

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL DEFENSE
STRATEGY

Tuesday, March 3, 2026

Washington, D.C.

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1 TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY

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U.S. Senate

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Committee on Armed Services

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Washington, D.C.

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The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:31 a.m. in

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Room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. Roger Wicker,

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chairman of the committee, presiding.

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Committee Members Present: Senators Wicker

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[presiding], Fischer, Rounds, Ernst, Sullivan, Cramer,

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Scott, Tuberville, Mullin, Schmitt, Banks, Sheehy, Reed,

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Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Kaine, King, Warren,

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Peters, Duckworth, Rosen, and Kelly.

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1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER WICKER, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM MISSISSIPPI

3 Chairman Wicker: The committee will come to order.
4 The committee meets this morning to discuss the 2026
5 National Defense Strategy. This NDS comes at a time of
6 upheaval, as the axis of aggressors seeks to undermine an
7 American-led 21st century.

8 Last month marked the beginning of the fifth year of
9 Vladimir Putin's ruthless war of choice in Europe. Then,
10 over the weekend, President Trump rightfully struck a run to
11 end forever the Ayatollah's quest to use both conventional
12 and nuclear weapons to threaten America and our allies.
13 And, of course, China's massive military buildup casts a
14 pall across the Indo-Pacific. Beijing looks to dominate
15 Asia and supplant U.S. leadership around the world. Given
16 such threats, the importance of this NDS cannot be
17 overstated. These uncertain times call for strong U.S.
18 leadership, a crystal-clear articulation of the threats we
19 face, and a prioritized set of achievable objectives for how
20 we will defend our interests.

21 This was the approach we saw in President Trump's first
22 defense strategy, a consequential document that focused on
23 homeland defense, acknowledged the return of great power
24 competition, and correctly identified China as the pacing
25 threat. Our witness this morning, Mr. Elbridge Colby, the

1 department's undersecretary for policy, helped lead that
2 first process. And for that he deserves considerable
3 credit. Thank you, sir.

4 The first Trump administration's realistic approach to
5 China policy enabled a long overdue departure from the
6 wishful hope of previous administrations who sought to view
7 China as a strategic partner rather than the enemy it
8 clearly is. There are certainly parallels between the 2018
9 and 2026 versions of the NDS. For example, the
10 prioritization of homeland defense, the identification of
11 China as the pacing threat, and the importance of equitable
12 burden sharing with our allies. I welcome the consistency
13 in these themes, as the underlying concerns have only
14 worsened in the intervening years.

15 Unfortunately, these common themes also highlight some
16 flaws in the new 2026 NDS. Principally, I believe the
17 strategy document fails to acknowledge the global nature of
18 the threat posed by the axis of aggressors working together.
19 The 2026 NDS rightly makes clear that our adversaries' best
20 strategy is to act in, "A coordinated or opportunistic
21 fashion across multiple theaters." However, it nonetheless
22 draws the wrong conclusion about what to do about this.

23 It is no secret that we are currently unprepared to
24 compete against the axis of aggressors. We need to do more.
25 And the administration proposes to do more. But right now,



1 we lack the industrial capacity to alter this condition in
2 the near term. This committee has spent considerable time
3 working with Secretary Feinberg and Secretary Duffey.
4 Together, we are supercharging our Defense Industrial Base
5 to meet the production demands for this type of competition
6 and to build a more resilient American economy in the
7 process.

8 We have much work to do. Particularly, we must
9 continue incorporating new weapons and new companies with
10 advanced manufacturing capabilities that can contribute
11 rapidly. Until we fix our industrial base, we need to get
12 more creative in how we support our allies and partners,
13 particularly when they represent the front line of our
14 adversaries' aggression.

15 The President issued a call to arms to our allies and
16 partners, urging them to spend 5 percent of their GDP on
17 defense. That call has been remarkably successful.
18 Congratulations, Mr. President. But any clear-eyed
19 assessment of the military situation in Europe makes it
20 clear we cannot fully delegate the Russia problem to our
21 European allies.

22 In my view, the NDS essentially ignores the
23 implications of the war in Ukraine to U.S. security. The
24 document downplays both America's interest in denying Putin
25 the benefits of his criminal aggression and the threat his



1 success would pose to the U.S. interest in Europe, should he
2 be successful. Currently, Europeans are paying for every
3 weapon that America is supplying. I do not see a concerted
4 strategy to get new types of weapons to Ukraine,
5 particularly those weapons that are not in high demand for
6 U.S. military forces at the present time. I think, for
7 example, of programs like the low cost ERAM cruise missile.
8 We've got to do better there.

9 The NDS also says little about our vital interest in
10 the Middle East. This seems out of step with repeated
11 military actions to deal with the ongoing threat of Iran.
12 President Trump is demonstrating that we can and will do
13 more than just one thing. He's exercising limited but
14 decisive force in order to ensure that the region and the
15 world will not be threatened by a nuclear Iran or its
16 terrorist proxies. Hear, hear.

17 And of course, the President's national security
18 strategy proclaims that the U.S. will reassert its
19 preeminence in the Western Hemisphere. But the 2026 NDS
20 does not describe how the department will achieve this
21 objective. It does not describe what this enhanced focus
22 means in terms of force posture or investment priorities.
23 The reality is that President Trump's actions in the Western
24 Hemisphere, the Middle East, and Europe -- Western
25 Hemisphere, Middle East and Europe are inextricably linked



1 to our overall struggle against the Chinese Communist Party.
2 Tailored use of military force and support in Venezuela,
3 Iran, and Ukraine has thwarted Chinese and Russian
4 objectives and denied their access to resources and
5 technology.

6 The 2026 NDS articulates the President's vision for our
7 allies and partners to step up and get far more serious
8 about their defense, and they are doing just that, and I
9 applaud that. But we cannot ask our allies to do more for
10 us while we do less for them. In that regard, this NDS
11 signals a diminished intent to deter existential threats
12 posed by Russia and North Korea. So we need more clarity on
13 how America's military will continue to support our allies
14 in new and different ways in deterring those threats.

15 Another specific critique of the strategy is that, in
16 effect, it obfuscates the threat posed by the Chinese
17 Communist Party. And they are our pacing threat. Granted,
18 Beijing remains the focal point. The strategy is clear in
19 its focus on what it describes as the First Island Chain.
20 This seems to be a way of talking about Taiwan without
21 mentioning Taiwan. The unclassified NDS does not mention
22 Taiwan at all, even though the National Security Strategy
23 directly identifies it. This seems to be an example of what
24 the NDS calls a strong but not necessarily confrontational -
25 - "Strong but not necessarily confrontational posture toward

1 Beijing."

2 This equivocation has real consequences, as it risks
3 misinterpretation of U.S. support for this island's
4 democracy. This perception is furthered by our failure to
5 execute previously authorized and appropriated assistance to
6 Taiwan, authorized and appropriated by the Congress and
7 signed into law.

8 Finally, and perhaps most troubling of all, the NDAA,
9 the NDS is nearly silent on the role of nuclear weapons.
10 The U.S. faces an unprecedented set of strategic threats.
11 They are worsening every day as we move toward a world with
12 Russia and now China as nuclear peers. The lack of any
13 significant statement on these developments raises the
14 question are we ignoring the existential dangers that China,
15 Russia, and North Korea pose to our way of life?

16 Now, on the other hand, there's much to like in this
17 strategy, particularly its priorities and emphasis. But I
18 still believe we have much work to do. I believe we must be
19 clear eyed about the long-term threats of the Chinese
20 Communist Party. And I think we need to take the
21 President's successful peace through strength approach used
22 in the Middle East and the Western Hemisphere, and apply it
23 to Europe and Asia. We should do that as we give our allies
24 and partners better clarity on the appropriate role of U.S.
25 forces in the future.

1 It's my hope that, moving forward, we can work together
2 to build and implement a living strategy. It must meet the
3 demands of the moment, particularly as we seek to execute a
4 \$1.5 trillion budget that will rebuild our military for a
5 generation.

6 With that, I turn to my colleague, Ranking Member Reed.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE
2 ISLAND

3 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman,
4 and welcome, Secretary Colby. Thank you for appearing today
5 to testify about the administration's 2026 National Defense
6 Strategy or the NDS.

7 I'll turn shortly to the specifics of that document,
8 but I must be direct at the outset. The NDS is a flawed
9 proposal, and it is now, in many respects, already obsolete.
10 As we sit here today, the President has engaged the United
11 States in major combat operations against Iran. Over the
12 past several days, American forces operating alongside
13 Israel have conducted thousands of strikes against Iran's
14 missile sites, command and control sites, and senior regime
15 leadership. Ayatollah Khamenei and many other senior
16 leaders have been killed. Iran has retaliated with missile
17 and drone attacks across the region, resulting in American
18 casualties and to the families of those service members
19 killed and wounded, we owe our deepest condolences and our
20 solemn commitment that their sacrifices will be honored.

21 Let me be clear, the Iranian regime has been a brutal,
22 corrupt, deadly institution for decades, and the day it is
23 replaced by a government that actually serves the Iranian
24 people will be a victory for all. However, in taking these
25 offensive military actions, President Trump has unilaterally

1 started a conflict that is rapidly spreading throughout the
2 Middle East. The end state is unknown. Even administration
3 officials cannot say clearly what objectives they are trying
4 to achieve, nor what happens when those objectives are met.
5 In the meantime, there will be immense costs for the
6 Department of Defense in readiness and opportunity and most
7 importantly, in American lives.

8 The President and the Secretary of Defense have
9 promised that this conflict will be brief and decisive, and
10 I am skeptical. With perhaps the exception of Desert Storm,
11 no war in the Middle East has ever been brief or decisive.
12 If past is prologue, I fear President Trump will simply
13 claim he's won, withdraw, and leave behind a crippled state,
14 a regional proxy war, and a humanitarian catastrophe that
15 could reverberate for years. And if this regime ultimately
16 survives, the Iranian people will pay a heavy price.

17 Secretary Colby, on the topic of ongoing operations, I
18 hope you will provide the committee with clarity. What are
19 the administration's objectives in Iran? What is the theory
20 of victory? And what authority does the administration
21 believe it is waging this war under, given that Congress has
22 not been consulted or authorized any conflict? Indeed, one
23 could argue very seriously that this is not consistent with
24 the Constitution.

25 Now, let me turn to the National Defense Strategy. I'd



1 like to note at the outset something that is easy to
2 overlook, but impossible to ignore: the tone of this
3 document. Previous national defense strategies, authored by
4 both Republican and Democratic administrations have been
5 sober, analytical assessments of the threat environment.
6 This one is instead littered with partisan commentary. It
7 attacks the rule based international order, the very norms
8 and institutions that we built after the most devastating
9 conflict in human history, and that have helped prevent a
10 Third World War, while enabling America's rise as the
11 world's foremost military and economic power. And I would
12 welcome a debate about how we can improve our alliances, but
13 we should not disparage the foundations of our own success.

14 Secretary Colby, I would ask you to explain the highly
15 partisan and backward-looking language of the National
16 Defense Strategy. The NDS starts by stating that the
17 department's priority mission is to defend the homeland. Of
18 course, that has always been the primary effort of the
19 military and our nuclear deterrent and cyber forces, among
20 other capabilities. In addition, the Defense Department has
21 long been a key partner to the Department of Homeland
22 Security for providing intelligence and logistical support
23 for drug interdiction. However, this NDS intends to reach
24 much further, blending national security and law enforcement
25 by fundamentally involving the military in border security

1 and counter narcotic trafficking operations.

2 On China, the NDS states that our presence in the Indo-
3 Pacific should not be used to, "Dominate, humiliate, or
4 strangle Beijing." And that, "A decent peace on terms
5 favorable to America, but that China can also accept and
6 live under is possible." Secretary Colby, I'd like to know
7 specifically what military options the department is
8 prepared to forego within that framing, and what precisely
9 constitutes 'a decent peace,' when China has spent the last
10 decade systematically manipulating the security environment
11 in its favor?

12 I would also note that this strategy appears focused
13 almost exclusively on the First Island Chain, while China is
14 actively expanding its security partnerships across the
15 Indo-Pacific, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.
16 And I hope you will address whether the department intends
17 to cede that competition to Beijing by default.

18 On Russia, your strategy is quite clear: Russia is
19 Europe's problem. It would seem Americans' concern should
20 be limited to Moscow's nuclear arsenal and its capabilities
21 in space and cyber. While I understand the logic of
22 pursuing the right balance of U.S. military capabilities
23 with those of our European allies, I do not accept the
24 abdication of our clear national security interest in Europe
25 by suggesting Russia is their problem to manage.

1 Further, the contrast between how this document treats
2 China and how it treats its allies is frankly, dumbfounding.
3 The NDS takes a conciliatory posture towards Beijing, yet
4 derides the nations that have stood alongside us for 80
5 years, describing our allies as more dependencies than
6 partners. I am encouraged by the progress our allies have
7 made in increasing their defense spending. But alliances
8 are not merely burden sharing arrangements. They are the
9 foundation of our international strength, and they also bear
10 the cost of the United States military conflicts as we're
11 seeing right now in the Middle East. Demeaning our partners
12 is a self-inflicted wound.

13 Secretary Colby, it's worth recalling that the 2018 NDS
14 from the first Trump administration, which described our
15 alliance as, "The backbone of global security." You are one
16 of the lead authors of that NDS, and I'd like to understand
17 what has so thoroughly changed your perspective on the role
18 of our allies.

19 Finally, I would point out the most fundamental problem
20 with this NDS. It bears no resemblance to what this
21 administration is actually doing. The strategy states the
22 department will, "Empower regional allies and partners to
23 take primary responsibility for deterring and defending
24 against Iran and its proxies." And yet, the United States
25 has just launched the largest military campaign since the



1 2003 invasion of Iraq. It is unclear if our allies were
2 even aware of the planning of this operation.

3 Further, the administration has carried out thousands
4 of strikes in Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Nigeria, and other
5 nations over the past year. And of course, we carried out a
6 massive military attack in Venezuela to capture Nicolas
7 Maduro. And we continue to conduct strikes on alleged drug
8 boats with no clear articulation of what goals we are
9 pursuing.

