impact on our nuclear force structure. And if a ship is bad, a submarine or cruise ship is bad-- a submarine is worst case scenario because the virus would just rip through an SSBN. And so military readiness becomes a problem.

The *Charles de Gaulle* had 60% prevalence. And so real readiness issues start being affected by the pandemic. And that may persist with us until there is a vaccine. So that may be a one-to-two year issue.

The final issue I wanted to talk about was this issue of nuclear command and control. And this got raised when Boris Johnson was put in the ICU. The British have a system to deputize nuclear command and control if the prime minister is incapacitated, but some countries may not. And this was raised recently with the rumors of Kim Jong-un potentially passing away or being incapacitated.

And in some of these countries, in smaller nuclear powers, this issue of nuclear command and control handling-- they may be designed to handle decapitation but they're not really designed to handle incapacitation. So what if Kim Jong-un is in a coma, and there is litigation within the power structure as to whether he's alive and who and what authority any orders over the nuclear enterprise would be valid? And there may be questions thrown up-- particularly in personalist regimes like North Korea-- about the status of nuclear command and control if a leader is incapacitated.

Now, in Kim Jong-un's case, there are a lot of rumors and no confirmation, and it seems to be

unrelated to coronavirus, although we wouldn't know anyway if it was. But it is entirely possible, given the age structure of leadership of the world, that you get to a point where there may be incapacitation of leaders in a nuclear weapons power. And that would raise a lot of concerns and questions about what nuclear command and control looks like.

So those are just several topics that have come up that I've been hearing about. Some are immediate, Command and control and readiness. Some are longer term. How do you allocate fewer resources for modernization programs?

And a much broader one about redefining security to include things like climate change and pandemic response. Because this has had a crippling effect on the globe and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. So I'll stop there and look forward to everybody's questions and comments.

**JIM WALSH:** Good. Vipin, I can't let you go, though, without one additional question. You're arguably the world's leading authority on the nuclear situation between India and Pakistan. Do you want to take one more minute, or two at most, and tell our audience more about that? Because you're really a world resource on that.

**VIPIN NARANG:** Well, my personal opinion is the status quo-- which is already pretty volatile-- between India and Pakistan is going to persist. I do worry about diversionary war incentives from a Pakistan that is mostly run fundamentally by the military. Pakistan's economy was already in dire straits, and the global economic situation is not helping it. And the legitimacy of the military and the civilian leadership in Pakistan could be significantly challenged by the coronavirus pandemic if it continues and will continue for the foreseeable future.

I don't like making predictions because I'm always wrong. But when that's happened, there may be incentives to distract the Pakistani population with some sort of diversionary tactic against India. And there has been significant activity across the line of control even now while India has been locked down. And right now, I would say, is not the time to challenge Prime Minister Modi, because his response may be unpredictable, given the state of India's economy, which is facing unprecedented lockdown, as well.

And so if I were to bet with India-Pakistan, there will be a new status quo. I mean, the status quo will persist, but it's not a status quo that I'm particularly optimistic about. Just last year, even without coronavirus, India and Pakistan became very, very close to significant conventional escalation when India used air power for the first time on Pakistani soil since the

1971 war.

And so that crisis and that rivalry is not going away, and coronavirus may add a new twist to it. But there may be a new flavor, especially if Pakistan decides instead of being restrained-- as I think Barry essentially, that his argument in *Foreign Affairs* was making-- decides to go the opposite direction and amplify its adventurism.

**JIM WALSH:**

OK, terrific. Well, thanks to the concise point-making of our panelists, we are on time and can go-- and I congratulate you on that. It's very rare that I am able to congratulate panelists on being on time. But all three on this one. Amazing.

So let's go to question and answer. There are far too many questions than I would ever get to. So I'll do the best I can.

To show that we're not scared of tough questions, let me begin with a fun one from Gerald. And he comments, "This entire discussion seems more like a list of wants, needs, and desires, but no demonstration about how anything will actually change. What gives? Isn't this merely the same group of people complaining that things are not going the way they want?" I will leave that to any of the panelists to start with.

**JOE CIRINCIONE:**

Let me start. You're right I am complaining that things aren't the way I want. I've been complaining about this for decades. We're spending way too much money on the military. We're spending way too much money in the nuclear.

