

Testimony

**United States House of Representatives
Committee on Armed Services**

By

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on

**Securing American Interests Against Global Threats
and the Growing Convergence of America's Adversaries**

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Chairman Rogers, ranking member Smith, distinguished members of the committee thank you for inviting me back to share some thoughts with you today. I am very familiar with the work of this Committee and your dedication and tireless effort to provide for the National Defense and the sustained support you provide for the armed forces and their families. Am honored today to be with my colleague Dr Mara Karlin, a highly respected national security professional who has devoted much of her life to help protecting the American people.

I was honored to participate in the Congressional Commission that examined the NDS 2022. We collaborated without regard to political party or ideology and found common ground on the dangers we are facing and issued a bipartisan, unanimous report. Frankly, we were alarmed and called for change and urgent action. Your topic today; “Securing American Interests Against Global Threats and the Convergence of America’s Adversaries” was central to our report findings and recommendations.

The threats the United States faces are the most serious and most challenging since 1945 and include the potential for near term major war. The United States last fought a global conflict during World War II, which ended nearly 80 years ago. The nation last prepared for such a fight during the Cold War, which ended 35 years ago. It is not prepared today.

China and Russia's “no limits partnership” formed in February 2022 just days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine has only deepened and broadened to include a military and economic partnership with Iran and North Korea, each of

which presents its own significant threat to US interests. This new axis of nations opposed to US interests creates a real risk, if not likelihood, that conflict anywhere could become a multi theater or global war.

Clearly the dominant power in this group is China, which the NDS 2022 identified as the “pacing challenge”, based on the strength of its military and economy and its intent to exert dominance regionally and globally. However, the reality is China is outpacing the United States and has largely negated the US military advantage in the Western Pacific through 20 plus years of focused military investment. U.S. military capability eroded due to the 9/11 wars and underfunding conventional capabilities. Indeed, China outguns the US in every military category: surface ships, offensive and defensive missiles, anti-ship missiles, regional air power and ground forces. The only area is submarines where the US maintains an advantage. China is rapidly building up its strategic nuclear forces with what appears to be an objective to surpass the United States.

The convergence of the four powers led by China and Russia, while it is not a formal security alliance, their coordination, collaboration and cooperation has significantly increased by the war in Ukraine and their desire to tangibly help Russia to win. Their underlying common interests is to weaken US leadership and the global order the US and like-minded democracies have fostered for almost 80 years. This development cannot be taken lightly and it is fundamentally altering the geopolitical landscape. This group has assisted each other in overcoming international sanctions, have bolstered each other's military capability and fostered support for each country's sphere of influence.

We should be clear-eyed about this threat; to minimize or exaggerate it is misguided.

Each country claims a sphere of influence: China's "core interests" extend to Taiwan and the South China Sea to include regional domination; Iran's "axis of resistance", using its proxies to gain influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen in seeking regional domination, control of Persian Gulf oil and the destruction of Israel; North Korea abandoning reunification with South Korea and seeking claim to the entire Korean peninsula and Russia's "near abroad", Putin's determination to rebuild the Russian Empire with former Eastern European countries. All four powers see the US as the obstacle to achieving these spheres of influence and desire to weaken US presence in their region and if possible, drive the United States out.

It is not isolated that Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, that Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023 and Iran operationalized all its proxies in attacking U.S. troops in the region, attacking Israel on multiple fronts and inhibiting the flow of commerce through the Red Sea and Suez Canal, while China under President Xi threatens war in the Pacific and increased its intimidation and coercion of US allies and partners in the region.

The United States can ill afford to treat these 4 powers in isolation because they represent a center of gravity that has potential for expansion to other like-minded countries. If Russia wins in Ukraine so does China, Iran and North Korea, who will be emboldened to become more aggressive at the expense of the United States much as these 4 powers did after the Afghanistan

withdrawal. The next National Defense Strategy and the subsequent NDS must address the strategy and resources to effectively deter these adversaries with the primary focus on China. It will not be cheap.

The American people are largely ignorant of the harsh realities we are facing, that if war broke out in the Pacific with China, the West Coast of the United States would also be under kinetic attack while China would conduct comprehensive cyber attacks on US critical infrastructure in the homeland to shut down power, oil, gas and water distribution while also attacking financial / banking systems and pharmaceutical companies to deny Americans access to funds and much needed medications. Losses to military personnel and high capital assets in the Pacific would be on a scale not seen since World War II and the intent would be to break the will of the people's support for the war at home by causing catastrophic suffering. It is reasonable to conclude that Russia, Iran and North Korea could take some action in their sphere of influence to gain military and or geopolitical advantage.

While all the elements of national power is essential to meet these threats to include building on the strength of the previous 2 administrations in strengthening NATO, the Abraham Accords and AUKUS, repurposing the Quad and forming a historical alliance with South Korea, Japan and the US, much more will need to be done not only in the region but in Latin America and Africa. Allies and partners are essential to confronting and containing these threats. However, when U.S. military strength or hard power is not what it should be it weakens the US position significantly and inhibits the other elements of national power.

Recovering/ Rebuilding the US Military:

1. Readiness:

Despite the recruiting challenges over a year ago, all the services made their recruiting objectives in 2024. Indeed, the Army is planning to exceed significantly its recruiting objectives for 2025. Retention in all 4 services is almost at record levels with the troops finding meaning and purpose in providing service to the Nation. There are readiness issues associated with shortage of personnel, lower than normal operational readiness rates for tanks, ships and airplanes and training exercises canceled due to lack of funding.

