

Opening Statement of U.S. Senator John McCain Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee

**Room SH-216
Hart Senate Office Building
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To receive testimony on global challenges and U.S. national security strategy. (As Prepared for Delivery)

Today the Senate Armed Services Committee begins a series of hearings on global challenges to U.S. national security strategy. And I am pleased to have as our first witnesses two of America's most respected strategic thinkers and public servants. General Brent Scowcroft and Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski each served as National Security Advisor to the President of the United States. Their collective experiences laying critical foundations for the U.S.-China relationship, confronting the ayatollahs in Iran, negotiating arms treaties with Moscow, and making tough choices on U.S. strategy in the Middle East have clear salience for this committee today, and we are grateful to each of you for allowing us to draw on your wisdom.

Four decades ago, Secretary of State Dean Acheson titled his memoir on the construction of the post-World War II order "Present at the Creation." Looking out at the state of that order today, it's fair to ask if we are now present at the unraveling.

For seven decades, Republican and Democratic leaders alike have committed America's indispensable leadership and strength to defending a Liberal world order, one that cherishes the rule of law, maintains free markets and free trade, provides peaceful means for the settlement of disputes, and relegates wars of aggression to their rightful place in the bloody past. America has defended this order because it is as essential to our identity and purpose as it is to our safety and prosperity.

But the Liberal world order is imperiled like never before. In a speech riddled with unrealistic wishful thinking, President Obama told the nation last night that the "shadow of crisis has passed." That news came as quite a surprise to anyone who has been paying attention what has been happening around the world.

A revisionist Russia has invaded and annexed the territory of a sovereign European state, the first time that has occurred since the days of Hitler and Stalin.

A rising China is forcefully asserting itself in historical and territorial disputes and alarming its neighbors – all the while investing billions of dollars in military capabilities that appear designed to displace and erode U.S. power in the Asia-Pacific.

A theocratic Iran is seeking a nuclear weapon, which could unleash a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and collapse the global non-proliferation regime.

A vicious and violent strain of radical Islamist ideology continues to metastasize across the Middle East and North Africa. And now, in its latest and potentially most virulent form, the

Islamic State, this evil has the manpower and resources to dissolve international borders, occupy wide swaths of sovereign territory, destabilize one of the most strategically important parts of the world, and possibly threaten our homeland.

And in Yemen, the country President Obama once hailed as a successful model for his brand of counterterrorism, Al-Qaeda continues to facilitate global terrorism, as we saw in the barbaric attacks in Paris. And Iranian-backed Houthi rebels have pushed the country to the brink of collapse.

All the while, American allies are increasingly questioning whether we will live up to our commitments, and our adversaries seem to be betting that we won't.

It does not have to be this way. Working together, this Congress and the president can immediately begin to restore American credibility by strengthening our common defense. American military power has always been vital to the sustainment of the Liberal world order. It enhances our economic power, adds leverage to our diplomacy, reassures our allies, and deters our adversaries.

Yet despite the growing array of complex threats to our security, we are on track to cut \$1 trillion out of America's defense budget by 2021. Readiness is cratering across the services. Army and Marine Corps end-strength is falling dangerously low. The Air Force's aircraft inventory is the oldest in its history. The Navy's fleet is shrinking to pre-World War I levels. And top Pentagon officials and military commanders are warning that advances by China, Russia, Iran, and other adversaries mean U.S. military technological superiority can no longer be taken for granted.

This state of affairs is dangerous and unacceptable, and represents a failure to meet our most basic constitutional responsibility to provide for the common defense. We must have a strategy-driven budget, not budget-driven strategy. We must have a strategy based on a clear-eyed assessment of the threats we face, and a budget that provides the resources necessary to confront them.

But crafting a reality-based national security strategy is simply impossible under the mindless mechanism of sequestration. And there would be no clearer signal that America intends to commit to the defense of our national interests and the international system that protects them than its immediate repeal.

And I would hasten to add: While a larger defense budget is essential, it will be meaningless without the continued pursuit of defense reform – rethinking how we build, posture, and operate our forces in order to maintain our technological edge and prevail in long-term competition with determined adversaries who seek to undermine the economic and security architecture we have long championed.

This hearing will be the first in a series on how we build a national security strategy that can sustain the American power and influence required to defend the international order that has produced and extended security, prosperity, and liberty across the globe. I am pleased we have with us such a distinguished panel of American statesmen to help us begin that conversation.