We've got to change it. So why don't we change it? Well, because as Elizabeth Warren is fond of saying, the system works just fine for those who benefit from it. And so the whole game out here is for the defense contractors who directly get half of the military budget.

Half of that \$750 billion goes directly to contractors. Not troops. Not the civilian employees of the Pentagon. Directly to the contractors. So their game is to scare you enough so that you're afraid to cut that pipeline of funds. And it's worked.

And as many of the people I just cited in that brief opening comment pointed out, since 9/11, we've had a certain mindset on national security. Before 9/11, we were spending about \$300 billion a year on national defense. Now it's more than double, \$750 billion. And it's been this national security threat mindset.

And what they're saying is it's time to change that. We have to close that period. Jessica

Mathews talks like that. You have to close the period.

And so your question is right. It might have been very difficult to do that before the pandemic. But the pandemic has fundamentally altered the equation. We are now thrust into a period where we just spent \$2.2 trillion, and we're adding to it. We may end up with \$4 trillion, \$6 trillion.

You cannot afford that kind of military budget with that kind of deficit, OK? And spending on the military does create jobs, but guess what? Taking that money and spending it on civilian programs, infrastructure that people always talk about but never spend enough money on, gives you many more jobs per dollar than the defense budget.

So it's these conditions that are starting to change, and then you couple it with the subjective conditions. What is happening in the Democratic Party? And you're seeing a rise of progressivism. It's not a mistake that Bernie Sanders was the second to last person standing in this debate. Those ideas dominate about half the party at this point.

So you've got the objective conditions that require change. You've got the subjective conditions of people who are demanding change. That's what's different. That's why we might be at a tipping point. Whether we succeed this year-- and people are going to try-- to trim the budget, to slow the ICBM, I don't know.

But the House is probably going to be the proving ground for these ideas. You will see this contest in the House, and if a Democrat takes the White House, bang. The people who are in this fight are going to be demanding that change.

**YASMEEN SILVA:** I can follow up quickly on that very fast. And I think that's the reason that I also raised the People's Bailout, is you're right in that this is a similar group of people calling for similar things. But now we've teamed up with people outside to apply that pressure together as a united front to legislators. And it's actionable items.

And I think that that's the difference about screaming into the ether and hoping and wishing for change and actually directing your voice in an actionable way and teaming up with people outside of the defense space, outside of the nuclear silo, as it were, to push for that change.

**JIM WALSH:** Great. I have a question that I want to direct to Vipin from Ron. "With regard specifically to national security, might the pandemic be an impetus more for international cooperation by

thinking of public health is a global issue? Might this tamp down inter-nation adversarial thinking, or is that naive? Is it just as likely that there will be an increase in xenophobia throughout the world, leading to more tension?"

So Vipin, what about the cross-cutting impulses or--

**VIPIN NARANG:** I think, given the current leadership configuration across the world, it's interesting that the response was everybody is shutting down their borders. You can't contain a virus in a globalized world. They've tried to deglobalize the world, and have failed in doing so. So this idea that we could shut the borders and be immune to the virus was mistaken from the beginning.

And now we know that China probably didn't know what it had on its hands until several weeks or months into the pandemic. And by then, it had already seeded all over the globe. And the only realistic solution is greater cooperation, especially in an interdependent world, to have better monitoring in response to what is, I think, inevitable. Because the response to close off the borders is futile, ultimately, if you have any sort of travel between international destinations.

So I do think that there's this racist, xenophobic tendency to blame China, which is fine. I don't think the Chinese response is perfect, but it was certainly not a bioweapon. It's not anything malicious that the Chinese released on the world. They got hit by it just as bad as everybody else, and will continue to face the economic and human costs of it.

But this idea that you can isolate yourself entirely from the rest of the world in the modern world is just not realistic. And we know that this effort failed. It probably plays well for domestic political base for some of these leaders, but it's not a realistic response. So I hope that there's a recognition that these will happen again. And the only way to really stop them is to have cooperative monitoring and response.

**JIM WALSH:** Terrific. Another question from Alec. And let me say that I am doing a terrible job of managing these questions. This is far harder than you realize. OK, question from Alec.

And this sort of gets to the-- as the last question did, too. When we think about national security, there's the supply side, the budget, and then there's the demand side. What's the nature of the threats that we face, and then the question of how best to solve those, whether military means are the best or a combination of other things. Blah blah blah. Here's an

interesting one from Alec in that regard.

