Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee

Alternative Approaches to Defense Strategy and Force Structure

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I must begin by thanking Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed and the committee for the opportunity to offer you whatever insights I can on the most profound subject of national security strategy. My testimony today is derived from the study we at AEI published earlier this month; I will rely heavily on ideas developed by the team at the Marilyn Ware Center, including your former colleague Sen. Jim Talent and my longtime colleagues Gary Schmitt and Mackenzie Eaglen.

Military force planning and defense budgeting, more than any other activities of the federal government, set the course of U.S. national security strategy. If strategy-making involves aligning ends, ways and means, it is the military means that most determine success. War aims can and frequently do change quickly; ask Abraham Lincoln. So, too, do strategies; ask Ray Odierno, just retired as Army chief of staff. The means, however, are harder to transform; ask Donald Rumsfeld, who wished to be the "secretary of transformation" and found himself forced to "go to war with the Army he had."

The presumption behind Rumsfeld's desire for transformation and his lament about the force he inherited has become a paralyzingly common one in the post-Cold War era. Indeed, it would appear to be the presumption behind much of the testimony the committee has heard in previous sessions in this series of hearings, and I would be very surprised if some of my friends on this panel don't reiterate those points. While I, too, believe that certain reforms and new technologies should be introduced as rapidly as possible – I would like to equip our troops with warp drives, cloaking devices and photon torpedoes as soon as they are invented – my "alternative approach" today will be to point out the benefits of continuity. I believe that there is an urgent need to reassert American geopolitical leadership by rebuilding American military power, that the crisis is now and in the near-term future and that, because the underlying structures of the "world America made" remain sound, it is possible to keep it from unraveling. Moreover, because the blessings of this American moment – that is, an enduring global great-power peace, a remarkable extension of economic prosperity and a historically unprecedented expansion of political liberty – represent the fulfillment of our national purpose, that it would be a moral failure of the gravest sort to do anything less than our utmost to preserve what our predecessors fought for, or to bequeath to our children what they deserve.

I would like to begin the case for continuity by pointing out the constancy of American strategic purpose, at least since the end of World War II. The two recent blue-ribbon panels chartered by Congress to assess the Defense Department's defense reviews concurred on a succinct definition of U.S. goals: we have sought to "secure the homeland," meaning North America and the Caribbean Basin; to assure peaceful access to and the military ability to exploit the "commons" at sea, in the skies, in space and in cyberspace; maintain a favorable balance of power in the three critical regions of Europe, East Asia and the greater Middle East; and to work to preserve a decent quality of international life by preventing atrocities such as genocide or ameliorating the effects of natural disasters. It should also be observed that the panels were forced to deduce these goals by reflecting on the pattern of American behavior, not by reference to the QDR or the formal national security strategy. That is to say, this is what we have done, but not what we have said we would do, let alone what we have planned to do.

Thus the gap between our traditional strategic reach and our current military grasp has widened and still grows. When the 2010 QDR independent Panel and last year's National Defense Panel analyzed the administration's defense reviews, they were reluctant to express anything beyond dissatisfaction with the existing force-planning construct. As the NDP put it: "[G]iven the worsening threat environment, we believe a more expansive force-sizing construct – one that is different from the [current] two-war construct, but no less strong – is appropriate."

Where the NDP stopped, we at AEI started. While recognizing the fact that we lacked the sort of resources that the Pentagon can call on in its QDR process, we felt compelled by the urgency of the moment to advance specific recommendations, at least to frame the debate that is needed. What we lacked in depth we made up for by directness. We came to four broad conclusions. The Defense Department must:

- **Adopt a "three-theater" force construct.** To remain a global power, the United States must preserve a favorable balance of power in Europe, the Middle East and East Asia. The ways and means of doing so differ from theater to theater. Deterring further Russian and Chinese aggression requires forces that are powerful and constantly present, backed up by sufficient forces based in the United States to respond, quickly win the initiative and favorably conclude any crisis or conflict that may occur, even one that may last a long time. While both theaters demand advanced aerospace capabilities, the principal presence missions would call on maritime forces in the Pacific and land-based forces in Europe. In the Middle East, the situation is quite different; there is no favorable status quo to defend and the trends are getting worse rather than better. Securing our regional interest requires not just presence but also mounting an effort to reverse the rising tide of many of our adversaries: Iran, ISIS, al Qaeda and its associates and, for the first time in many decades, Russia. But while the demands differ in each region, the United States must address each individually and simultaneously in order to preserve the global order; activity in each theater is necessary but none is by itself sufficient to achieve our goals. As a global power, America cannot "pivot" among these theaters, nor can it retreat to the

continental United States. And there are good reasons to maintain very diverse sorts of forces.