10 Mr. Secretary, your NDS states, "No longer will the
11 department be distracted by interventionism, endless wars,
12 regime change, and nation building." Yet we have repeatedly
13 intervened, started wars, and sought regime change in the
14 past eight weeks alone, much less the past year. Secretary
15 Colby, I look forward to your testimony and explanation of
16 this NDS and how it reflects what the Department of Defense
17 is actually doing.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member.
20 Secretary Colby, the ranking member and I took a little
21 longer than necessary. So, take as much time as you choose
22 in giving us your opening statement.

23 You're recognized, sir.

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1 STATEMENT OF HONORABLE ELBRIDGE A. COLBY, UNDER
2 SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY

3 Mr. Colby: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, Ranking
4 Member Reed, thank you very much for the opportunity to
5 appear before you and the other distinguished members of
6 this committee to testify on the Department of War's 2026
7 National Defense Strategy.

8 The animating purpose of this strategy was to put into
9 reality the logic of President Trump's common-sense America
10 First peace through strength approach. At its heart, as
11 detailed in the 2025 National Security Strategy, this
12 approach is channeled through the principle of flexible
13 realism: that is, the effort to practically and
14 realistically advance and protect the concrete interests of
15 regular Americans.

16 The core of a strategy, as the NSS eloquently
17 describes, is to evaluate, sort, and prioritize. Needless
18 to say, this is of special importance in the realm of war
19 and peace. The heavy responsibility of effectively doing so
20 motivated our work at the Department to produce the 2026
21 NDS, and we believe that Under Secretary Hegseth's
22 leadership, that we have done so. Under President Trump's
23 leadership and with your support in Congress, the American
24 military is and will be the world's finest, an unmatched
25 fighting force that has impressively demonstrated its

1 prowess in recent months in operations Midnight Hammer,
2 Absolute Resolve, and now Epic Fury.

3 At the same time, we recognize that, as Secretary
4 Hegseth has aptly put it, we cannot do everything
5 everywhere, all the time. This is, of course, a practical
6 reality. The American military, while without peer, is not
7 infinite in its application and resources. Potential
8 opponents have been building their strength and capabilities
9 and it is not fair, just, or sustainable to ask the American
10 people to bear burdens that are inequitably distributed with
11 those of our allies and partners.

12 As a result, we must prioritize, and this strategy does
13 so. It does not do so in a way that is pinched or hesitant.
14 Instead, it does so in a way that prudently, practically
15 navigates between two unreasonable extremes. On the one
16 hand, an isolationism that pretends that we can retreat from
17 the world and that a favorable stability will emerge. And,
18 on the other hand, an unfettered use of military force for
19 overly expansive ends that would drain the American people's
20 will and resources in unnecessary and overly ambitious
21 conflicts. This strategy rather prudently adopts a middle
22 course that will actually put us on a far firmer, more
23 successful, and thus more lasting course than either of
24 these extreme alternatives.

25 In particular, the NDS does so by intelligently and

1 strategically allocating our resources and that of our
2 incredible armed forces towards the priorities that most
3 affect regular Americans, and where our efforts are most
4 material and necessary to achieve American interests in the
5 world. This is a reflection of common-sense America First
6 thinking as a deduction. The strategy is built on four
7 pillars.

8 First, it restores after decades of neglect by some
9 administrations, the military's role in securing our
10 homeland and ensuring that our key interests in our native
11 hemisphere are protected. This is critical for regular
12 Americans because we must ensure that we are directly
13 protected and secure in our home area. While the military
14 is only a part of this effort and often far from the leading
15 element, it does play a critical role that will be enduring.

16 Second, the strategy focuses our military effort on
17 ensuring the preservation of a favorable balance of power in
18 the Indo-Pacific, the world's largest market area.
19 America's interests there are real and significant because
20 of the scale of that market. At the same time, our
21 interests are not limitless. We do not need to dominate
22 that region, rather, we only need to prevent that vast and
23 dynamic region from being dominated so that we can trade and
24 interact with it on fair and reasonable terms for regular
25 Americans.



1 As a result, our strategy there is to deter China
2 through strength, not confrontation. We of course,
3 understand that China is a very powerful country that is
4 undertaking an extraordinary military build-up. That is a
5 simple fact. At the same time, we are clear that we do not
6 seek conflict with China. To the contrary, we seek to avoid
7 it. We make clear that our interests with respect to China
8 are scoped and reasonable. We do not seek to strangle
9 China, nor compel a change in its form of government.
10 Rather, we seek to prevent China from becoming the hegemon
11 of the Indo-Pacific.

12 In particular, this requires, as the NSS clearly
13 states, being able to deny the feasibility of successful
14 aggression along the First Island Chain. Because of its
15 significance and the central importance of the military role
16 in meeting this requirement, meeting this standard of an
17 effective denial defense along the First Island Chain is the
18 primary focus of the U.S. Armed Forces. At the same time,
19 ensuring our forces can pace to this challenging standard
20 will ensure that the Department can always offer the
21 President the operational flexibility and agility required
22 for other objectives, especially the ability to launch
23 decisive operations against targets anywhere, including
24 directly from the U.S. homeland.

25 It is critical to emphasize here that our strategy is



1 well aligned, not only with the interests of our allies in
2 the Indo-Pacific, but many other countries as well that are
3 not formally our allies. These states seek to preserve
4 their autonomy and thus their ability to chart their own
5 national futures on their own terms. This, too, is our goal
6 as Secretary Hegseth eloquently laid out last year at the
7 Shangri-La Forum in Singapore. And our military focus,
8 alongside the efforts of our allies and partners, is
9 designed to uphold that ability.

10 Third, we recognize clearly that there are other very
11 real threats around the world that imperil our allies and
12 indeed our own interests directly. We do not neglect that.
13 To the contrary, we see it clearly. But we also understand
14 that we need to allocate our own resources realistically and
15 prudently, and that we must account for our allies' and
16 partners' ability and will to meet those challenges as well.
17 This is why the strategy so strongly emphasizes burden
18 sharing, which is its third pillar.

19 The logic here is to encourage, enable, and wherever
20 necessary, press our allies and partners in other theatres
21 to take primary responsibility for their conventional
22 defense. This makes sense because, as is so often pointed
23 out, we are allies with many of the world's largest and most
24 advanced economies. As a result, we do indeed have an
25 alliance network that has tremendous latent military power.



1 Unfortunately, over the last generation, after the end of
2 the Cold War, partially due to our own permissiveness across
3 a number of administrations and perhaps even hubris on this
4 point, many of our allies have functionally demilitarized.
5 This is untenable and unreasonable. And to be perfectly
6 frank, our allies know it, have admitted it, and are moving
7 rapidly and substantially to step up. And I can say this
8 from personal, extensive personal experience.

9 They are no longer, because of President Trump's
10 leadership as well as leadership in places like Europe,
11 South Korea and from many of you in Congress, they are no
12 longer fighting the scenario. Rather, they have now
13 accepted that they must step up and are beginning quickly to
14 do so. As a result, our approach has adapted to one of,
15 let's get down to business. In Europe, we are urging our
16 allies to move to a model of NATO 3.0, in which wealthy
17 European allies take the lead for the conventional defense
18 of European NATO.

19 On the Korean Peninsula, we are urging our South Korean
20 ally to do the same vis-a-vis North Korea. And in both
21 cases, they have agreed. The good news, distinguished
22 members, is that this is working. Our allies are indeed
23 stepping up along these lines. Now the issue becomes more
24 of a practical, albeit challenging, one of helping them to
25 do so and making this transition as rapidly and as



1 effectively as possible.

2 In other regions, we are also urging and seeing
3 progress with our allies. Along the First Island Chain,
4 with countries like Japan and Australia, we are urging these
5 wealthy and capable allies to do their part for collective
6 defense, as the NSS urges. In the Western Hemisphere, we
7 are working with many like-minded countries in the region to
8 address shared threats to our prosperity and well-being. In
9 the Middle East, we are working with our model ally Israel,
10 and other regional partners to address the threat of Iran
11 and terrorism as we see right now.

12 The final pillar of the strategy is to so-called
13 supercharge the Defense Industrial Base. The NSS and NDS
14 indeed both call for nothing short of a national
15 mobilization of our industrial capacity to arm both our own
16 forces and those of our allies and partners. As you on this
17 committee know so well, this is vital because we must be
18 able to arm our own forces and those of our allies and
19 partners with the best weaponry quickly, at scale, and at a
20 reasonable price. We are seeing tremendous progress on this
21 front thanks to President Trump, Secretary Hegseth, Deputy
22 Secretary Feinberg, Under Secretary Duffey and their
23 efforts, as well as your support and leadership on this
24 committee and throughout the Congress. But this will have
25 to be a critical area of focus in the coming years.

1 In closing, this strategy promises, under President
2 Trump's leadership, to put our country and our allies and
3 partners on the path to lasting security. In just a few
4 years, we can reasonably expect the warfighting ethos to
5 have been restored in our armed forces, and for them to be
6 armed with the most modern, effective weaponry at scale. We
7 can expect our wealthy allies and partners around the world
8 to have stepped up to do their part for collective defense
9 and their own security.

10 We can expect our potential opponents to see the
11 peerlessly formidable armed forces of the United States and
12 the highly capable forces of our allies and partners
13 together, and to conclude that peace and restraint is the
14 better course for them. Thus, we can very much reasonably
15 hope for a decent peace for Americans, for our allies, and
16 for that matter, for our potential opponents. This is a
17 very good future to which we can reasonably aspire.

18 At the same time, however, we at the Department of War
19 know that we cannot take this future for granted. To the
20 contrary, we will hope for the best, but prepare for the
21 worst. We will ensure that our armed forces are as ready as
22 they can possibly be, in line with the priorities outlined.
23 Should our potential opponents spurn this reasonable offer,
24 members of Congress, your support in ensuring that our
25 forces are ready will be absolutely vital.



1 Thank you very much. I look forward to your questions.

2 [The prepared statement of Mr. Colby follows:]

3 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

2 And members are reminded that we will have a classified
3 session after this with the Secretary and then, of course,
4 an all senators briefing on Iran in the afternoon. Because
5 of our schedule and the fact that we will have another round
6 in a classified setting, I'm going to strictly enforce the
7 five-minute rule, on all members, including myself.

8 And so, Mr. Secretary, let's talk about Taiwan. I
9 expressed some misgivings about the inattention to this
10 issue as I perceive it. Congress has authorized and
11 appropriated the use of Taiwan Security Cooperation
12 Initiative and authorized the use of Presidential drawdown
13 authority to accelerate the build-up of Taiwan's defenses.
14 But we do not appear to be using these authorities.

15 Has this money been obligated? If not, why? And I'll
16 go ahead and ask my follow up question. Why was there no
17 mention of Taiwan, only the mention of the First Island
18 Chain, which seems to be a way of finessing that issue?

19 Mr. Colby: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On the question
20 of TSCI, I'll defer to my counterparts in the department to
21 give you a precise answer. I will say, sir, that obviously
22 the administration as a whole has undertaken already an
23 announcement, and I think Congress obviously played an
24 important role in this late last year on a significant arms
25 sale to Taiwan, I don't need to elaborate on that, but I



1 think that is a significant part of the administration's
2 record.

3 Chairman Wicker: [Off mic.]

4 Mr. Colby: I couldn't say to you, sir, so I'm not
5 trying to be evasive. I just can't give you an informed
6 answer. So, can I get back to you on that?

7 Chairman Wicker: And perhaps between now and the
8 classified, you could get an answer.

9 Mr. Colby: Okay. Can we do that?

10 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Go ahead.
11 Proceed.

12 Mr. Colby: And then on -- I mean, sir, I would say,
13 obviously this document is read very carefully and we
14 recognize that there are, you know, multiple audiences,
15 including international partners. I think obviously we are
16 very, very tightly aligned. And it's something I'd really
17 stress that the degree of alignment and coordination with
18 our interagency and White House partners, as well as the
19 extensive internal coordination on the document, I don't
20 think anybody can mistake that the focus of this strategy on
21 preparing for a denial defense along the First Island Chain
22 that is elaborated on the National Security Strategy, which
23 includes a reference to Taiwan, that that has been very
24 clear to all of our audiences.

25 At the same time, as Secretary Hegseth laid out at the



1 Reagan Forum, sir, I think you were there as well as a
2 number of your committee counterparts, our approach is
3 strong and clear, but quiet. What I would say to you, sir,
4 is we are really focused on delivering military hard power
5 readiness not only to our own forces, but to our allies and
6 partners and less focused on making, you know, significant
7 rhetorical statements. That obviously is a topic of debate
8 as to whether that's the right mix. But our approach is
9 really this strong and clear but quiet.

10 I don't think anybody can doubt our focus on making
11 sure that we support the NSS Presidential direction to have
12 the ability to deny aggression along the First Island Chain.

13 Chairman Wicker: Okay. Thank you. Let's let you
14 respond to some doubts I expressed in my opening statement.
15 Do you think the NDS signals a diminished intent to deter
16 existential threats posed by Russia and North Korea?

17 Mr. Colby: I don't at all, sir. In fact, I think the
18 NDS details and it does so from a realistic perspective that
19 matches our perspective obviously, the primary existential
20 threat posed by Russia and North Korean nuclear weapons, in
21 the case of Russia, they have other capabilities, that is
22 explicitly detailed. But we look realistically and
23 carefully, not only at our own interests, we recognize our
24 interests in Europe and center on that as well, but also
25 say, obviously, the Europeans, have an even more, as the



1 President repeatedly points out, rightly, they're even more,
2 indexed and focused on that.

3 And so the basic logic here, Senator, is not to ignore
4 or downplay, but rather to array our overall strategy in a
5 way that works with the warp and woof of our allies. So
6 that's why I think, actually, to be honest, sir, even in the
7 last couple of months, my first trip was I stopped in
8 Alaska. But then I was, I went to South Korea, where they
9 have agreed to take primary conventional responsibility of
10 South Korea, vis-a-vis North Korea and in Europe.

11 I was at the -- had the honor of representing the
12 Department for Secretary Hegseth at the Brussels Ministerial
13 and at the Munich Security Conference. The Europeans are
14 leaning into this and stepping up. It's not that -- we're
15 not saying that we're pulling out of these, to the contrary.
16 We're saying realistically, we're going to look to them to
17 take the lead. And something I would stress -- and I know
18 I'm going to have the chance to talk to Senator Reed here --
19 is I think this is a return to the Cold War mentality, when
20 these were expected to be real military alliances with
21 burden sharing. And members of this committee in the 1970s
22 and 80s on both sides of the dais, would make a real point
23 of making sure that our allies did their part. And we're
24 going back to that noble heritage.