"Day by day, we're seeing a big spread of COVID throughout the Middle East region. What do you think about the issue of keeping troops in Iraq and keeping the residual peacekeeping forces in the rest of the Middle East during this time?"

One might make that a broader question about, what does this environment mean for US deployments? I opened that to anyone who wants a piece of that. Vipin?

**JOE CIRINCIONE:** Vipin's on mute. If you could unmute yourself.

**VIPIN NARANG:** Yeah, I don't really have a good answer to that. I do think that for the first time since maybe World War II, the US military and militaries across the world have to really worry about how to prevent a virus from crippling their readiness. So in terms of deployment, it is very difficult to sustain tempo of operations for any sort of conflict.

In terms of diplomacy, if there was a bandwidth, you would say this is a good opportunity-- a transformational moment-- to potentially reset some of these longstanding rivalries in the Middle East and South Asia and East Asia. But I don't see that happening with the current configuration of leadership in the United States. Joe?

**JOE CIRINCIONE:** Just very briefly. The *USS Theodore Roosevelt* situation sort of makes a point about this. Captain Crozier was desperate, telling people, look, we've got to pull into port. We have to end this patrol. And the acting Secretary of Navy said, no, you can't. We need you on that watch. We are in a warlike situation-- his words-- and we need you to deter China.

No, we don't. No, we don't. The carrier group task force pulls off. They finally get to Guam. They finally give the sailors the health care they need. China hasn't taken advantage of that gap in our naval picket line. They're not waiting to bust out.

We're overcommitted. We're overdeployed. We have too many bases. We have an exaggerated sense of what we need for a wall to protect ourselves.

And it turns out, we can perfectly adequately take care of our defensive needs with far fewer forces, far fewer weapons, cheaper weapons, than the ones we have currently deployed. And in so doing, we'll free up resources that we can apply to the gaps in our defenses on pandemics, on climate change, and social justice, for example.

**JIM WALSH:** Terrific. Am I freezing? Can anyone tell me that?

**JOE CIRINCIONE:** No, you're good.

**JIM WALSH:** OK, great. Let me go to a question offered by anonymous. "Isn't the pandemic expanding the power of authoritarianism? And how do you propose that we combat this with this domestically-focused wish list?"

**JOE CIRINCIONE:** See, that's--

**JIM WALSH:** John, let me interrupt. let me give Yasmeen a crack at that if she's interested, or Vipin.

**YASMEEN SILVA:** I think maybe the person who was asking the question was focusing more on China or other countries. But I don't know if I would go so far as to say authoritarianism, but I think what this is highlighting is an erosion of some civil liberties here. I was mentioning before, voting. Right now, we have to decide between voting and public health.

And so I think that in any country, there is an opportunity to use this in a way that is bad or use this in a way that is good. And I would say that we in the United States are lucky enough to have an opportunity to seize on this and expand our social contract, as Joe alluded to in the beginning, in a way that I think is good. But it could be used either way. I'll leave the international side to either Joe or Vipin.

**JIM WALSH:** Vipin, what do you think? There's some sense that this would lead to some power grabs or consolidation of government authority.

**VIPIN NARANG:** Yeah. Let me just quickly say that I think coronavirus has provided the perfect excuse for certain strongmen-- and they're mostly men-- in some countries to take steps that they've always wanted to take, but lacked the pretext to do so. So the immigration ban that Trump tweeted about. How does suspending green cards for 90 days make us safer or in any way help fight the pandemic? It doesn't. And given the exceptions, it's just a sop to his base, but this is Stephen Miller's longstanding dream to basically curb legal immigration.

And it has nothing to do with the pandemic response. It has nothing to do with coronavirus. It's something that people within the Trump administration have long wanted to do, so they made an excuse to do it.

There are some concerns in India, for example, that Modi's excessive lockdown is an attempt

to trial run what a lockdown might look like if you wanted to do it in the future. And so it may be giving certain leaders with authoritarian tendencies, even in democracies, the pretext they need to test drive certain policies that they've wanted to but have been unable to do so because they've lacked the pretext.

**JIM WALSH:**

Great. Well, we're unfortunately careening towards the close here. So let me get one more audience question in, and then we'll close with a speed round of concluding thoughts. And again, I apologize to everyone. I did the best I could. And I'm just not very good at this.

