Statement of David J. Berteau
Before the Senate Armed Services Committee
On Defense Mobilization for the 21st Century
March 6, 2025

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, members of the committee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to talk about Defense Mobilization in the 21st Century. I'm David Berteau, President and CEO of the Professional Services Council, but I appear before you today in my personal capacity. I have a bit of history on this topic, and my comments and suggestions today are my personal views.

Oftentimes, the starting point for discussion about defense mobilization is our American experience during World War II. The might of industry was harnessed to defeat the Axis powers and secure peace. Much has been written about that, and I suspect that the committee is familiar with some of the historical lessons. I can go into some of those during questions, if you desire.

Cold War Mobilization Planning (1981-1989)

Let's look at a more recent period, the mobilization plans and preparations during the Reagan buildup at the height of the Cold War. I was working at the center of that buildup for Defense Secretaries Weinberger and Carlucci, and I draw some of the lessons from that time that may be relevant for today.

The Reagan buildup during the 1980s was driven by the need to counter the Soviet threat in Europe. We built plans for surge in the event of conflict and for mobilization in the event of protracted conflict. Importantly, the Department of Defense programmed money—and included it in the President's budget requests—to support those plans. Because we had a solid, programmatic basis for those funding requests, Congress appropriated funds in the billions of dollars.

How did we justify that? The executive and legislative branches held a shared view on the fundamental threat: a Soviet invasion of central Europe through a geographic feature known as the Fulda Gap in Germany. We had a clear understanding of Soviet forces, capability, and intent. We built our force structure to respond to that threat. We exercised, not on paper, but in the real world-- deploying, sustaining, and training U.S. armed forces to demonstrate our ability to respond to an invasion. These exercises enabled us clearly to identify shortfalls in weapon systems, munitions, material, logistics and support (including port capability on both sides of the Atlantic), personnel, and training. We worked to address those shortfalls through investments in excess capacity in manufacturing and production, in stockpiling parts and supplies, and in aligning repair cycle times with crew training cycles. We bought, assembled, and forward deployed six army divisions worth of material, equipment, and ammunition. Congress funded these efforts because we had clear requirements that were tied to actual operational plans and scenarios. Much of the funding would also cover our needs for what we called "leaser included cases," meaning wars of smaller magnitude than the Soviet invasion of Europe.

Today, it is much harder for us to replicate what we did in the 1980s. The threats are broader, deeper, and vastly more complicated, including cyber- and space-based threats that are unconstrained by geography. The basis for devising requirements is not a single overwhelmingly prominent scenario against which we would plan for surge and mobilization. Instead, we develop a range of sometimes redundant, sometimes overly specific requirements based on multiple scenarios. Yet to my knowledge, DoD does not have a set of scenarios on which everyone agrees we should base the demand, the needs, the requirements, for near-term surge in the event of conflict and longer-term mobilization for protracted conflict.

In other words, the ***first lesson*** from Cold War mobilization plans in the 1980s is **the need for a comprehensive and agreed-upon set of scenarios on which to base those requirements.** These scenarios must include the full panoply of threats.

The ***second lesson*** of my Cold War experience is that **demonstrated capability is the surest form of deterrence.** It is vital to have more than just paper plans in place. In those days, we demonstrated, with real world exercises and deployments, the capability to deliver on those plans. Of course, those demonstrations might fall short of what we really needed in some areas, and I suspect the Soviets could see that as well as we could. However, the best way to justify the necessary expenditures to address shortfalls was to prove them. That's what annual exercises did.

The ***third lesson*** is the **fundamental need for the government to partner with industry.** That partnership must include long-term contracts, including stable designs that can maximize production rates in parallel with the ability to incorporate innovations and new systems and processes. Based on requirements, DoD must identify and fund needed excess capacity. This partnership relies on mutual trust, with each partner living up to its contractual commitments, including timely payment of invoices.

The ***fourth lesson*** is the **essential importance of allies and partners around the world.** Those partnerships depend upon being able to train, exercise, and ultimately fight together. There is no substitute in this area for a common set of assumptions about scenarios and for actual real-world practice.

The ***fifth lesson***, one to which we paid little attention at the time, is that **mobilization is far more than a Defense Department undertaking.** True national mobilization, such as America has only experienced twice in our history, involves the entire national economy. In my memory, DoD just assumed that would happen. We never actually practiced it.

Lessons for Today

What do those lessons mean for today and the coming decade?

Today's threats are different, more diverse, and harder to respond to. They include space and cyber threats and asymmetric responses to the deployment, use, and sustainment of U.S. and allied forces. In a report to DoD in 2012, I studied the force posture requirements of the so-called "pivot to Asia," and America was not then-and I suspect is not today—ready to sustain a long-term conflict across the Pacific. Complications might well arise in the form of conflict in Europe, on the Korean peninsula, in the Middle East, or elsewhere.

To me, the most important task that I draw from those lessons is that the nation needs a clearer understanding of what mobilization requires. What are the demands? What happens if we don't meet them?

I suggest that this Committee immediately require DoD to undertake a comprehensive mobilization wargame, one that assumes the full array of current and emerging threats, including truly contested logistics in theater and around the world. The Committee could require that the output of that wargame be a comprehensive, prioritized summary of needs that are more than simply a list of stockpiled munitions or increased production rates from weapon systems. The list of needs should also include requirements for logistics and support, fuel resupply, sustainment and repair, operational flexibility in theater, personnel and training, and the impact of attrition from enemy forces.

The list of needs should also address steps needed to maximize the integration of government and industry. Among those needs are improvements in the DoD acquisition system for all companies and a focus on outcomes, including faster times to delivery of results.

I suggest that the Committee direct such an undertaking be done now, with the results provided to the Committee in time to incorporate into conference negotiations for the final FY 26 National Defense Authorization Act. That timetable can help ensure your ability to respond in this next bill rather than waiting another year.

Chairman Wicker, Senator Reed, I think you again for the opportunity to join you today. I have much more that I'd like to cover, and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.