25 Chairman Wicker: My time has expired. Ranking member

1 is recognized.

2 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.
3 And thank you, Secretary. As I stated in my opening
4 statement, the NDS specifically states that in the Middle
5 East, the department, "Will empower regional allies and
6 partners to take primary responsibility for deterring and
7 defending against Iran and its proxies." Furthermore, the
8 NDS repeatedly states that while our allies will receive
9 critical support from the U.S., it will be much more
10 limited.

11 This National Security Strategy was published, by my
12 count, about 39 days ago. So, Secretary Colby, the military
13 operations are unfolding in the Middle East are completely
14 contrary to the strategy the department has put forth. Why
15 has the department abandoned the strategy after 39 days?

16 Mr. Colby: Well, Senator, I completely reject that
17 characterization, sir. If you look in the strategy, it
18 details specifically not only the threat posed by Iran and
19 ensuring that the President has the options to act against
20 Iran first. Secondly, it also explicitly and repeatedly
21 details that the strategy will provide the ability for the
22 President to use particularly effectively air and maritime
23 forces standoff kind of or overhead kind of forces to do
24 exactly this kind of operation, obviously, things like
25 Midnight Hammer.

1 And then thirdly, I would say that we actually are
2 seeing a real example, obviously, our Israeli allies are
3 really leaning in, but we see that from our Gulf partners
4 right now, we see it from other partners in Europe. So I
5 actually -- I don't think this is an invalidation at all,
6 Senator.

7 Senator Reed: Well, so our Gulf powers are partners
8 are taking primary responsibility as it's described in NDS?

9 Mr. Colby: Well, Senator, primary responsibility
10 specifically refers in particular to the European context,
11 the South Korean context. We're looking at Israel in
12 particular. It's a general theme. It's a little bit more
13 differentiated how we're talking about. We obviously want
14 allies and partners throughout to be able to take
15 responsibility. But, you know, we're looking as a general.
16 It's not a kind of straight jacket, if you will.

17 Senator Reed: Did we notify our allies and partners
18 except Israel, of course?

19 Mr. Colby: I defer to the operational or other you
20 know, the Department of State on that.

21 Senator Reed: Mr. Secretary, I would assume that you
22 would be vitally involved in that notification process. Did
23 we notify our partners?

24 Mr. Colby: I have myself been on the phone with a
25 number of ministers and subministerial level since the



1 outbreak of the operation on Saturday, so I know we've
2 notified them. The exact timing, I defer to others more
3 senior in the administration.

4 Senator Reed: Thank you. The military and strategic
5 objectives of the Iran operation are varied from eliminating
6 the nuclear program, taking out the ballistic missile
7 arsenal, protecting Iranian civilians, cutting off support
8 to Iranian proxies, and defending the American people in
9 general and our allies. The President has moved the
10 goalposts constantly, and now has conveniently thrown out
11 all the rationales as justification for this war of choice.

12 Secretary Colby, can you, as the lead policy advisor to
13 the Pentagon, explain the objectives of this operation? And
14 can they be accomplished by airstrikes and air power alone?

15 Mr. Colby: Well, Senator, I think I can lay out once
16 again the objectives of the military campaign, which have
17 been directed by the President and were elucidated by
18 Secretary Hegseth and General Caine yesterday in their
19 briefing, which are focused on addressing the ability of the
20 Islamic Republic to project military power against, of
21 course, us, our bases, our forces, etc., as well as our
22 allies and partners in the region and beyond.

23 And that's primarily the missile forces of the Islamic
24 Republic, which had obviously been growing substantially and
25 posed a very serious threat to all of those equities that I



1 just mentioned, as well as the ability to produce that. And
2 then the Iranian navy. Those are the primary focus of the
3 military campaign.

4 I do think those are scoped and reasonable objectives
5 that can be attained. I think at the same time, the
6 President, for instance, has made comments and I wouldn't
7 speak for him, but my interpretation of how the military
8 campaign nests under that is he has urged the Iranian people
9 to take this unprecedented opportunity to, you know,
10 supplant, or overthrow this oppressive Islamic Republic.
11 But the military campaign has detailed that he has directed,
12 is focused on the power projection capabilities. And at the
13 end of this campaign, yes, primarily relying on aerospace
14 and maritime forces that will have substantially set back a
15 threat that, sir, you just yourself detailed as such a
16 opprobrious and noxious threat.

17 Senator Reed: Now, if a regime change was nothing with
18 respect to the military objectives, and the President was
19 just sort of wandering off, why was the first objective in
20 the campaign, the attack and death of Khamenei and key
21 leaders of the regime?

22 Mr. Colby: Well, just try to answer it quickly. I
23 wouldn't characterize the President as he sets our agenda
24 and he directed these military goals. I'm talking about,
25 sir, about the goals of the American military campaign.



1 Senator Reed: How do you separate the military goals
2 from the President of the United States?

3 Mr. Colby: I'm not, sir, I was talking about those are
4 Israeli operations.

5 Senator Reed: The chairman is enforcing his rule, as
6 he must.

7 Chairman Wicker: Senator Fischer.

8 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank
9 you, Secretary Colby.

10 I believe that all strategies must evolve as
11 geopolitical threats shift. When a regime that's
12 responsible for the deaths of thousands of Americans remains
13 committed to building nuclear weapons and growing a
14 ballistic missile force that poses an unacceptable risk to
15 the United States, the President will respond.

16 That said, there is one pillar of this strategy that
17 will remain relevant no matter the conflict. We need to
18 supercharge U.S. industry. For too long, the department has
19 used the munitions funding as a bill payer for other
20 programs. No more. We need to build more weapons systems,
21 do so at scale, and negotiate better terms and prices. You
22 mentioned that, sir. Thank you.

23 So how is the department reviewing the total munitions
24 requirement to address the long-term strategy for
25 production?



1 Mr. Colby: Well, thank you, Senator, and I think
2 that's I mean, you've really keyed in on it. And I think
3 the President's truth last night really also shone the light
4 on this. And I would say, obviously, Deputy Secretary
5 Feinberg, is I would say heroically leading the effort on
6 this front, Undersecretary Duffey, I know there's a lot of
7 people involved, the services. I know you are all involved.

8 I mean, I think I've seen an unprecedented degree of
9 focus on this the way I think -- I was talking to Secretary
10 yesterday, and, Mr. Chairman, sir, Senator Reed, we were
11 talking about this the other day, I think we see a
12 fundamental mindset shift in the degree of urgency, and with
13 a couple of lines of effort. One is 1.5 trillion. I mean,
14 that's the President saying we got to get after this
15 problem. First of all, you need the money. And the
16 strategy says we're going to try -- we're going to advocate
17 for a higher top line. But money alone is not sufficient
18 because it needs to be executed.

19 Senator Fischer: So how are you going to address this
20 then?

21 Mr. Colby: Well, I think I would defer to Deputy
22 Secretary Feinberg because he's the one leading this. But
23 we are all very confident in supply. Sorry, I don't mean to
24 be, dodging your question, I just, that's something -- I
25 know my lane, and that's, you know, he's the real lead on



1 this.

2 Senator Fischer: We have a lot of critical weapons
3 programs that overlap the supply chain. So how is the
4 department going to be able to identify the key bottlenecks
5 that are out there and address those?

6 Mr. Colby: Again, I would defer --

7 Senator Fischer: Can you address that, or should we
8 talk to the deputy secretary?

9 Mr. Colby: I would talk to the deputy. I would just
10 say, I think there's not specific kind of boutique solutions
11 to this. This is why both the NSS and the NDS call for a
12 national mobilization, which is a pretty big deal. I mean,
13 this is a huge --

14 Senator Fischer: Right. Well, it's a huge concern.

15 Mr. Colby: It's a huge concern. And we need to like
16 it's not -- not that you were saying this ma'am -- but it's
17 not a band aid, this is like surgery.

18 Senator Fischer: Okay. Defending the homeland should
19 always be the first priority of any NDS. And this includes
20 a commitment to modernizing and diversifying our nuclear
21 forces, which are foundational to our national security.
22 Since the United States now faces, for the first time in
23 history, two near-peer nuclear powers in Russia and China, I
24 encourage any changes in force structure to result in
25 greater nuclear deterrent capability, not less. As Beijing



1 continues its military buildup, including their breathtaking
2 nuclear breakout, how will the department seek to achieve
3 strategic stability?

4 Mr. Colby: Well, thank you, ma'am. I will say,
5 actually, this is something I was emailing Admiral Correll
6 about this morning. And the nuclear strategy is something
7 that obviously has my personal attention. But at the top
8 leadership of the department, we fully agree that the two
9 peer environment, or soon to be potential peer of the
10 People's Republic on the nuclear side, requires a
11 fundamental rethink. One of the things that we did is we
12 nested the nuclear elements at the kind of high level into
13 the national defense strategy. That doesn't mean we're just
14 ignoring the nuclear piece, as you and I, I think, had the
15 opportunity to discuss.

16 Senator, we are going to do a deeper review in the
17 nuclear, but with more of a focus on actually getting in at
18 the classified level into what are the problems we need to
19 solve. I will say that I think most of the problems with
20 the challenges with the nuclear force are a matter of
21 execution, and programmatics, and money, and less the sort
22 of strategy elements. There are key strategy elements that
23 I'd be happy to talk about in the classified session.

24 Senator Fischer: Do you plan to do a nuclear posture
25 review?



1 Mr. Colby: I don't think we plan to do a kind of
2 formal nuclear posture review. I think the declaratory
3 policy and so forth from the first Trump term was very good,
4 and we didn't feel the need to do a huge amount of -- I
5 mean, one thing about this strategy is that it's designed to
6 move the bureaucracy and the organization in a certain
7 direction. It's not designed to kind of do things just
8 because we've done them. But rest assured, nuclear forces
9 are at the top of our priority list.

10 Senator Fischer: As we look to deterring China as the
11 second line of effort, do you anticipate that we're going to
12 increase our efforts in partnership with South Korea, Japan,
13 cooperation with AUKUS partnership as well?

14 Mr. Colby: Well, absolutely. We're going to deepen
15 partnerships, especially with Japan and South Korea. And
16 I'm running out of time, but happy to elaborate.

17 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

18 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Chairman Fischer. Senator
19 Shaheen.

20 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Under
21 Secretary Colby, you've previously written that the Middle
22 East is, "Relatively unimportant for the United States."
23 You also wrote in an article entitled, Why Not to Attack
24 Iran, that strikes against Iran's nuclear program without a
25 clear strategy would leave, " Tehran every incentive to



1 reboot the program with greater vigor." You wrote in the
2 same article that military strikes were unlikely to
3 "Embolden resistance to the government," and you concluded
4 by noting that it's probably best not to start down a road
5 that has no end in sight. And then in 2012, you wrote that
6 putting boots on the ground would, "Likely prove protracted
7 and costly."

8 President Trump and Secretary Hegseth have left the
9 door open to putting boots on the ground. Do you agree with
10 them now and why?

11 Mr. Colby: Thank you, Senator. A couple of things.

12 First, we discussed this at some length, actually
13 almost exactly a year ago in my confirmation hearing, and I
14 committed to provide credible military options that were
15 rationally correlated to America's interests, and I have
16 done so in furtherance of that commitment. And I believe --

17 Senator Shaheen: I'm sorry to interrupt.

18 Mr. Colby: Sure.

19 Senator Shaheen: But then do you agree with Secretary
20 Rubio that the reason that we took this action now was
21 because of Israel's intent to strike? And was there any
22 effort to dissuade Israel from making these strikes now?

23 Mr. Colby: Well, I would defer to Secretary Rubio on
24 his specific comments. I know he and others, the President,
25 the vice President, secretary, chairman have all talked



1 about the threat that Iran has posed. And I was clear about
2 that in my testimony a year ago. We've been clear about
3 that here.

4 I would say Operation Midnight Hammer did have a clear
5 objective, and that was something that was distinguished it
6 often from the kinds of perspectives that I was writing
7 about 15 years ago in a private capacity.

8 Senator Shaheen: So you do agree with them now that
9 putting boots on the ground is a possible --

10 Mr. Colby: I mean, the President has reserved the
11 right to --

12 Senator Shaheen: -- and viable option?

13 Mr. Colby: The President has, obviously, as he's
14 discussed --

15 Senator Shaheen: I don't want to know what the
16 President -- I've heard what the President said. I want to
17 know what you think.

18 Mr. Colby: Well, I'm a, you know, lieutenant of the
19 President, so I'm keyed on his intent. I think --

20 Senator Shaheen: So you're not going to take a
21 position on that. Whatever the Presidents decides you're
22 going to be supportive of it?

23 Mr. Colby: Yeah, yeah. I will abide by the
24 President's instructions.

25 Senator Shaheen: Let me switch to another issue,



1 because in your opening statement, you didn't mention Russia
2 or Ukraine, and this is the largest land war in Europe since
3 World War II. Do you think that it's central to U.S.
4 deterrence or not?

5 Mr. Colby: I think the war in Ukraine is very
6 important. Obviously, as the President has rightly said,
7 obviously it's especially vivid and important for people on
8 the European continent, which is where it's taking, which is
9 one of the reasons why he's I think really, to his great
10 credit, trying to end the war and the negotiating team
11 that's working. I think they're making good progress. But
12 yeah, I absolutely think the war in Ukraine is important.

13 Senator Shaheen: They would be making a lot better
14 progress if we put some pressure on Russia. Don't you
15 agree? And has Russia had any role in supporting Iran in
16 this operation?

17 Mr. Colby: I couldn't speak about that in this hearing
18 or I would be sort of happy to discuss that in a closed
19 hearing, my assessment of that, although I'd defer to my
20 intelligence community colleagues on the specifics. But
21 sorry, your first question was pressure. I mean, the
22 administration has put pressure on Russia, for instance,
23 through economic measures and the administration -- I've
24 personally been involved, contrary to a lot of press
25 reporting, in facilitating the transfer of weaponry to help



1 Ukraine. So I think the administration is. But the goal is
2 peace, Senator.

3 Senator Shaheen: I certainly agree with that. And I
4 think the fastest way to get peace in Ukraine is to put more
5 pressure on Russia and Vladimir Putin and what he's doing in
6 this war, and that the way to do that is to further sanction
7 the shadow fleet, further sanction oil production. It is to
8 provide the weapons and the support that Ukraine needs to
9 continue to execute this war. And sadly, we are not doing
10 that in the way that I think would really lead us to peace.

