

Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee

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Thursday, January 25, 2018  
Dirksen Senate Office Building

I am grateful for the opportunity to come before this committee to discuss the national security challenges facing our country. I am particularly honored to testify alongside Secretaries Kissinger and Shultz, two of our nation's leading statesmen. I also want to thank Chairman McCain and Ranking Member Reed for their leadership and to wish Chairman McCain well in his current fight.

This hearing examines how policymakers can execute a coherent strategy to address the threats facing the United States. Unfortunately, the lack of consistency in recent U.S. foreign policy has created uncertainty about America's role in the world. According to a survey published by the Pew Research Center on June 26, 2017, global confidence in the U.S. president fell from 64% to 22% in just one year. Nature abhors a vacuum, so if our competitors believe that the United States is stepping back, they will step forward.

We are already seeing concerning signs about the loss of American leadership. A few months ago, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong came to Washington and warned that his counterparts might decide, "I want to be friends with both the U.S. and the Chinese—and the Chinese are ready, and I'll start with them." We must choose whether the United States will accept the mantle of global leadership or cede that responsibility. For my part, I believe it is critical that the United States stay actively engaged to protect our interests around the globe.

Regaining confidence in the United States will require a clear and consistent approach to the challenges we face. In this regard, I find parts of the recently released National Security and Defense Strategies refreshing. The National Security Strategy does not mince words about the challenges posed by China and Russia. The National Defense Strategy makes its top priority "the reemergence of long-term, strategic competition" with these states. This message was amplified by Secretary Mattis's comment last week that "Great power competition, not terrorism, is now the primary focus of U.S. national security."

Inconsistencies lie, however, in the difference between the administration's words and deeds. Thus far, the administration's approach to both China and Russia has been mixed. Under Xi Jinping, China appears to be embracing authoritarian mercantilism. Beijing's growing economic and military might have enabled greater assertiveness in the South China Sea, more coercive practices against Taiwan, and efforts to restructure geostrategic relationships across the Eurasian continent. In my view, the administration missed a golden opportunity to push back against China's destabilizing activities when the President went to Beijing last fall.

Russia is far less capable than China, but its interference in the U.S. elections and its activities in Eastern Europe are no less serious. Once again, however, the administration has been far too hesitant to call out Russia's efforts to undermine democracy both at home and abroad.

Despite our ongoing efforts, terrorist groups, such as ISIS, will continue to present a threat to the United States so long as the root causes of terrorism remain. Terrorism is fed by youth bulges, lack of opportunity, lack of women's empowerment, lack of political legitimacy, ethnic strife, and sectarian rivalry. We will have to continue to manage the threat from ISIS and other terror groups by addressing these underlying dynamics while also upholding our core values and principles.

The final set of challenges comes from rogue states. Although the nuclear deal with Iran has limited Tehran's nuclear capabilities, Iran continues to threaten regional security. I believe that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action should have been followed by a series of efforts to force Iran to cease other types of cancerous behavior, such as support for terrorism. There is more work to be done in this regard, and I urge the administration and members of Congress not to overlook this equally necessary approach toward Iran.

North Korea also embraces an array of destabilizing activities. The prospect that Kim Jong-un might be able to launch a nuclear-armed missile against the continental United States requires renewed cooperation with South Korea, Japan, and others. I believe that deterrence and containment are the best approach, as long as they are executed in coordination with our allies.

These challenges are real, but none yet rise to the level of an existential threat. An existential threat requires not only the capability to threaten our survival, but also the intent to carry out that threat. Although China and Russia are the two most capable competitors we face at present, I do not believe that they presently possess that intent, and it should be our goal to dissuade them from doing so. Iran, North Korea, and terrorist groups may desire to undermine our system, but they do not yet have the capability to threaten our way of life.

Even without an existential threat to our nation, we cannot sit idle while our competitors advance. We must prioritize the threats we face and then devote attention and resources appropriately. The National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy set forth China and Russia as the top tier concerns, but it remains to be seen whether the administration is capable of working with Congress to pass a defense budget that reflects this prioritization. Such an effort will be critical to the United States' strategic standing.

We must also engage more deeply with our allies and partners. President Eisenhower once noted, "We could be the wealthiest and the most mighty nation and still lose the battle of the world if we do not help our world neighbors protect their freedom and advance their social and economic progress." This is as true now as it was then, and we must be vigilant that this basic underpinning of our national security is not lost to the forces of isolationism.

It also is unclear whether the President himself will support the approach that his administration has identified. Although the National Security Strategy discusses the importance of "pursuit of shared interests, values, and aspirations," the President has at times undermined these concepts.

My view is that the United States must maintain a leadership role in the world both in word and deed. The United States—along with its allies and partners—has the strength, wisdom, and

experience to lead. The world needs a renewed U.S. commitment to global security, prosperity, and values. The time is now for our leaders to take on the mantle of leadership, and I look forward to discussing with you how the United States might do so.