



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

## TESTIMONY

### **STATEMENT BEFORE THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A FUTURE NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY**

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Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for your invitation to appear before you today to discuss the National Defense Strategy.

This is a vitally important topic. In recent years, it has become apparent that we are living in a world characterized by the reality of great-power competition and the growing possibility of great-power war. At the same time, the United States faces increasingly capable regional rogues, such as North Korea and Iran, which possess or are developing nuclear weapons and the ability to deliver them to great distances. We also face the need, today and into the future, to wage a global counterinsurgency campaign against jihadist terrorist groups. At the same time, it has become painfully obvious that the United States possesses limited resources – or more accurately limited political will to muster the resources – to meet this increasingly competitive environment.

The National Defense Strategy can serve as a powerful tool to focus and organize the Department of Defense to ensure that the United States maintains and bolsters its competitive advantages in an increasingly challenging environment.

I would first like to discuss six topics that the NDS should address, and conclude with one topic that undergirds them all.

*First, the NDS should address the threats and challenges that the United States faces and determine the priority for addressing them.*

As I noted at the outset, we find ourselves today once again in a period of great-power competition with an increasing possibility of great-power war. It is the most consequential threat that we face, and failure to deter and prepare adequately for it would have dire consequences for the United States, our allies, and the global order. Because of that, I believe that preparing for great-power competition and conflict should have the highest priority.

At the same time, we face increasingly capable regional foes, to include North Korea and Iran. We need to stress test our forces against these threats.

And finally, now and for the foreseeable future, we will need to wage a global counterinsurgency campaign against jihadist terrorist groups. We need to acknowledge that reality and plan accordingly.

*Second, the NDS should provide both a global and regional look at U.S. defense strategy and set priorities there.*

The United States is a global power, with interests that span the world. Moreover, we face competitors who are active not only in their home regions, but also far beyond them as well. China is not only building up its military in the Western Pacific, but is also active in the Middle East and Africa. Russia is not only using force in Ukraine, but also in Syria. That having been said, not all regions carry the same strategic weight.. Asia's strategic weight continues to grow, and it is increasingly the locus of global economic, military, and political activity. In my view, it is the most consequential region. Europe is also extremely important. Its strategic salience has grown as threats to it, and to American interests there, have increased. And the United States cannot afford to ignore the Middle East, however much some may want to. History shows vividly that failure to address terrorism and instability far from our shores will eventually lead to those very same problems being visited on us at home.

*Third, the NDS should provide focus on spending priorities on readiness, force size, and modernization.*

The readiness deficiencies of the U.S. armed forces are on stark display on an all-too-regular basis, and Secretary of Defense Mattis justifiably made improving readiness his first priority. However, it has also become obvious that the Navy and Air Force are also smaller than is prudent in an increasingly competitive environment. And our forces are also in dire need of modernization after a long hiatus. While the United States was focused on defeating insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia and China were

focused on acquiring capabilities to defeat us. As a result, we find ourselves a step behind in a number of key warfighting areas.

*Fourth, the NDS should balance the need to fight and win wars with the need to deter and compete in peacetime.*

We must prepare for both the reality of great-power competition and the increasing possibility of great-power war. One manifestation of the former is the development and refinement by China and Russia of approaches to compete with us below the threshold that they calculate will draw a major U.S. response. We need to develop strategies to compete and win in peacetime. Just as our competitors are using many tools to do so, so do we have many available to us. What has all too often been lacking on our side, however, has the political will to use them, to incur risk, to demonstrate our resolve, and thus to deter.

*Fifth, the NDS should speak to how the United States can work more effectively with our allies.*

America's allies represent a long-term competitive advantage. We need to devise ways to work more closely with them, to develop and share capabilities more effectively with them, and to increase interoperability.

*Sixth, the NDS should put forward a force planning construct to guide the shape and size of U.S. forces.*

Here I would commend to you CSBA's recent *Force Planning for the Era of Great Power Competition*, which explores the topic in depth.

In my view, this force planning construct should focus on the need to both compete in peacetime with great powers, but also to fight and win a great-power war, if only to bolster deterrence. The United States should also be able to do these things while deterring or fighting a regional foe. And the force planning construct should acknowledge the reality that the United States will be engaged in a global counterinsurgency campaign for the foreseeable future. One of the keys to doing these things is likely to be innovative operational concepts and capabilities, and here there is room for considerable creative thought and action.

In conclusion, the answers the NDS provides to these six questions will help answer one that is much greater and more consequential, and that is this: *What role will the United States play in coming decades?* Will we continue to lead and defend the

international order – an order that has benefited us greatly – or will we retreat into a diminished role? Will we compete, or will we sit on the sidelines as states who seek to reshape the world to their benefit and our detriment take the field? And if we answer in the affirmative, then we need to acknowledge the magnitude of the task ahead. It will take time, resources, and political will.

I, for one, hope that we answer in the affirmative, and that we muster what is needed for the competition that lies ahead of us.

#### **About the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments**

The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) is an independent, nonpartisan policy research institute established to promote innovative thinking and debate about national security strategy and investment options. CSBA's analysis focuses on key questions related to existing and emerging threats to U.S. national security, and its goal is to enable policymakers to make informed decisions on matters of strategy, security policy, and resource allocation.