11 Let me ask you, because I just came back from Ukraine.
12 And one of the things I heard -- well, and from Eastern
13 Europe -- one of the things I heard from all of the military
14 leaders that I talked to, both American and among our
15 allies, is that what the Ukrainians are doing in executing
16 this war is the most highly innovative technological
17 advances that are happening in conflict anywhere in the
18 world right now. And we are not at the table to take
19 advantage of getting the best information about what's going
20 on, because in the Pentagon, Ukraine has become a dirty
21 word.

22 Can you respond to that and tell me why we are not
23 taking advantage of the opportunities that Ukraine is
24 showing us?

25 Mr. Colby: I just don't think that's true, Senator. I



1 think people like Secretary Driscoll, for instance, are
2 incorporating a lot of lessons learned, and there's a lot to
3 learn from Ukraine -- a great deal to learn from the Ukraine
4 conflict.

5 Senator Shaheen: Good. I hope we are learning. Thank
6 you.

7 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Rounds.

8 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary
9 Colby, first of all, thank you for joining us today. I
10 sincerely appreciate the attention you and your team have
11 paid to the simultaneity problem in the National Defense
12 Strategy.

13 The simultaneity problem is the fact that in the event
14 the United States is engaged in hostilities with one of our
15 adversaries, other adversaries, and other theaters will
16 likely initiate hostilities with us and seek to press their
17 advantage in their region or theater after U.S. forces are
18 committed elsewhere. You and your team seem acutely aware
19 of that problem. I also appreciate that the department is
20 trying to maintain deterrence in multiple theaters with
21 finite resources, and that protecting our interests in the
22 Western Pacific must be the priority in the face of the
23 existential threat posed by the CCP. That's the background
24 for my questions.

25 The National Defense Strategy places a heavy emphasis



1 on burden sharing with our partners and allies. Is it the
2 position of the administration and the intent of the NDS to
3 build up partner and ally capacity prior to shifting
4 resources out of a theater, such as Europe or the Middle
5 East? And if we could ask it in perhaps a different way,
6 how do you think the department should sequence the
7 marshaling of resources and the capacity between INDOPACOM
8 and the rest of the world?

9 Mr. Colby: Well, thank you, Senator, and I appreciate
10 the spirit of your question, because I think you exactly
11 understand what we're trying to do. And I think, you know,
12 one thing about the strategy is it's, you know, it's
13 obviously a high-level capstone document. And I think,
14 Senator Fischer, I think you said it's a living document, or
15 maybe it's the chairman, but basically, it's more of a
16 heuristic or a framework.

17 Obviously, the publication is a point in time, but the
18 idea is it should be adaptive to events like it came out
19 before Operation Epic Fury, but I think it accounts and
20 anticipates for it. So, I think what I would say, sir, to
21 your point is, we are trying to get to the best point where
22 everybody is in the right position to deter, obviously,
23 ideally and if necessary, to fight effectively for denial as
24 soon as possible, and certainly within the window of any
25 potential danger.



1 And so part of what's happening, Senator, and I think
2 this is part of what's changed early this year from our tone
3 and I think our partners have noticed it, I regard 2025 as a
4 lot of it is about reframing and giving our allies and
5 partners credibly under the President's leadership, an
6 understanding that things are going to be different, that
7 the demand signal is different. And a lot of that was a
8 hypothesis whether they would -- whether they would change
9 and whether they would register. And I think what we've
10 seen over the course of 2025 is that they have. They are
11 not fighting the scenario. So, in Europe, I mean, I was
12 just there at the Def Min. I mean, you have countries like
13 Germany, Poland, Finland, Sweden, Norway, etc.

14 Netherlands is now raising the retirement age,
15 according to what I'm told to 70, in order to fund their
16 defense build-up. So they are actually doing what we've
17 been asking. And so the change in tone is because actually
18 things have now adapted. Now it's more just get down to
19 business. And that's when it becomes, Senator, to answer
20 your question directly, more a matter of how do we deal with
21 the transition in a situation in which, as the President
22 said yesterday, there are areas where, you know, we would
23 like to be in a different place than we are, and that's
24 where we want to take the conversation.

25 I am confident that together across the Department of



1 War and our very capable allies and partners, we can do
2 that. But it's very important to send a clear signal that
3 this is not a joke. This is not a recipe for more lassitude
4 by our allies. And I think that's happened.

5 Senator Rounds: Okay. There is strong support in
6 Congress to provide additional resources to our national
7 defense. Engagement between the administration and Congress
8 is critical to identifying and addressing the resource
9 shortfalls. Have you shared with Congress any specific
10 resource shortfalls or capability gaps that will cause us to
11 assume additional risk as the NDS is implemented?

12 Mr. Colby: Well, actually, that's some of the sort of
13 implementation work that we're doing right now, especially
14 in light of, you know, ongoing, you know, dynamics is to try
15 -- actually, I was talking to the chairman and his staff
16 about this yesterday just to say we are doing some targeted
17 looks at this, and we definitely would like to come back to
18 you because some of this needs, you know, and I think it's
19 something that would appeal across the aisle where we all
20 benefit from having the right stuff in the right place at
21 the right time.

22 So, you know, my personal advocacy will be open kimono
23 on what we find on that, because it's obviously your
24 participation is absolutely critical.

25 Senator Rounds: That that open kimono should probably



1 be done in a classified session.

2 Mr. Colby: For your sake, yes.

3 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Chairman Wicker: Senator Scott. Senator King.

5 Senator King: A rare opportunity to go before Senator
6 Kaine. Mr. Colby, you're in charge of policy, so I'm going
7 to ask you some policy questions with regard to Iran. When
8 I woke up Saturday morning to the news, the first question
9 that popped into my mind was, why now? Why now? What was
10 the precipitating factor? And there was discussion of an
11 imminent threat of missiles. There was discussion of
12 rebuilding the nuclear capacity, but none of those were
13 imminent in any way.

14 Yesterday, Secretary Rubio told us why now. In a
15 stunning statement, "We knew that there was going to be an
16 Israeli action. We knew that there would be that would
17 precipitate an attack against American forces. And we knew
18 that if we didn't preemptively go after them before they
19 launch these attacks, we would suffer higher casualties."

20 Have we now delegated the most solemn decision that can
21 be made in our society, the decision to go to war to another
22 country? That's the implication, the breathtaking
23 implication of Secretary Rubio's statement, which to me is
24 the only explanation I've seen as to why this action was
25 taken when it was. There were no objective facts on the



1 ground that said, this is something we have to do now.

2 There were no missiles being loaded on launchers. There was
3 not a nuclear bomb being rolled out. I'd like some response
4 on policy.

5 Is it now the policy of the United States that we're
6 going to be taken into a war by the prime minister of
7 another country?

8 Mr. Colby: Well, sir, what I would say is, and I think
9 Secretary Hegseth and General Caine went into this
10 yesterday, that it was -- and the President has talked about
11 this as well, it's the very rapid build-up and
12 reconstitution of Iran's ballistic missile, cruise missile
13 and one-way attack drone capability --

14 Senator King: That's been going on for some time. The
15 question is, why was it Saturday or Sunday?

16 Mr. Colby: Well, I think there was a perception that
17 this threat has been manifest. As the President said,
18 they've been killing Americans for 47 years. And this is
19 something where we can see this is going, and they're going
20 to be able to have with this kind of missile shield --

21 Senator King: Do you dispute Secretary Rubio's
22 statement? I think Secretary Rubio inadvertently told the
23 truth the other day, that this was driven by Benjamin
24 Netanyahu. And here we are in a major conflict. Do you do
25 you not agree that that seems to be the precipitating



1 factor?

2 Mr. Colby: Well, I agree with you that Secretary Rubio
3 told the truth. I wouldn't characterize his remarks, they
4 stand for themselves. I know he's spoken a lot. The
5 remarks I've seen of his, the President, the Vice President,
6 the secretary of war, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of
7 Staff focus on the buildup of Iran's conventional missile
8 capability.

9 Senator King: Well, I find it very disturbing that
10 we're committing this nation to war based upon a decision by
11 a -- even though a staunch ally, and I'm a supporter of
12 Israel, but I don't think anybody should drive our decision
13 to go to war but the interest of the United States --

14 Mr. Colby: I think the President made our decision,
15 Senator, that's my understanding, certainly, our
16 understanding of the Department of War, the President made
17 our decision. I mean, he makes the decision, obviously.

18 Senator King: Well, he made the decision, but it
19 appeared to be based upon the fact that Israel was going to
20 -- was going to strike. And one of my questions is going to
21 be at the hearing this afternoon, was any effort made to
22 dissuade the prime minister? Prime Minister Netanyahu has
23 been egging for an invasion of Iran for 20 years. U.S.
24 Presidents have consistently said no. And my question is
25 why now?

1 Let me move on to something else. I'm very concerned
2 about the President's words to the to the Iranian people.
3 In his speech the other night, in his speeches back in
4 January, the other night, he said, "I call upon the Iranian
5 patriots who yearn for freedom to seize this moment, to be
6 brave, be bold, be heroic and take back your country.
7 America is with you. I made a promise to you, and I
8 fulfilled that promise."

9 We cannot protect the valiant people of Iran from the
10 IRGC, from the air. There is no way that they can be
11 protected without troops. Do you have any different
12 understanding of that? And my concern is that we may be
13 raising the expectations of these people, that we will truly
14 have their back when we won't, and they'll be slaughtered
15 again, as they were in January.

16 Mr. Colby: My understanding, and again, I wouldn't
17 presume to interpret the President's words, but this is
18 objectively an historic opportunity. Obviously, you've had
19 this significant erosion of the most, you know, oppressive
20 members of the Islamic Republican government. But
21 ultimately, I think one of the reasons this isn't an example
22 of nation building and this kind of interventionism that
23 Senator Reed mentioned is precisely because it is looking to
24 the Iranian people to take the initiative. I have no
25 question that it would be risky and costly.



1 Senator King: But the Iranian people don't have the
2 guns, Mr. Secretary. The Iranian people don't have the
3 force. It may work. I hope it does. But in this case the
4 risk is great. And I'm afraid we may have put these people
5 in harm's way, uh, by misleading them about our commitment.

6 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator King. Senator
8 Scott.

9 Senator Scott: First off, Under Secretary Colby, thank
10 you for being here. I want to thank President Trump for his
11 decisive leadership in Operation Epic Fury. The President,
12 Secretary Hegseth, have clear objectives to ensure Iran
13 never has a nuclear weapon and this evil regime is no longer
14 able to terrorize and target the American people and our
15 great ally, Israel. We have known for decades that the only
16 way to deal with Iran is to totally destroy this evil
17 regime, and President Trump is doing it.

18 I also want to take this opportunity to talk about the
19 incredible men and women in our military who answer the call
20 to serve each and every day. They represent the best of
21 what it means to be an American. Sign up for a cause
22 greater than themselves to serve their country and stand for
23 our freedoms. And unfortunately, as we saw over the past
24 few days, answering the call to serve can come with great
25 sacrifice. For that, we can never repay them. Our heart



1 goes out to their families, and I ask every American to keep
2 their loved ones in your prayers.

3 I've now been in the Senate for a little over seven
4 years, and in that time I've have had the opportunity to
5 travel all over the world to meet with our servicemen and
6 women, diplomats, foreign leaders, to foster American
7 business, prioritize national security interests, and grow
8 relationships with our allies. Everywhere I go, I hear
9 great things about President Trump's leadership on the world
10 stage and the incredible support he's received from
11 Secretary Rubio and Secretary Hegseth in advancing this
12 peace through strength agenda. Our allies respect us and
13 our adversaries fear us. Countries have shifted their views
14 on national security because they now know that under this
15 administration, standing with the United States is
16 beneficial to our mutual security.

17 In my recent visits to both the Indo-Pacific and
18 Northern and Eastern Europe, I witnessed this firsthand as
19 countries are siding with us against our enemies, investing
20 in our economy, and most importantly, buying American
21 weapons. I tell every government official I meet with in my
22 office or overseas, be like Israel, Baltics, Poland. Do
23 everything you can for yourself and then ask where your need
24 is and what you need us to do. And many of our allies who
25 traditionally failed to do so are starting to do just that,

1 because they know that while President Trump will hold our
2 friends accountable to step up to the plate and do their
3 fair share, he will never abandon them.

4 Senator Rubio said it perfectly in his speech at the
5 Munich Security Conference. The President is succeeding and
6 will continue to succeed because he believes the entire
7 world is important to the United States and for our security
8 and prosperity. He understands that the United States and
9 Europe are inseparable because of our common values and
10 civilization. And the President reaffirmed it in his
11 remarks on Iran when he outlined the threats that the regime
12 having nuclear weapon would have on the U.S. and our very
13 good friends and our allies in Europe.

14 The President clearly understands we have enemies
15 around the world. The governments of Communist China, Iran,
16 Russia, and North Korea. They chose to be our enemies, and
17 they are most definitely not focused just on the region they
18 live in. They don't change their actions simply because we
19 try to be nice to them or try to ignore them. That didn't
20 work for President Obama, didn't work for President Biden.
21 It only makes our enemies bolder and more aggressive toward
22 us and our allies.

23 President Trump proved he is not what his critics say
24 he is when he comes to foreign policy and military matters.
25 He is not a reckless warmonger, nor is he an isolationist.



1 He is someone who understands that nowhere on the planet can
2 we say whatever happens there is not our business. Instead,
3 he knows our world is a safer place when our enemies wake up
4 every day scared to death about what we might do to them,
5 and knowing that miscalculations on their part will not go
6 unanswered. Just ask Iran and Venezuela.

7 Back to my travels. As I learned about in
8 conversations with our allies in Europe and the Indo-
9 Pacific, there is a problem. Allies tell us they want to
10 train with us, but the Department of War ignores these
11 requests and tells them they are too small and
12 insignificant. Allies tell us they want to buy weapons from
13 us, and that's what the President wants, but some of our
14 allies have told us that the Department of War that they may
15 not buy them, resulting in frustration not at the President,
16 but the failures of the process that won't let them buy the
17 weapons we told them to buy in the first place. They've
18 gone to other countries to buy weapons.