2. Size of the Force:

The force is too small. The Army is at an all-time low not seen since prior to World War II at 450,000, the Air Force is at a 40 year low and the Navy is almost 70 ships short of its objective of 360 ships. However, given the growing nature of the threats and adversaries the military is facing, requirements keep going up which asks much more of a smaller force to do more. During 20 months as a member of the NDS Commission I became quite familiar with the demands and stress on our forces. If this continues it would not be surprising to see retention go down due to life-balance issues during peace-time.

3.

4. Funding:

The NDS 2018 Commission (I was a member) recommended a funding strategy of 3-5% above inflation annually of GDP and the NDS 2022 endorsed that recommendation as well. I believe it should be closer to 5% above inflation. Since the end of World War II, defense spending grew faster than inflation, but non-defense spending grew at an even faster rate, causing defense as a share of the overall budget to decline (currently 13%, 2024). This suggests that the United States could spend a much greater share of its budget on defense as it has in the past. The Nation spends a smaller share on defense because other forms of spending have taken priority. This is a policy choice not a fiscal constraint. During the Cold War funding peaked at 6.8% with an average around 6% for the period. During Iraq/Afghanistan it was 4.7%.

The Congress with the help of the President needs to move with a sense of urgency to restore deterrence. I agree with Chairman Rogers and Wicker's proposal to increase defense spending by \$200B over the next two years. It underscores the crisis the United States is facing to increase capabilities, fix the Defense Industrial Base and the Organic Industrial Base.

5. The Defense Industrial Base (DIB) / Organic Industrial Base (OIB)/ Defense Business Practices

The Defense Industrial Base(DIB):

The Reagan military buildup was able to move with a sense of urgency when capital was provided to the DIB because it consisted of 51 primes according to the Reagan Institute where today as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 there are only 5 primes. Approximately 40% of the general purpose active duty Cold War force was cut. A reality that history has revealed was much too steep (the 9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were fought sequentially rather than simultaneously because land forces were too small.)

Today the United States is challenged to meet peacetime demands to assist our partners in Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. When the US military plays war games simulating combat we run out of critical munitions much too soon adversely impacting the outcome. This must be fixed:

- Need consistent, reliable funding
- Need continuous demand to sustain workforce and supply chain flow
- Discipline the requirements process (it has been a major obstacle)
- Accept risk/avoid zero tolerance for error
- Stop overtesting

Organic Industrial Base(OIB):

(Ammunition plants, depots, maintenance)

- Many facilities are old, technology outdated and unsafe
- Beginning in the second-half of the Trump administration through the Biden administration, Presidents' budget
 - From \$200M annually to \$800M to \$1B
 - Congress (HASC) added \$200M
 - Many of the facilities improved
 - Supplemental funding \$4B for 155 ammunition
 - Lake City Missouri Small Arms Plant
 - First new plant since 1941
 - 50 caliber and below
 - Must sustain funding

5.Returning Deterrence:

The US military remains the world's number one military superpower capable of projecting combat power worldwide. China nor Russia can do that on the scale of the US military. Not only project power but not be dependent on a host nation for any logistical needs to sustain the force.

However, when the US military is 1000 miles or so off China's mainland, the military advantage is decisively in China's favor. As mentioned, China outguns us in just about every platform except submarines which because of their stealth can approach China's missile batteries and airfields and put them at risk. But it is not enough because China can still target our first island chain bases in the region and put at risk US surface fleets with swarming anti-ship hypersonic missiles. Imaginative operational concepts that mitigate these advantages by using autonomous above the water and below the water submersibles can begin to close the gap. Ukraine's military without an Air Force destroyed 28 Russian naval ships and drove them out of the Black Sea. The United States proved during the Cold War that we did not have to go platform to platform with the Soviet Union who significantly outnumbered US military in everything: number of divisions, tanks, artillery, attack helicopters etc. US leaders experimented with new technologies to determine what worked best and produced those quickly: Abrams tank, Bradley Fighting Vehicle, Apache Helicopter, Multiple Rocket Launcher, Air Defense. These systems could not by themselves defeat the Soviet Union but they could impose cost and discourage an invasion. Every 2 years the US/NATO forces exercised their capability right on the border of the Soviet Union so they could see it was real and we knew how to maximize it. This is deterrence, your adversaries know you have the capability, it will impose cost and there is no doubt about the intent to use it.

We need to continue to encourage our allies to upgun as well and assist them as needed. Taiwan is an obvious priority.

6. Congressional Assistance:

--Continuing Resolutions (CRs). We are now into a generation of CR's which continues to handicap the services every year.

Money continues to be lost and new starts delayed.

--Legacy Systems. Services more than ever need to rid themselves of systems no longer relevant and need your support even though the system is manufactured in your district.

-- Services need Congressional relief to purchase large quantity of drones from the non-defense commercial sector that are outside of a program of record.

In conclusion while there is much to be done concerning the axis powers the US and allies are in a position to enable Ukraine to participate in a peace agreement that can end the war and guarantee Ukraine's future security while deterring Putin from further expansion. In the Middle East, Iran is in the most weakened position in its 44 year history with the opportunity to prevent it from having nuclear weapons either by voluntarily dismantling the program using coercive diplomacy with a date certain and comprehensive verification or a US supported Israeli strike to cause major setbacks in the program. Returning to the Abraham Accords looms on the horizon if and when a reasonable pathway forward can be found for

the Palestinians. If the US government commits to rebuilding the US military along with using all the instruments of national power in concert with allies and partners the US can deter China's aggression.

US democratic capitalism can outthink, outwit and out-innovate China's state capitalism.

Thank you, I look forward to your questions.