Charles asks, "Although most experts agree that COVID-19 was not created in a lab, does the fact that the virus has successfully closed down and weakened the world's strongest powers proves the efficacy of viruses as a biological weapon? If so, does that mean the military should start to take part in preparation for the next pandemic and also a possible military response?" Should we get back in the BW business again, is the question.

**VIPIN NARANG:**

No. First of all, this would be a terrible bioweapon. For a state to focus on a pathogen that was this transmissible, that would blow back against the state.

Let's stipulate, there is no evidence that this is a bioweapon. Almost every credible scientist believes it's naturally evolved. NPR did a report today that challenges and debunks the notion that it was even an accident out of the Wuhan lab.

Nature is an efficient developer. And this virus has evolved over how many mutations over how many years in zoonotic species like bats, and then jumped to humans. It's happening because of climate change. It's not because of any human effort to develop a novel pathogen.

And I think that shows, in fact, that if this was a state developed-- No state wants to see this, because there's no way to predict that if you unleash a pathogen like this on the world, that you won't be hit worse than everyone else. A more competent administration that would have stood up testing and tracing early on could have escaped the brunt of this lockdown, and the US would have actually come out ahead. And China would have gotten hit first because it was dealing with it and didn't know what it was dealing with. Whereas over time, we learned how to also treat the disease and manage it and prevent its spread.

So the idea that China, or any country, would unleash, this face the blowback, and potentially come out worse, I think militates against the idea that bioweapons might ever be effective as a tool of state power. Now, terrorists may be interested in it, but good thing is, terrorist

organizations can't develop these kinds of pathogens, in all likelihood Joe, [INAUDIBLE] Yasmeen?

**JIM WALSH:** I'm going to have to hold it there, because--

**VIPIN NARANG:** Well, Joe wanted to get in. Just let him get in. We got time. It's OK. It's a virtual event.

**JOE CIRINCIONE:** Real quick. In the 1950s and '60s, almost every major country developed biological weapons programs. We had the best. We had enough toxins and viruses to kill every man, woman, and child on Earth. And in '71, Richard Nixon decided we didn't need these. He unilaterally disbanded the bioweapons program, in large part because of what Vipin just said.

This is a terrible military weapon. Blowback. How do you weaponize this? Look at the way the virus is spreading. It's not just spreading in a warhead. You need a living being to transmit this virus.

So they're impractical weapons. The military was happy to give them up. He negotiated that the Biological Weapons Convention. Nobody admits to having biological weapons now. That's not to say there aren't some, but they're generally taboo. They're frowned upon. Nobody has them.

But the way that question is phrased, what you're thinking, indicates the mindset we have to break. If your chief instrument is a military, then you look at every problem as if it has a military solution. The pandemic does not have a military solution. The rise of authoritarianism does not have a military solution.

And that's why we have to get away from this mindset we've had for the last 19 years, get away from the idea the US military could be the chief instrument of change in the world, and look at the other things we're really faced with and start moving our resources. Not abandoning the military, but restoring the ballots, restoring it to its proper role in the mix of tools. We have to use all the tools of American military power to confront the changes that we really face. The challenges we really face.

**JIM WALSH:** All right. Great. So we're entering what is the lightning round, though there will be no prizes. So I'm going to ask each of you to take one minute and offer your concluding thoughts, most especially on the question of how do we get there. And I want to start with Yasmeen and Vipin, and then end with Joe. How does the US go from where we are to where we need to be? How can people watching and listening to this event, regardless of their views, contribute to that

conversation?

**YASMEEN SILVA:** Quickly to actually build off of the last question as a means to answer your question.

Regardless, as Vipin said, this pandemic, it's Mother Nature. But this is going to happen again, and we do need to be prepared. And the best way that we can be prepared is by having an American public that is educated, that has access to health care, that has access to enough income that they can stay home and feed their families and not have to go out.

And so I think that all of that comes when we are prioritizing human needs and lives over a military solution for the 21st century, for what we are facing, does not exist and we can trim the fat. And I think, as I've been saying, there are grassroots movements. There are advocacy groups who are calling for that, who are working with elected officials, and who are making really cogent arguments against a very powerful lobby.

But we need more voices. We need people to make a call to their elected officials. We need people to be writing into their local papers to express their opinions, which their elected officials read. So for every closed door meeting that a lobbyist has, we need five to 10 phone calls.