19 The President's national security team have sent a
20 clear message to our partners and allies: step up, do your
21 fair share, and the United States will be selling you the
22 best American made weapons and training so you can use them.
23 However, it seems our allies are getting a mixed message
24 when they come to the department to work together and buy
25 weapons.



1 Under Secretary Colby, what do you recommend those of
2 us on this committee say to our allies who are aligned with
3 President Trump and ready to do their part, but are left
4 confused when the process fails them?

5 Mr. Colby: Thank you, Senator. Just to answer your
6 question on training, I think this should be -- is actually
7 a priority for Secretary Hegseth on things like 127 Echo.
8 So I think that should be something where there should be a
9 lot of receptivity. And obviously if allies are not getting
10 that message, obviously they're welcome to look me up. And
11 then on weapons, sir, this is something that really has our
12 top attention, and we were just talking about it with the
13 national mobilization, the Defense Industrial Base. There's
14 also been a process overhaul.

15 One of the things we've done, and I'm actually a big
16 advocate of this looking at the clock, is pushing the FMS
17 process and consolidating it under Under Secretary Duffey,
18 because then it's the acquisition people, the industrial
19 relations people who have the whole stack, as they say.

20 And obviously we have a role in policy from a strategic
21 point of view. But ultimately this stuff is a -- I call it
22 an Excel problem rather than a Word problem. I believe FMS
23 sales demand have quadrupled since 2021. So there's just a
24 massive scale issue. And of course, our own services are
25 also in line. So this is something I think we all just

1 really want to attack this problem. And fortunately, we've
2 got Deputy Secretary Feinberg is really amazing on this.

3 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator. Senator Peters.

4 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 Before getting to my questions, I just want to talk
6 briefly about President Trump's decision to basically drag
7 America into another war in the Middle East without
8 congressional approval. The Constitution is very clear for
9 the reason for congressional approval. If you look at the
10 debate during the Constitutional Convention, our founders
11 were very clear that having unconditional power for a
12 President to go into war was the power too great. It
13 reminded them of the king that they had just defeated in the
14 Revolutionary War, and believe that the People's House, the
15 Congress in article one of the Constitution, should have
16 that power to declare war and to bring those powers into
17 play.

18 As a Navy reservist, a former Navy reservist, I served
19 in Bahrain and the UAE, places right now that are under
20 risk. Our service members are under risk in those places
21 for attack. My thoughts are certainly with them and others
22 serving through the Middle East. I know the thoughts of all
23 American people are with the men and women who are serving
24 in the Middle East as well. But what I am hearing from my
25 constituents is that they do not want to send their sons and



1 daughters to war. That is not something the American people
2 want.

3 In fact, what I hear from them is they want to see
4 costs come down in America. They're paying too much. Costs
5 continue to go up. Trump policies have raised prices. Now
6 we may see spikes in energy prices. They don't want a war.
7 Now, I want to be clear. Iran is a bad actor, and we must
8 ensure that they never, ever produce nuclear weapons. But I
9 also want to be clear. We should remember that we had a
10 diplomatic agreement with Iran on nuclear proliferation, and
11 President Trump withdrew from that agreement during his
12 first term without a plan, and he was basically playing
13 politics. I get it.

14 But now he's sending U.S. forces back to the Middle
15 East to fight in a war without the support of Congress and
16 without the support of the American people. And that's why
17 the administration must immediately seek congressional
18 approval to make clear to not just to Congress, but more
19 importantly, to the American people, that there's an actual
20 end goal and there's an actual strategy to ensure that what
21 he is doing there actually protects our homeland security as
22 opposed to endangering it.

23 So, Mr. Colby, my question for you is, President Trump
24 has provided a number of conflicting reasons for his
25 decision to declare war himself unilaterally on Iran, and at

1 no time did he ever offer any evidence of an imminent
2 attack, as we heard from my colleague, which would be an
3 exception to getting an immediate approval if there's an
4 imminent attack, no evidence of that. Sometimes he has
5 stated the goal is regime change. Sometimes it's about
6 eliminating the proxy forces, ballistic missiles, a list of
7 things that he is considering as goals for the program. The
8 President has also stated he is willing to negotiate with
9 the current regime to bring an end to hostilities.

10 But I want to remind you of a discussion we had in
11 January of last year. We met prior to your confirmation
12 hearing, and you shared -- and you were very clear that you
13 did not want to enter another war in the Middle East without
14 a clear purpose and a clear end state. We're not hearing
15 that. I want to hear from you what you think that is. You
16 have been consistent on this point throughout your career.
17 In fact, in some of the articles, I have a recent one, just
18 in 2021, just a few short years ago, 3 or 4 years ago, where
19 you said that the U.S. military focus on Iran should be
20 dramatically reduced and requests for additional U.S. forces
21 to, "Deter Iran should be rejected."

22 You also said Iran can be checked from any possibility
23 of dominating the Gulf states by supporting theirs and
24 Israel's efforts to check Tehran's ambitions. They can do
25 it. You also said Iran draws critical resources, including

1 leadership attention and popular support from far more
2 important defensive objectives, namely ensuring a favorable
3 and stable balance of power in Asia.

4 So my question for you, sir, is, given your strongly
5 held beliefs that you told me face to face in my office and
6 you were very sincere in those efforts, I never would
7 question what you said, do you feel the President has
8 actually articulated a clear purpose and an end state to the
9 American people, as he articulated to the American people,
10 that we need to go to war in Iran?

11 Mr. Colby: Well, thank you, Senator. I appreciate the
12 detailed and thoughtful question. I would just say, I think
13 the -- first of all, in terms of your questions on the
14 imminence issue and the legality, I know there's going to be
15 a briefing later today, and I defer to my general counsel
16 and intelligence counterparts to get you the answer you need
17 on that. I do think that the President and the military
18 campaign, the President has directed the military campaign,
19 obviously, those are not exclusive of other goals like his
20 encouragement to the Iranian people to take this
21 opportunity. This is to degrade. And I mentioned some of
22 those things.

23 And in fact, Senator, the Israelis are taking the lead.
24 I mean, it's the Israelis who are conducting a great deal of
25 these operations and the Gulf states that are actually



1 conducting a lot of operations as well, and some of our
2 European partners. And I think you've seen the reaction not
3 just from regional partners, but countries like Canada,
4 Australia, a number of the German chancellor yesterday. So
5 I think we do we have -- and I mean, I'm not on the uniform
6 side, but the Department of War has been provided with, we
7 are going to degrade and destroy the Iranian missile threat
8 one way attack drone threat, and the Navy in particular, and
9 of course, be in a position to deny Iran's ability to obtain
10 a nuclear weapon.

11 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Mullin.

12 Senator Mullin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just feel
13 like I need to respond to some things the senator was
14 bringing up by accusing the President of pulling out of a
15 nuclear deal in his first term. It was a horrible deal. It
16 was a disastrous deal. It was a deal that we all know that
17 would originally allow Iran to be able to have enrichment to
18 the grade that they could make a nuclear weapon. And then
19 for the senator that was saying that the President needs to
20 come back for reauthorization.

21 I don't remember him saying anything in 2016, when
22 Barack Obama at the time dropped 26,000 bombs in Syria,
23 Pakistan, Libya, just to name a few. And I definitely don't
24 remember my colleagues in 2013 at all complaining about the
25 President, then Barack Obama, going into Syria. And I would



1 like to ask the question, then what threat did Syria have to
2 the United States? What threat did Libya have to the United
3 States during the Arab Spring, to which these leaders were
4 removed?

5 And then I would ask the question at what threat did
6 Iran have to us? Do we really need to talk about it? Do we
7 need to talk about how many times they've killed thousands
8 of Americans since 1979, from the first time they took
9 hostages in November of 1979 to the last time they attacked
10 us in June of 2025? And anybody wants to doubt that they
11 were a threat to us and an essential threat to us? Does
12 anybody doubt on that side of the aisle, does anybody doubt
13 that Iran, if or when they got a nuclear weapon, would
14 deliver it to the United States if they have the capability
15 of doing it? Does anybody deny that the fact that the
16 President was being proactive on an adversary that has been
17 chanting, "Death to America" since 1979, does anybody deny
18 that Iran was a threat to us and our service members? Or do
19 we have to remind you how many they've injured and killed
20 through their proxies and through direct action?

21 This is the first President in seven presidencies that
22 actually did something about the thorn that constantly came
23 after us. And now you criticize and you say it's illegal.
24 It's not. The same authorization is the same authorization
25 that Democrats and Republican Presidents in the past have

1 used. And thank God, we had a President with a backbone to
2 finally get rid of this murderous regime. And now we're
3 complaining about it? Remember, legally, he has to respond
4 to Congress or inform Congress in 48 hours. That has
5 happened.

6 And then within 60 to 90 days, he needs to inform
7 Congress if we're going to war and ask for specific war
8 authorities. But the President, through Article II, clearly
9 has an obligation and the powers under the Constitution to
10 defend our interests, home and abroad. And there is no
11 question he's defending our interest. No question. So what
12 is this grandstanding about? Do you think we should have
13 left the Ayatollah in place? Do you think he was a good
14 guy? Are you defending the Ayatollah now? Or aren't you
15 glad that America finally stood up and took care of this
16 murderous regime that's been sponsoring terror around the
17 world for 47 years?

18 How about we say thank you, Mr. President, for finally
19 getting rid of this nuisance, this murderer, this sponsor of
20 terror. He did the world a favor. And the world is a safer
21 place because of it. You may disagree with a lot of his
22 actions. You may disagree with some of his policies, but
23 you can't deny that this was a threat and an essential
24 growing threat to the United States. And you want to say
25 he's playing politics and you get the politics behind it,

1 Mr. Peters?

2 You guys are playing politics. You guys are the ones
3 that are grandstanding. The President's doing his job as
4 commander-in-chief, and I think at one time or next we
5 should say thank you. Thank you for being a strong leader.
6 But there's no way in God's green earth you guys can ever
7 give the President, at least President Trump, any credit.
8 Sorry.

9 Chairman Wicker: Thank you.

10 Senator Mullin: Oh, I'm out? I still got 49 seconds.
11 I got one question. Strategically speaking, Secretary
12 Colby, how is your department working with director or with
13 the defense, to -- sorry. How are you guys directly working
14 with the Department of War on strategies specifically
15 towards Russia, with Canada, or is there a strategy there?

16 Mr. Colby: Well, thanks, Senator. Actually, we're
17 working a lot with our Canadian partners. They're one of
18 the countries that really does need to step up. Canada has
19 an incredibly storied and proud military history. I always
20 point out they were in all the years of World War I and
21 World War II, I think they had the fourth largest navy at
22 the end of World War II. They had their own beach on D-Day.

23 But frankly, the Canadian Armed Forces, if you talk to
24 them, they've really kind of dismantled, particularly since
25 the end of the Cold War, even a bit before. So we're trying



1 to get more from Canada. We've actually engaged with them
2 extensively. Secretary and I met with Minister McGuinty a
3 few months ago, and we've been in constant contact --
4 continuing contact with them with a sense of where we think
5 they need to go, not only to meet NATO targets, but also for
6 homeland defense as part of NORAD, the potential for Golden
7 Dome, these other kinds of things.

8 But we're really looking very carefully at Canada to
9 make sure that they're stepping up in line with collective
10 defense and what everybody in NATO is doing.

11 Senator Mullin: Thank you.

12 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Mullin. Senator
13 Warren.

14 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So over the
15 weekend, Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu launched
16 illegal strikes against Iran. This war for regime change is
17 both unconstitutional and dangerous. Now, we've already
18 lost six service members in this war and President Trump has
19 said, "We may have casualties. That often happens in war."
20 Yesterday, in his briefing to the American people on why our
21 sons and daughters are being sent to war, Trump highlighted
22 the quality of the White House drapes that he had purchased
23 and the gold ballroom that he is building, giving us a sense
24 of what's top of mind for him.

25 Under Secretary Colby, both you and I have sworn an



1 oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States. Under
2 the Constitution, who declares war, the President or
3 Congress?

4 Mr. Colby: Congress declares war, if I understand
5 correctly.

6 Senator Warren: Thank you. You know, all three of my
7 brothers served in the military, and this is personal for
8 me. I am praying for the families who have already lost
9 loved ones, and for all of our troops that the President has
10 put in harm's way without legal justification or moral
11 justification. Donald Trump ran on lowering prices on day
12 one and on a, "Pro-peace ticket." He called himself the
13 peace President. And of course, he claims to put America
14 First.

15 So, Under Secretary Colby, do you think that America
16 First means starting another war in the Middle East?

17 Mr. Colby: Well, Senator, I would just say that the
18 administration does have a legal and moral justification,
19 and I would certainly support the idea that President Trump
20 is the President of peace. First of all, he has brokered --

21 Senator Warren: All I can say is, boy, the
22 justification sure seems to be changing every 20 minutes.
23 But could you answer the question I just asked you? And
24 that is, do you think America First means starting another
25 war in the Middle East?



1 Mr. Colby: I would say America First and peace through
2 strength are served by rolling back, as the military
3 campaign is designed to do the threats posed by Iran's very
4 large and growing missile and one-way attack drone program,
5 its navy, and of course, ensuring that it doesn't have a
6 nuclear weapon. And in fact, I think the evidence is the
7 proof of that is demonstrated by the global support for this
8 initiative.

9 Senator Warren: So you think America First means
10 starting a war anywhere, any time? You know, I'm confused
11 because you're here to discuss the Trump administration's
12 national defense strategy. And I'll quote it back to you.
13 "No longer will the department be distracted by
14 interventionism, endless wars, regime change, and nation
15 building." Interventionism: that means going to another
16 country and bombing them. Endless wars: wars that may last.
17 We don't know how long because there's no clear end point.
18 Regime change: which the President has said this is all
19 about. And nation building: evidently, the President seems
20 to think he's going to come in and build a different Iran.
21 Now is that --

22 Mr. Colby: Senator I don't --

23 Senator Warren: -- putting America first and following
24 your own foreign policy objectives?

25 Mr. Colby: I think I would characterize it



1 fundamentally differently. The defense strategy does talk
2 about the threat posed by Iran and the need to have credible
3 military options. And I don't think this is certainly, as
4 we understand from him and the goals of the military
5 campaign, this is certainly not nation building. This is
6 not going to be endless as the President, the Vice President
7 and the secretary --

8 Senator Warren: This is not, in your mind
9 interventionism?

10 Mr. Colby: I don't think this is, no. I don't think
11 that's what that, you know, nation building, endless wars.
12 That's definitely not.