- **Increase military capacity.** The reductions in the size of the U.S. military of the past three decades have been the most pressing problem of national defense. Since the end of the Cold War, American soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines have been unrelentingly deployed. After 9/11, they were not sufficient in number to successfully conduct campaigns simultaneously in Iraq and Afghanistan, despite a massive mobilization of reserve component troops; an increase, though tardy, in active-duty numbers; and innovative employment of Navy and Air Force leaders in ground missions. Neither the rapid introduction of new equipment such as the massive mine-resistant vehicles nor the renaissance in counterinsurgency operations could make up for the lack of forces. Despite advances in technology that have improved the precision and tactical effectiveness of weaponry and combat units, numbers still matter in war. The daily headlines demonstrate the destabilizing effects of our withdrawals, not just from the Middle East, but from Europe and indeed East Asia as well; even before the end of the Cold War, the United States gave up its position in Southeast Asia by closing the massive facilities in the Philippines. Now, thanks to the constraints imposed by the 2011 Budget Control Act, the capacity of U.S. forces will be further diminished to levels not seen since America emerged in the early 20th century as a global power.

- **Introduce new capabilities urgently.** Programs to transform the technological and tactical prowess of the U.S. military or offset the new weaponry now fielded by adversaries have been a strategic disaster; the failure to modernize across the force since the 1980s now leaves America's armed forces without the kind of great technological advantages that allowed it to "shock and awe" its enemies and conduct decisive operations with very few casualties. "Skipping a generation" of procurements has simply allowed others to catch up. Now the Pentagon has little choice but to buy what it can – what is now available or could be made available rapidly – quickly and economically. This means accelerating the small number of mature procurements still left on the books, such as the F-35 and the Littoral Combat Ship, despite their problems and imperfections. Second, the spirit of innovation should be applied to reviving those programs that could be reworked to give important new capabilities. The F-22, for example, could be refitted with F-35-era electronic systems, or the Zumwalt-class destroyer, which has a larger hull and vastly more powerful engine than the Arleigh Burke, could be redesigned not as a pocket battleship but as an air-and-missile defense platform with a rail gun and then perhaps with directed energy weapons. Third, programs ready for development, such as the Long Range Strike-Bomber, should be fully funded so that they can be fielded within the next five years. In sum, near-term modernization and innovation must take precedence over longer-term transformation.

- **Increase and sustain defense budgets.** The defense cuts of the early Obama years and the further reductions mandated by the Budget Control Act have merely accelerated a pattern of defense divestment that began a generation ago.

> No amount of internal reform can offset the cuts, and the damage is too great to repair within the course of a single presidential term. The current Defense Department and the shriveled defense industry cannot, as they stand now, intelligently spend a Reagan-era-style level of budget increase; the late 1970s and early 1980s provided a much more robust base from which to grow. Therefore a sustained reconstruction of U.S. military capacity and capability is called for; while it is critical to address urgent needs, it is also imperative to carry through a substantial program of rebuilding for at least a decade. A "two-target" investment strategy is required: first, return military budgets to the level set by former Defense Secretary Robert Gates in his original 2012 budget. Second, defense budgets should gradually be built to an affordable floor of 4 percent of gross domestic product that would sustain the kind of military America needs.

Sound defense planning demands a long-term perspective, focusing not on what changes – threats and technologies – but on what remains constant – the security interests of the United States and American political principles. Since 1945, the one constant of international politics has been the military power of the United States. That proposition now demands new proof, and our next commander-in-chief should expect to be tested, as John Kennedy was by Nikita Kruschev: have the retreats and "pivoting" of recent years become the new American norm, or will there be a renewed commitment to the traditions of American strategy and international leadership? Absent sufficient military means, there can be but one answer to that question.