And I think, to plug something that's going on with Beyond the Bomb right now, we have a letter to the editor writing tool up on our website specifically around making sure that the next stimulus does not give more money to defense contractors. And you can go to our website, and you will write it there, and we will submit it on your behalf. The tools, especially virtual, they are more plentiful than ever. So you just need to dig in, take the five to 10 minutes, make your voice heard.

**JIM WALSH:** Great. Vipin, concluding comments?

**VIPIN NARANG:** Yeah, sure. I think this pandemic and the crisis is going to go on for a while. I don't think military competition is going to go away. I don't think nuclear weapons are going to go away. We're going to make very tough choices about how to allocate scarcer resources towards optimal diversification of capabilities over time.

It was funny. I was just looking for the picture to see if I could share the screen, but the Navy released a picture of a submarine torpedoing coronavirus. Well, that's not how it works, right? Military can't fire a torpedo at coronavirus. This is a health pandemic with global ramifications, economic ramifications, and economic consequences will affect how much states can spend

on the military.

And I agree with Yasmeen. We need a fundamental rethink about our health care system and how to handle surges and pandemics in the future. The reason we had to flatten the curve was because we had to keep the number of infections below the capacity of the health care system. We designed a health care system with no slack in the United States. And so maybe it's time to rethink how much surge capacity the health care system has rather than focusing on surge capacity of the 82nd Airborne.

So I do think there needs to be a rethink about how to allocate resources to address what will happen again. I don't think military competition is going away, so we're not going to get rid of the military. We're not going to get rid of nuclear weapons, at least probably not in our lifetime. But we will have to make choices about how to be able to address these threats when they emerge, while also maintaining the capabilities we need to seek and deter other nuclear powers and major powers, also.

**JIM WALSH:** Great. Joe Cirincione.

**JOE CIRINCIONE:** Well, Jim, let me just thank you for your expert moderating this panel. You were appropriately humble and self-critical of your-- And this is hard to do. It was much harder for me to share my screen and present my slides and hit the right button and talk at the same time. So fortunately, I didn't have to think while I was doing it. But once I tried to think, everything just froze.

So you're doing a great job. Thank you very much. And thank you, MIT. And thank you, Michelle, for organizing this.

In conclusion, this is something that's in process. As I began by saying, it's hard to know when you're at an inflection point. It's hard to know where you are. And there's things that are going on in the world. Vipin expertly alluded to them, changes that we have to understand.

But what I'm talking about domestically, and the kind of thing Yasmeen is talking about also, is the domestic struggle. We do have a problem with authoritarianism. But that problem is a domestic problem with authoritarianism. And we are now in the process of trying to wrestle back democratic control of this government from the people who are trying to seize control for their own purposes, for their own enrichment. And what I'm encouraged by is to see the mass movements that are organizing, to see the Move Ons, the Indivisibles, the Beyond the Bombs mobilize in greater numbers and with more urgency and to start to link up.

There's this phrase I learned from the women's movement about the intersectionality of our issues. Well, I'm starting to see it. Gun control and climate change and health care and concerns about cybersecurity. People are starting to see that these things are connected. And it's part of what it means to be redefining national security.

So if I'm right, this momentum is building. It's starting to assume a political character. You will see in the House of Representatives in the the next couple of months, amendments to cut the defense budget, to stop the new ICBM, to start to reorient.

I don't know if they are going to succeed. But what they will do is lay the groundwork for a rethinking, a reorientation. If political winds shift in November, we-- and this MIT forum is part of it-- have to be prepared to lay the intellectual structure for it, the political structure for it, and most importantly, the political support for this, to convince our political leaders that now is the time to break with the 9/11 mindset and switch to a true 21st century national security strategy.

**JIM WALSH:**

Well, thank you, panelists, for this rich, if brief, discussion. Thanks to Michelle English, Laura Kerwin, the Center for International Studies at MIT, as well as the Security Studies Program. And most of all, all of you, including those of you who asked tough questions. We want you back. We want to hear those questions.

In fact, if you're inclined, you can come back tomorrow. Tomorrow, Starr Forum at 1:00 PM. Amazon Burning, COVID-19, Ghosts of the Climate Future? For details, you can visit the CIS website and click on Upcoming Starr Forums banner on the lower right hand of the Center's home page. Again, thanks to all of you, and be well.