13 Senator Warren: Interventionism, that's actually the
14 very first word in the Department of Defense's --

15 Mr. Colby: Interventionism is a more, I would say, you
16 know, kind of responsibility to protect or something. I
17 mean, it's obviously you know, precisely defined.

18 Senator Warren: And we didn't do this in order to try
19 to protect Israel?

20 Mr. Colby: I think that the -- well, that's one of the
21 goals. It's obviously we're serving our own interests.

22 Senator Warren: So it is interventionism. And how
23 about the endless war part?

24 Mr. Colby: Well, I don't think it's going to be an
25 endless war.



1 Senator Warren: Is there a clear goal that we will
2 know when this is over?

3 Mr. Colby: Well, the President's going to decide
4 exactly how we do it. The military campaigns have clearly
5 defined scope --

6 Senator Warren: The regime change part. Remind me
7 about that. The President, of course, has called it regime
8 change. Do you disagree with him?

9 Mr. Colby: No. I think the President has said that
10 this is an opportunity for the people of Iran to rise up and
11 overthrow their oppressors. But as he indicated, the
12 Venezuela model could be one the other day --

13 Senator Warren: And he has called on them to do that.
14 Does that sound like regime change to you?

15 Mr. Colby: I think the goals of the military,
16 obviously, allowing the Iranian people to take this matter
17 into their own hands is one of the options here, but the
18 American military campaign is got more scope and it's not an
19 endless war.

20 Senator Warren: That's great. So the Trump
21 administration first says it's going to be America First,
22 then puts out a national defense strategy and then goes to
23 war alongside Israel illegally, unconstitutionally. And
24 that is now the policy of the Trump administration: say one
25 thing in a campaign, write it down on paper, and then go do



1 whatever the hell you want. That is wrong.

2 Chairman Wicker: The time of the senator has expired.
3 Senator Schmitt.

4 Senator Schmitt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank
5 you for being here Under Secretary Colby and for your
6 service. I want to thank you for your leadership and your
7 fortitude to take on, in my view, this foreign policy blob,
8 in these entrenched experts that seemingly never go away in
9 this town, who've been continually wrong about so many
10 things over the years.

11 And I think the 2026 National Defense Strategy
12 acknowledges a bunch of things, but certainly that after the
13 Cold War ended, there was never really an adjustment,
14 whether it was trade policy or foreign policy, you know, the
15 idea was that Europe, we would help Europe get back on their
16 feet. Japan get back up on their feet with these unfair
17 trade deals, a defense umbrella that, quite frankly, Europe
18 didn't really ever pay for, and that's changing. And I
19 think that's a good -- that's a good thing.

20 And I think it reflects an urgent need on the ground
21 for our foreign policy, for disciplined realism rather than
22 bouncing around from Wilsonian pet project to Wilsonian pet
23 project, that there isn't really a strategy. I think that
24 the NDS does outline a strategy because the American people
25 are certainly concerned about the things that are happening



1 in their communities, the influx of drugs. And so when
2 people try to point out some inconsistency with taking out,
3 you know, these cartel boat runners -- I actually had a fake
4 news reporter characterize them as fishing boats.

5 But I think it also, you know, requires us to take a
6 look at our foreign aid too, and making sure it's aligned
7 with these America First principles. I want to ask you, as
8 it relates to the limited time, I think your presence at the
9 NATO ministerial meeting and the Munich Security Conference
10 thereafter, hopefully was a signal to our European allies,
11 that you're willing to engage with them and have thoughtful
12 but constructive dialogue.

13 How are you communicating to our allies this new
14 reality that in order for America to continue to be strong,
15 that they have to step up in a much more meaningful way?
16 And we've heard a lot about the 5 percent, but the 5 percent
17 can't be for pensions, right? It has to be for munitions
18 and the defense of their own continent. How are you
19 communicating that, and what's your feedback?

20 Mr. Colby: Well, thank you very much, Senator. Really
21 appreciate it. And I think you put it well, and I'd
22 actually like to go back to something if I could connect it
23 to Senator Reed's comments about the tone. I would say the
24 tone of this document is not partisan, but rather a
25 refutation of a post-Cold War. I mean, I think I'd really

1 like to stress that point, that I think during the Cold War,
2 the substance of this strategy is much more akin to what you
3 would have seen in something like a flexible response
4 document or Schlesinger or Harold Brown or Cap Weinberger
5 and of course, the secretary gesture --

6 Senator Schmitt: Wouldn't we be better off as a
7 country if in 1993 we would have had something like this?

8 Mr. Colby: I think so. I think we got a bit
9 hubristic. Well, very hubristic in some cases. And
10 frankly, that, you know, this is not saying it's only
11 Democrats. We're pointing at ourselves as well. And I
12 think part of the communication here, and this relates back
13 to Senator Reed's question as well, is to be clear.

14 And there is a -- I mean, as people point out, Bob
15 Gates went to NATO in 2011 and Panetta said, and whoever and
16 President Barack Obama said, etc. and we were politely
17 ignored because it wasn't seen as credible. And so this
18 strategy is designed to have an impact on real behavior.
19 And in order to do that, you have to break through to
20 people. And sometimes that's being pretty sharp and direct,
21 not with the point of being sharp and direct to be
22 insulting, but to actually get through to people, actually,
23 because the best friend is a one who tells you when you need
24 to change something.

25 And that gets to your question, Senator, about talking

1 to allies. I talk to the allies all the time, and I talked
2 to Europeans. Any European comes through, I talk to them
3 often privately, but I think the point of what we were
4 trying to do with the visit in Brussels and with the
5 Secretary's full support and State Department and others,
6 White House was to say, all right, I think the message has
7 been conveyed. We're obviously going to continue it. But
8 now people are no longer fighting the scenario. People are
9 willing to step up.

10 I had great meetings with the German minister of
11 defense, for instance, who is a social democrat, but he's
12 been a leading -- probably the number one figure, along with
13 the Chancellor, in raising Germany's defense spending. You
14 have Polish government of both types, obviously, you know,
15 the Scandinavian governments. So our view is we want to
16 work towards a results-oriented goal, which I think,
17 Senator, you put it really, really so well, which is common
18 sense, which I mean, there's -- you know, and I've had these
19 conversations. How does it make sense for Americans to be
20 spending 3.5, 4, 5 percent, 6 percent of GDP and wealthy
21 Europeans be spending 1 percent? That just makes no sense.

22 The minister of defense of New Zealand, who's a real
23 leader on this, she said it over the summer, you know, since
24 the Cold War, we all dismantled our militaries. We put it
25 into health care. The free ride is over. It's not that the

1 alliances are over. The way you're going to save those
2 alliances by making them relevant and equitable for
3 Americans is by rebalancing. Not only is that what we're
4 doing, that's what's happening.

5 Senator Schmitt: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 Chairman Wicker: Senator Schmitt, thank you for your
7 questions regarding the subject matter of this hearing.
8 Senator Kelly.

9 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mine too are,
10 or at least the first one, the subject matter. Secretary
11 Colby, is it correct that the administration is justifying
12 the ongoing military operation against Iran, in part because
13 of the urgent threat posed by Iran to U.S. forces in the
14 region and the perceived future threat of Iranian ballistic
15 missiles to the U.S. homeland. Yes or no?

16 Mr. Colby: From a general perspective, I wouldn't
17 comment on the legal rationale, but certainly from a
18 strategic point of view, absolutely.

19 Senator Kelly: Absolutely. So your 2026 National
20 Defense Strategy downgraded the Middle East and didn't label
21 it as a core strategic theater on the same level as the
22 Indo-Pacific and the Western Hemisphere. Is that correct?

23 Mr. Colby: I think what we said, that we were very
24 clear eyed and specific about the threat posed by Iran and
25 by its missile program, and the potential for resumption of



1 its nuclear program after Operation Midnight Hammer, and the
2 need to give the President options working with our --

3 Senator Kelly: On the core strategic theater question,
4 it was the Indo Pacific and the Western Hemisphere that
5 should be the focus.

6 Mr. Colby: The overarching focus of the American
7 military, obviously, is the homeland hemisphere and the
8 First Island Chain and the Middle East is part of that.

9 Senator Kelly: Thank you. That's how I read it. So
10 when that was drafted, did the administration believe, as it
11 claims now, that Iran was close to having a ballistic
12 missile capability that could threaten the homeland?

13 Mr. Colby: I defer to my intelligence community
14 colleagues on the specifics of that kind of question, but
15 obviously, the administration I think I can speak for the
16 administration as a whole, thinks that the Iranian missile
17 program is a very serious threat to be dealt with.

18 Senator Kelly: How about you?

19 Mr. Colby: Yeah. I think the Iranian missile threat
20 is a serious threat that needs to be dealt with.

21 Senator Kelly: So you believed that Iran was close to
22 having a ballistic missile capability that could range the
23 United States?

24 Mr. Colby: I think I'm talking about the general
25 threat of Iranian ballistic cruise missiles, one-way attack



1 drones that we're seeing right now. Exactly the --

2 Senator Kelly: Yeah. But those are different.

3 Mr. Colby: Yeah. No, I would just defer to --
4 Senator, you're asking about a specific --

5 Senator Kelly: I'm talking about something else. I'm
6 talking about a missile that exoatmospheric that could get
7 to the United States.

8 Mr. Colby: Yeah. Sorry. I'm not trying to be
9 evasive. I'm saying I think on that question, I would defer
10 to intelligence community colleagues. The threat posed by
11 Iran is not limited to any whatever the status of that is,
12 which I think would be at a classified level.

13 Senator Kelly: So it sounds like you didn't know of
14 anything that could range the United States or close to it.
15 So here's the thing, I'm trying to understand whether you
16 believe Iran can be primarily contained by our regional
17 partners, which is what you wrote a few weeks ago. Or is it
18 an imminent threat to the United States as President Trump,
19 Secretary Hegseth, and Secretary Rubio have told the
20 American people over the last few days. Can't be both.

21 Mr. Colby: Well, the strategy had in mind the
22 Operation Midnight Hammer obviously, in the past it was
23 written before Operation Epic Fury, but we fully anticipated
24 providing the President with credible military options to
25 deal with the Iranian threat, in concert with --



1 Senator Kelly: But here's the thing, Mr. Secretary,
2 none of us here heard about Iran having missile technology
3 that was that advanced. Being able to range the United
4 States or being close to obtaining a nuclear weapon. I
5 mean, the last thing we heard from the President on the
6 nuclear weapon before, you know, this war, as he calls it,
7 was the Iranian nuclear program was obliterated. That means
8 completely eliminated, gone for good. That's what
9 obliterated means.

10 And then on Saturday, this Administration started a war
11 on that basis, inconsistent with the document that I think
12 you're responsible for. And now at least six U.S. service
13 members have paid the ultimate price based on this notion
14 that Iran posed an imminent threat to the United States, to
15 the homeland and to our military, and many more are risking
16 their lives right now to eliminate a threat that six weeks
17 ago, when you published that document, you didn't really
18 believe existed.

19 Mr. Colby: Senator, I think it's demonstrably untrue
20 that the strategy didn't countenance the potential for the
21 President to use military force against Iran. In fact, it
22 appears several times --

23 Senator Kelly: Can you speak into the microphone?

24 Mr. Colby: Oh, I'm sorry, Senator, I think it's
25 demonstrably untrue that the document didn't countenance the



1 provision of credible military options for the President to
2 use force again. In fact, it specifically refers to that a
3 number of occasions. So obviously, I think the military
4 campaign that's underway Operation Epic Fury --

5 Senator Kelly: Wouldn't you think that that would be a
6 primary theater that we would be focused on in the document
7 if that threat, that imminent threat to the homeland
8 existed?

9 Mr. Colby: I think the document countenances the
10 employment by the President of military force in globally as
11 part of the strategy.

12 Senator Kelly: Well, I'm about out of time, but I
13 think it's important to say that we've seen this playbook
14 before. It's what dragged us into a war decades ago, a
15 bloody war in Iraq. And, Secretary Colby, I think if you
16 intend to avoid this mistake again, I think we got to
17 rethink about how we need to be really straight with the
18 American people, about what's going on. Thank you.

19 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator. Senator Banks.

20 Senator Banks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Securing the
21 Western hemisphere is not a distraction from deterring
22 China. Securing our own backyard enables us to project
23 power to the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Just look at Panama.
24 Secretary Colby, does the removal of Chinese companies from
25 the Canal Zone support our ability to surge forces to the



1 Pacific?

2 Mr. Colby: Thank you, Senator. I think the ability to
3 operate freely and without any hindrance through the canal
4 is absolutely essential.

5 Senator Banks: Or look at Venezuela, where the Maduro
6 regime supplied heavily discounted oil to China. The same
7 goes for Iran, by the way. How will reducing discounted oil
8 shipments from Venezuela and possibly now Iran impact China?

9 Mr. Colby: Well, Senator, thanks. I defer to my
10 colleagues, but I think one of the things we're seeing is
11 that this perception that everything was connected and that
12 these were sort of axis aligned adversaries, as the last
13 administration would put it, is actually not happening. The
14 President, through his creative diplomacy, his flexible
15 diplomacy, as well as the targeted use of force, has been
16 able to break off in key respects, even working with a
17 government that is -- obviously, Maduro has been, you know,
18 brought to justice or is being charged.

19 But we can put a lot more in there, much more compliant
20 with a reasonable conception of our interests. And I think
21 it actually is demonstrating and enlisting a lot of support
22 in the region and beyond, that's showing that, you know,
23 people I think, as Senator Scott said, people want to
24 associate with our country.

25 Senator Banks: The NDS talks about our adversaries



1 coordinating aggression across multiple theaters. If Iran
2 were no longer a threat to the U.S. and our allies, how
3 would that impact our ability to respond to coordinated
4 aggression?

5 Mr. Colby: Well, Senator, I think the degradation of
6 Iranian military powers is the goal of the campaign being
7 carried out, will certainly lessen the threat of
8 simultaneity in the Middle East and will put us in a in a
9 better position from that point of view.

10 Senator Banks: And how would that free up military
11 assets that could be assigned to INDOPACOM?

12 Mr. Colby: Well, I think if we -- and I think I have a
13 lot of confidence in our military forces that that hopefully
14 should put us in a position where, you know, Iran at a
15 minimum is not significantly back. And as I've discussed
16 with the minority members a lot, there may be a range of
17 more, you know, optimistic outcomes in terms of a
18 fundamental change in the government in the Islamic
19 Republic. But in any case, it will be significantly
20 degraded and be put in a position where our, you know, very
21 kind of our model ally Israel, which is willing and able to
22 take a lot more responsibility, our Gulf partners who are
23 doing a lot, both defensively but also increasingly more
24 assertively, some of our European allies are now moving more
25 assertively.



1 I think that's going to put us in a position where --
2 obviously, the United States will still play a very
3 important role in the Middle East needless to say, including
4 militarily -- but allow us to enable this focus on the First
5 Island Chain.

6 Senator Banks: I want to give President Trump a lot of
7 credit for his historic arms sale to Taiwan in December.
8 How do FMS cases like these contribute to Taiwan's ability
9 to assist U.S. forces in the denial mission?

10 Mr. Colby: So I think the obviously the issue of
11 Taiwan is a particularly sensitive one. And we are clear in
12 the National Defense Strategy that we are not changing or
13 seeking to change American policy or declaratory policy in
14 any way. But of course, it has been the position of the
15 United States for, you know, almost half a century to
16 provide Taiwan with weapons of a defensive character and to
17 oppose the use of violence or coercion to change the status
18 quo. And I think our policies are consistent with that.

19 Also consistent, as I spoke with the chairman about
20 earlier, with this strong and clear but quiet, I think this
21 defense strategy and approach of this administration is more
22 focused on delivering on results. And I think you could
23 favorably compare President Trump in that respect to
24 President Biden, who was very vocal in a number of ways, but
25 actually did less in terms of the ability to actually deter.



1 Senator Banks: And how important is it that Taiwan
2 pass a special defense budget to fund these types of
3 capabilities?

4 Mr. Colby: Well, I wouldn't comment specifically on
5 the issue of Taiwan, given its sensitivity or seek to
6 intrude, but I will say it is absolutely vital that our
7 allies and partners who expect our defense to do their part
8 for defense. And I think, you know, members of this
9 committee I think have been making this point very clearly.
10 And really -

11 Chairman Wicker: Senator Banks, what was the question?
12 I'm sorry, I didn't --

13 Senator Banks: Ask about Taiwan passing a special
14 defense budget to fund their defense capabilities.

15 Chairman Wicker: Thank you for that. And go ahead and
16 take the time, Mr. Secretary.

17 Mr. Colby: I was just saying, members of this
18 committee, I think are making a very similar appointment. I
19 said, without specifically addressing the issue of Taiwan or
20 etc., but in general, it's really critical that our allies
21 and partners step up to defend themselves if they expect us
22 to potentially defend them. So I think that message is
23 really important and --

24 Senator Banks: I had 17 more questions, but the
25 chairman took my time away. So with that, I yield back.



1 Chairman Wicker: One question per second. Thank you,
2 Senator Banks. Senator Kaine.

3 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4 Chairman Wicker: You've been very patient, Senator
5 Kaine.

6 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks, Mr.
7 Secretary. I don't like responding to colleagues after
8 they've left the room, but colleagues raced to other
9 committee hearings. I get that Senator Mullin asserted that
10 the angst on this side of the aisle is because we don't like
11 President Trump. He has misstated the concern. I think I
12 can speak for most of my colleagues who have concerns and
13 say, our concern is this: have we learned nothing from 25
14 years of war in the Middle East?

15 More than 14,000 U.S. troops and contractors killed,
16 more than 61,000 U.S. troops and contractors injured,
17 including one on our committee, hundreds of thousands of
18 civilian lives lost in Iraq and Afghanistan, \$8.2 trillion,
19 by estimate is what the U.S. taxpayer has paid for the wars,
20 and the necessary VA care for those who've suffered, and the
21 debt we incurred to fund the wars.

22 And so, you know, you may criticize us for raising
23 these concerns, but the nation, my Virginians, have lived
24 through repeated deployments and wars that produced very
25 little that people can see was worth that degree of

1 sacrifice. To also make some corrections, for the record,
2 the Iran deal was a was a bad deal. Well, both President
3 Trump's secretaries of defense and state suggested he stay
4 in the deal. He ignored their advice to get out of it, that
5 it was going to lead Iran to a nuclear weapon. The first
6 paragraph of the deal, Iran committed that it would never
7 seek to never seek, develop, or acquire nuclear weapons.
8 That was a forever promise that could have been enforced
9 until President Trump tore up the deal.

10 There was an assertion that President Obama took us to
11 war in Syria in 2013. No, President Obama proposed military
12 action in 2013, and Democrats forced him to bring it to the
13 Senate Foreign Relations Committee because we said, you
14 don't have the authority to wage war without a vote of
15 Congress. We have upheld this constitutional standard
16 against Democratic Presidents, and we're going to uphold it
17 pursuant to our oath against a Republican President. So
18 that's what we are worried about. Have we learned nothing?
19 We hope that this will not be a war that will lead to so
20 many casualties. But six families are already being
21 informed that their loved ones will never come home. And it
22 may well be more than that.

23 Mr. Colby, the National Defense Strategy as the policy
24 lead at the Pentagon, you play a key role in draftsmanship
25 discussion. But then it goes up the ranks and it gets



1 approved by the secretary, and it also gets approved by the
2 President. Correct?

3 Mr. Colby: Certainly, I think this it's fair to say.
4 I would say this strategy has been more extensively
5 coordinated, not only within the department, but in --

6 Senator Kaine: Just in terms of approval, this does
7 not get published on January 23 without the secretary and
8 the President saying, I'm fine with this.

9 Mr. Colby: I wouldn't get specifically into the
10 specifics. Coordination, obviously it's signed by the
11 secretary of war. It's on his statutory responsibilities.
12 But I would also say I would assert that this is the most
13 extensively coordinated defense strategy --

14 Senator Kaine: So the secretary of war is not going to
15 issue it unless the President agrees. Now, this was January
16 23, six weeks ago.

17 Mr. Colby: I would say we don't do anything, and
18 certainly not something as significant as this without being
19 aligned with the President. We pay a lot of attention to
20 that.

21 Senator Kaine: So you've agreed with me and taken 10
22 seconds of my time to do so. So, I mean, the National
23 Defense Strategy no longer will the department be distracted
24 by interventionism, endless wars, regime change, and nation
25 building, Venezuela and Iran. I'm not going to ask you



1 whether or not that's interventionism, because I'm not going
2 to embarrass you by making you try to say that it's not.

3 Mr. Colby: I already did with Senator Warren --

4 Senator Kaine: It's interventionism. It's
5 interventionism. Second, we hope it's not an endless war,
6 but we don't know how in particular Iran's going to go.
7 Third is arresting Maduro and killing the Ayatollah, is that
8 regime change?

9 Mr. Colby: Senator, I don't think the Venezuela -- I
10 think the Venezuela operation, Operation Absolute Resolve is
11 a perfect example of how we're not getting --

12 Senator Kaine: Just answer my question.

13 Mr. Colby: And I think, Senator, if I may respond
14 earlier, I think absolutely we have learned the lessons.
15 And I thought Secretary Hegseth expressed it very well --

16 Senator Kaine: Is the arrest of a foreign leader and
17 the assassination of another, is that regime change?
18 Contrary to what you said six weeks ago in the document?

19 Mr. Colby: Well, what I would say is that both
20 operations have learned the precise lessons that you're
21 talking about and that --

22 Senator Kaine: Is it regime change? And you can
23 answer that question. Do you change a regime when you
24 arrest a President --

25 Mr. Colby: Depends on your perception of the issue, I



1 mean, the issue --

2 Senator Kaine: I mean, how do you -- how do you --

3 Mr. Colby: I don't know. I don't know. I think it's
4 an interesting debate. But I think in the case of
5 Venezuela, there's been a change in the government's
6 behavior.

7 Senator Kaine: Just say then, okay, you are
8 uncomfortable having your own words read to you, and you're
9 uncomfortable saying that the

10 Mr. Colby: I'm not uncomfortable, Senator.

11 Senator Kaine: -- assassination of a leader and the
12 arrest of a leader --

13 Mr. Colby: I'm perfectly comfortable with having this
14 discussion.

15 Senator Kaine: -- you won't acknowledge that's regime
16 change. I think that's very instructive to those listening.
17 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

18 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator
19 Sullivan.

20 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr.
21 Undersecretary, good to see you. I want to thank you. I
22 think we've had a good, discussion back and forth on coming
23 to my office, meeting with other senators, emailing,
24 texting. I appreciate that input from you guys. You guys
25 get input from us. I think it's -- I think it helps both



1 sides. So I want to thank you for that. I think it's
2 important and I just encourage you to keep it up. So I
3 appreciate that very much.

4 Look, just to answer Senator Kaine a little bit, you
5 know, my view, Iran has been at war with us for like almost
6 50 years. They've killed and wounded thousands of service
7 members, starting with the Beirut bombing, the Khobar
8 Towers, the IEDs that were very sophisticated, that General
9 Soleimani, the Quds Force commander. They built those.
10 They provided them to Iraqi Shia militias, killed over 600
11 American service members, wounded over 2000.

12 And I was in a top-secret hearing with General Dunford,
13 and I asked him a question, "Have we lost deterrence against
14 Iran? They're killing our guys everywhere. They're not
15 afraid." And he said, "We've lost deterrence. They feel
16 they can kill Americans at will with no consequence." So to
17 my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, wake up. This
18 country's been at war with us for almost a half century.
19 And they've killed thousands and wounded thousands of our
20 best and brightest.

21 By the way, I was in another classified hearing October
22 of 2024, all the top intel officials, the FBI director, 100
23 U.S. senators about election interference, one month before
24 the 2024 elections. And I directly asked the FBI director,
25 "Are the Iranians still trying to kill President Trump?" A



1 month before the election, the FBI director asked him, you
2 want to talk about election interference? That's what this
3 was about, trying to kill the lead candidate. He looked at
4 me, "Senator, yes, Iran is still -- Iran's leadership is
5 still trying to kill the President of the United States."

6 So, again, they've been at war with us. And I think,
7 what is happening now is reestablishing deterrence and the
8 allies that we have in the Middle East. And by the way,
9 it's been a bipartisan goal of every President to make sure
10 the Iranians don't get nukes and don't get ballistic
11 missiles. And that's what the President and our brave
12 troops are undertaking right now. Do you have a comment on
13 that?

14 Mr. Colby: Well, thanks, Senator. I agree with
15 everything you said. I mean, in terms of the threat that
16 they posed -- in fact, I mean, I know you're a Marine. My
17 uncle, who was here with me a year ago for my nomination was
18 a Marine actually in Beirut for the barracks and was almost
19 killed. He was missing for a few days. So I think I mean,
20 that's less than a lot of people have suffered --

21 Senator Sullivan: Over 230 Marines I think 16
22 soldiers, killed them all.

23 Mr. Colby: Fully agreed, and I think we've obviously
24 brought in the lessons. And, as the President said, you
25 know, he's not going to have the yips, as I think he put it



1 yesterday. We're still going to learn the lessons of the
2 last 25 years and not make the same mistakes. But I think
3 that's, you know -- in Operation Absolute Resolve, we've
4 seen the results that have been favorable. And we're in the
5 early -- I mean something I just really stressed without
6 consuming your time, sir, but it's just we are at the
7 earliest stages of this campaign. So I'll just say that.

8 Senator Sullivan: No, it's dangerous. There's no
9 doubt about it. Let me ask, there's been some articles
10 about munitions and how we're running short of munitions. I
11 don't know if that's true. I'm just reading the press. How
12 are we doing on our Defense Industrial Base? And do you
13 want to send a message to any other countries around the
14 world who might be reading, "Hey, America is low on
15 munitions. Maybe it's our time to move on Taiwan," or
16 something like that.

17 Do you want to send a message here in a public hearing?
18 Like, "Don't think about it. We're not low on munitions."
19 Where are we on that? Where are we on the industrial base?
20 And do you want to send a clear message to anyone else who
21 might be trying to undertake some mischief?

22 Mr. Colby: Absolutely. I think our President has got
23 the will and resolve to use the American military. He's not
24 afraid of it, I would say. You know, he spoke on the issue
25 yesterday of munitions, and I'll get back to that in a



1 second. But I would say I know for a fact that our
2 potential opponents are looking at the prowess of the joint
3 force under President Trump and Secretary Hegseth's
4 leadership, and they are intimidated, and they're right to
5 be intimidated.

6 We have a President with the resolve, and the
7 Department of War is giving him the ability to do so with
8 this strategy, but especially a \$1.5 trillion budget. I
9 know you've been a leader on that, sir. An overall national
10 mobilization of our defense industrial base and allies who
11 are actually stepping up.

12 Senator Sullivan: And are we are we making progress on
13 the industrial based munitions.

14 Mr. Colby: We are.

15 Senator Sullivan: And should our potential adversaries
16 around the world not read these articles about we're running
17 low on munitions and think it's time to --

18 Mr. Colby: Absolutely. I think we need to work hard
19 on --

20 Senator Sullivan: -- maybe move on Taiwan?

21 Mr. Colby: Sorry, excuse me to interrupt, but I think
22 we need to work hard on the Defense Industrial Base. But
23 nobody should get the wrong impression. We're ahead of the
24 problem.

25 Senator Sullivan: Good. I'm going to submit questions



1 for the record, because I don't want to go over my time, Mr.
2 Chairman, but I appreciate your visit to Alaska. We have
3 ICEX going on up there with senior Navy officials this
4 coming week. We had the top, you know, the chief of staff
5 of the army up there. I visited with him and his
6 leadership. So a lot of military up in the most strategic
7 place in the world. And I look forward to submitting
8 records on the Arctic. Thank you.

9 [The information referred to follows:]

10 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Sullivan. The Secretary pointed out early in this hearing that his first visit after confirmation was in Alaska. Senator Gillibrand.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you for appearing. The reason why so many people on this side of the aisle are so concerned, it's not that, as Senator Sullivan said, that we don't know that Iran is an enemy, that Iran has conducted so many terror attacks against the United States through its proxies, against our allies, multiple times, multiple years over many, many decades. There is no confusion there. There is no love lost for the Ayatollah, and we are grateful for the strategic capability of the bravest men in the world -- bravest men and women in the world. In our armed services, they can do and execute any mission we give them with precision, with extraordinary bravery and courage, and they will serve, regardless of what President Trump, what mission he sends them on.

Now, the reason why there is so much consternation is



1 because President Trump has not given us a clear reason why
2 he is in Iran. If he wants to declare war on Iran, that is
3 the job and responsibility of Congress under the
4 Constitution. So he is subverting our authority in every
5 respect. Second, he's had a mixed message. He's talked
6 about regime change. The secretary of defense has talked
7 about regime change. He's talked about take out the
8 missiles. He's talked about take out the explosives, take
9 out the centrifuges and take out the capacity to create
10 nuclear weapons. And he's used these messaging over many,
11 many instances.

12 And so we are rightly concerned that President Trump
13 neither has the clarity or disposition to execute a mission
14 that he feels is for the defense of America, because we've
15 not heard that. We've not heard how this is an exigent
16 circumstance where he must defend America. So from a policy
17 perspective, since you are the undersecretary of defense for
18 policy, do you not agree that President Trump should be
19 coming to Congress asking for an authorization for use of
20 military force?

21 Mr. Colby: Thank you. Senator, I defer to my
22 colleagues, Office of General Counsel, and others in terms
23 of the legal requirements. I do think that the military
24 campaign that the President has directed does have clear
25 goals. It's the destruction or degradation of the Iranian

1 ballistic missile force and production capacity, as well as
2 one-way attack drones and the Iranian navy. And of course,
3 always preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. My
4 understanding, and not speaking for the President in any
5 way, but just listening extremely closely to him, is that he
6 has indicated or stated that this is a unique, historic
7 opportunity for the Iranian people to take matters into
8 their own hands. The fact is that there has been
9 substantial degradation in the leadership of the Islamic
10 Republic. And as you rightly say, Senator, that's no tears
11 anywhere around here imputed. But I think the goals of the
12 military campaign that he himself has directed are indeed
13 clear.

14 Senator Gillibrand: But those goals are ones that
15 should be directed by Congress because they are declarations
16 of war. And if he is indeed interested in, "America is
17 backing you with overwhelming strength and devastating
18 force," and Secretary Hegseth, "All I want is freedom for
19 the people," then you should have come to Congress first.
20 That is not an exigent circumstance where we must defend the
21 United States. His only authority under the Constitution is
22 to protect America if they are being attacked or imminently
23 going to be attacked.

24 And so we believe that the American people have a right
25 to know if we are going to get involved in a war. They have



1 a right to be part of it through their representatives,
2 Congress, their senators, their House members, to decide
3 whether it's in America's best interest to go to war. And
4 the last time I was in New York, what New Yorkers want to
5 talk about is the cost of groceries, the cost of housing,
6 the cost of transportation, the cost of medicine. And they
7 voted specifically for non-intervention throughout this
8 country. They voted for lowering costs, not forever wars.
9 Those were promises of the Trump administration getting
10 elected.

11 And so we expect that when this country decides to go
12 to war, where our citizens will arguably be vulnerable to
13 attack whether they live abroad or they're serving in the
14 military, that we can use our voices to represent our people
15 and decide whether we will authorize the use of military
16 force by the President. He owes it to the American people
17 to go through us, to ask to go to war.

18 Mr. Colby: Senator, obviously, on the specific legal
19 issues, I defer. But I know that the leadership of the
20 administration is going to come this afternoon and brief you
21 and engage with Congress. So I know how important -- I know
22 Secretary Rubio is here. I believe Secretary Hegseth as
23 well, the chairman. So exactly what those conversations are
24 going to be, I'm sure you'll get detailed answers to your
25 questions.



1 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand. We
3 have Senator Rosen and then Senator Duckworth.

4 Senator Rosen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking
5 Member Reed, thank you for holding this hearing. I also
6 first want to take a moment to share my sorrow for our
7 service members killed and wounded in action over the past
8 few days. I especially want to express my sorrow and
9 gratitude to their families, and we must always be sure that
10 their sacrifice will not be forgotten.

11 And I've always said that we can never allow Iran to
12 get a nuclear weapon, and that they're the number one state
13 sponsor of terror around the globe with the blood of
14 American service members, Israelis, and countless others on
15 their hands. They have oppressed their own people for
16 decades. Those same people are rightly celebrating what
17 could be the end of the reign of terror. And so, like so
18 many others, I'm glad the Supreme Leader is dead. I believe
19 the world is better off without him.

20 But the President's past approach to armed conflict and
21 his administration's history of repeatedly withholding
22 information and misleading Congress, raised concerns that he
23 may be leading us into another protracted Middle East
24 conflict without clear objectives, without presented
25 evidence that an Iranian attack was imminent and without,



1 Senator Gillibrand said, authorization from Congress.
2 Operation Epic Fury also appears to stand in contrast to the
3 regional priorities of the National Defense Strategy that
4 we're here to discuss today, and to Secretary Colby's own
5 stated belief that the United States must shift focus from
6 the Middle East. And so I hope today, this hearing will
7 provide some clarity.

8 So, Secretary Colby, I'm going to move on and talk
9 about cyber strategy. Cyber capability is integral to the
10 success of all of our military operations. We're seeing it
11 right now with Operation Epic Fury. Military power is no
12 longer just about bombs, bullets. Cyber has evolved into a
13 fully integrated domain of warfare. So now more than ever,
14 we need a cyber workforce equipped with the expertise to
15 defend our networks, to execute offensive operations in a
16 rapidly changing battle space, to achieve America's national
17 security objectives. The domain has shifted. We can't
18 fight today's digital wars with outdated and inflexible
19 personnel structure.

20 However, the NDS sparingly mentioned cyber. I'm
21 surprised at how little emphasis has been placed on cyber as
22 compared to other capabilities discussed. It does not
23 engender much confidence that cyber is being treated with
24 the necessary respect and understanding of its significance
25 in every area that we engage in. I'm not sure it's an



1 urgency or a priority for this administration. So why does
2 the strategy fail to prioritize offensive and defensive
3 cyber capabilities required for addressing today's conflict
4 in the cyber environment? And does the Department of
5 Defense believe our digital infrastructure can survive a
6 multi theater war without focused investment in these
7 critical domains?

8 Mr. Colby: Well, thanks, Senator. I just reject the
9 characterization that we're not super focused on cyber. We
10 are. And I'd be happy to go into it in the closed hearing.
11 We have a fantastic -- in my organization, we have a
12 fantastic assistant secretary for cyber, I believe used to
13 work on this committee, Katie Sutton, and she's leading a
14 real effort on applying the strategic principles to cyber.
15 One of the points is that we didn't want to kind of just
16 repeat things that have already been said a lot of time, but
17 rather the purpose of the strategy, and I think Senator
18 Fischer was saying this is more of a living kind of
19 heuristic to apply to drive change in the organization.

20 So we don't need to -- and similarly with the nuclear
21 issue, we don't need to solve every particular problem
22 within a domain or area, but rather we want to provide a
23 framework that then creative people like Ms. Sutton can then
24 go and drive along with General Hartman, who's now the
25 CYBERCOM commander, as well as General Rudd, if confirmed.



1 So we see very much that cyber is absolutely critical. saw
2 it in Operation Absolute Resolve. You're seeing with in
3 Operation Epic Fury, I think the chairman talked about that.
4 The way we see cyber is elemental and inextricably linked
5 with the success of the joint force across the board.

6 Senator Rosen: We need to continue to prioritize that.
7 I think it is foundational.

8 Mr. Colby: Absolutely.

9 Senator Rosen: I want to talk about quickly, the
10 withdrawal from Syria and the ISIS threat. The U.S. began
11 withdrawing troops out of the largest base in northeastern
12 Syria last month. Appears to be part of the complete
13 withdrawal from the country. I was pleased to see Syrian
14 government join the defeat ISIS campaign. We've seen
15 repeated ISIS attacks over the last several months,
16 including one in December, resulted in the death of two U.S.
17 soldiers and a civilian interpreter, as well as a breakout
18 of up to 20,000 ISIS affiliated individuals from Al-Hawl.

19 So does the department intend to withdraw all U.S.
20 forces from Syria? And does the department view ISIS in
21 Syria as a threat to U.S. interests?

22 Mr. Colby: Well, I won't speak specifically about some
23 of those issues, just in the open hearing, but I'll say we
24 take very seriously from the President and the Secretary on
25 down, the need to sustain a long term counterterrorism



1 fight. And that's encompassed in the strategy. And of
2 course, you've seen military operations against ISIS
3 recently. And we have a political strategy in Syria being
4 led, obviously, by the State Department and others.

5 Senator Rosen: Thank you. I'll be interested to hear,
6 I'll take this off the record, if you consider the breakout
7 from the camps with tens of thousands of ISIS affiliated
8 individuals a threat to U.S. national security. Thank you,
9 Mr. Chairman.

10 Chairman Wicker: Senator Rosen, do you intend to ask
11 the next to the last question you asked in the classified
12 session? I think we might we might get an answer there.
13 Senator Duckworth.

14 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This
15 week's operations against Iran and Trump's obsession with
16 military adventurism shows a huge gap between his promises
17 to get America out of foreign wars and his actions. This
18 illegal military campaign against Iran has resulted in the
19 deaths of service members so far, along with the serious
20 injury of others. It puts a target on the back of every
21 American in the Middle East. And it has no clear end state
22 other than vague promises about the freedom of the Iranian
23 people.

24 Trump claims this was necessary to prevent imminent
25 threats against Americans, but he has failed to present a



1 shred of legitimate evidence. And this is a pattern between
2 Iran. Venezuela strikes at the Caribbean Sea, deployments
3 to American cities, threats to Greenland, and the way he's
4 treating our NATO allies. Trump is creating more chaos than
5 he's eliminating and distracting and exhausting our military
6 in the process. He insists on fabricating excuses to push
7 our military into wars of choice, his choice, instead of
8 preparing for potential future crises that could have real
9 impacts on Americans at home and abroad.

10 We're here to talk about the NDS. So, Mr. Colby, I
11 want to talk about our role as a Pacific nation. Every day,
12 flashpoints threaten to spill over into war in a region of
13 core importance to the United States, the Indo-Pacific. You
14 and I have had many conversations about this region. I want
15 to make something clear: we are a Pacific nation. Securing
16 Americans requires securing the Pacific, where hundreds of
17 thousands of Americans live and work and millions more
18 depend on peace for their livelihoods.

19 Five U.S. states and three U.S. territories are either
20 in or along the Pacific Ocean. In fact, the only veterans
21 affairs hospital outside of the United States is in the
22 Philippines because so many American veterans call it home.
23 And as the NDS rightfully points out, the American economy
24 is powered by key trade and energy routes in the Pacific.
25 But there are very real signs that the People's Republic of



1 China is exploiting Trump's adventurism to threaten all of
2 this. Just in the last three months, there have been at
3 least four flashpoints in the PRC across the region.

4 In February alone, U.S. and Chinese fighter jets
5 engaged in a standoff near South Korea. And in the South
6 China Sea, the Philippine Coast Guard claimed that the PRC
7 jammed their internet access, the first time their
8 communications have been disrupted. To show what Americans
9 might lose if this administration gets a crisis in the Indo-
10 Pacific, I want to discuss with you just one example out of
11 dozens of possible regional flashpoints, the disputed
12 islands on the western side of the Philippines.

13 Mr. Colby, do you agree that one of DoDs major
14 decisions in the initial hours of any crisis will be
15 coordinating with the State Department and local nations on
16 how to deploy the military to ensure the safety of American
17 families, including arranging a noncombatant evacuation, if
18 necessary, anywhere in the world?

19 Mr. Colby: I do, and I actually was doing that in the
20 middle of the night last night. So yes.

21 Senator Duckworth: Okay. In the case of a flare up
22 involving the Philippines, more than 750,000 Americans,
23 three quarters of a million people are living in the
24 country, and they would be caught in the crossfire. And
25 getting them out would involve coordination across as many



1 as six countries' air spaces across Southeast Asia. Mr.
2 Colby, do you agree that DoD would need to make quick
3 decisions about how our military should be used to protect
4 access routes, sites, or assets key to our global and
5 domestic economy?

6 Mr. Colby: I do, Senator, and if I could just briefly
7 say, I think the U.S.-Philippines relationship and alliance
8 is especially critical. And I think we've made tremendous
9 progress over the last year.

10 Senator Duckworth: Yes, we can. A conflict in the
11 western side of the Philippines in the South China Sea,
12 could disrupt as much as one third of global maritime trade,
13 especially supplies of oil, gas, electronics, and
14 agricultural goods that Americans depend on generating
15 economic catastrophe for Americans at home. There's a clear
16 danger to this administration's failure to prepare for
17 crisis in this region that is essential to American
18 prosperity.

19 If the U.S. isn't prepared, flinches, or delays, the
20 response to PRC could exploit it. We have to be ready right
21 away, but that requires focus on preparation. And it can't
22 be done -- it can't be done when the Indo-Pacific is not a
23 top priority, and it can't be done when President Trump
24 insists on illegally and recklessly using our military to
25 generate chaos around the world.



1 If we continue to strain our military with wars of
2 choice all over the world and make our enemies doubt whether
3 we will defend our interests in the Pacific, we will all
4 lose. And I cannot emphasize to you how important it is
5 that we continue to focus on the Indo-Pacific.

6 Mr. Colby: Thank you, Senator. Needless to say, I
7 disagree with your characterization of the President. In
8 the limited time, I'll stress that that is exactly why we
9 are focused on your points in the Indo-Pacific. I
10 completely agree with. And that is exactly why it is the
11 priority and I am personally focused. The secretary I know
12 is personally focused. Obviously, people like Admiral
13 Paparo personally focused on watching things very carefully
14 and operating from a position of strong and clear, but quiet
15 and very close alignment with our allies and partners in the
16 region.

17 My first trip was to Korea and Japan. My first call, I
18 believe, is as on Operation Epic Fury was the Minister of
19 Defense of the Philippines -- Secretary of Defense of the
20 Philippines. So we are laser-focused on the First Island
21 Chain.

22 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. I yield back, Mr.
23 Chairman.

24 Chairman Wicker: Senator Duckworth, thank you for
25 ending our public hearing with a question about the subject



1 matter of this hearing. It is 11:36. The committee will
2 reconvene in the Senate SCIF in precisely 15 minutes. We're
3 adjourned.

4 [Whereupon, at 11:36 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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