

**MITCHELL INSTITUTE**  
for Aerospace Studies



# **A Call for a New NSC-68 and Goldwater Nichols Reform**

**Dr. Richard B. Andres**

***With Gen (Ret) T Michael Moseley and***

***Maj Gen (Ret) Larry Stutzriem***



# The Problem – A Crisis in U.S. Defense Strategy

- The U.S. faces its **most dangerous moment** since it adopted NSC-68 in 1950.
- The **current deterrence system is failing** against China, Russia, and Iran.
- The **U.S. military lacks the capability and capacity** to uphold its security commitments.
- If deterrence collapses, **a great power war could become inevitable.**



*“The threats the United States faces are the most serious and most challenging the nation has encountered since 1945....It is not prepared today.”*

-2024 Commission on the National Defense Strategy



# Goldwater-Nichols Act—Root of the Problem

---

- ***What Was GNA Intended to Do?***

- Passed in **1986**, GNA restructured the **Department of Defense (DOD)** to improve joint operations.
- It **removed Service Chiefs from the chain of command** and empowered regional **Combatant Commanders**.
- It created the **Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS)** as the **primary military advisor** but did not give the position operational authority.

- ***Unintended Consequences***

- **Service Chiefs lost authority** over strategy and force development, weakening long-term planning.
- **Combatant Commanders prioritize immediate operational needs**, diverting resources from future warfighting readiness.
- The CJCS has **advisory but not executive authority**, reducing its ability to enforce a coherent defense strategy.



# Systemic Dysfunction in the DOD

## 1. Bureaucratic Paralysis and Slow Modernization

- **DOD procurement has become sluggish**, with new systems taking **decades instead of years**.
- **GNA expanded civilian oversight**, leading to **bureaucratic inefficiencies** that delay weapons development.
- **Example: The Air Force's fleet is unacceptably old:**
  - B-52H Stratofortress: Average age of **62** years.
  - KC-135R Stratotanker: Average age of **62** years.
  - T-38C Talon: Average age of **58** years.
  - F-16C Fighting Falcon: Average age of **33** years.
  - The overall fleet's average age is **29** years, with eight fleets exceeding **50** years





# Systemic Dysfunction in the DOD

## 2. Prioritization of Short-Term Over Long-Term Threats

- **Service Chiefs used to balance short-term and long-term needs—now they cannot.**
- **Combatant Commanders focus on today's fights**, pushing resources toward regional crises instead of future deterrence.
- **Example:** Post-Cold War focus on counterinsurgency and nation-building **diverted funding from great power competition** (China/Russia).







# Systemic Dysfunction in the DOD

## 3. Strategic Decision-Making Is Fragmented

- The **CJCS lacks command authority**, making defense strategy a **consensus-driven process** instead of a decisive one.
- **Combatant Commanders advocate for their own regions**, preventing a coherent global defense posture.
- **Example:** The **2018 National Defense Strategy** aimed to shift focus to China, but combatant commands continued prioritizing non-peer conflicts.





# Why Past Defense Reforms Failed

- **2015 Third Offset Strategy**—Attempted to prioritize advanced technologies but failed due to bureaucracy.
- **2018 National Defense Strategy**—Tried to reorient toward China but lacked funding and structural reform.
- **One-War Force Model (Post-2018)**— Assumed adversaries would not act simultaneously, but **Russia, China, and Iran have exploited this flaw.**
- **The fundamental issue: DOD cannot change without structural reform of the GNA system.**





# The Current Security Crisis

- **Multiple theaters of conflict strain U.S. forces:**
  - **Ukraine** – Russian war depletes U.S. military stockpiles.
  - **Middle East** – Iran and proxies threaten U.S. interests.
  - **China** – Escalating threats in Taiwan Strait and South China Sea.



**Adversaries are Coordinating and Capitalizing on U.S. Weakness**





# Commitments Exceeding Capabilities

---

- **Scenario 1: Global Erosion of U.S. Influence as We Repeatedly Back Down**
  - Russia, China, and Iran **continue aggressive expansion.**
  - U.S. **deterrence credibility collapses**, emboldening further aggression.
  - **Rules-based international order unravels**, leading to global instability.
- **Scenario 2: War with China**
  - Taiwan invasion leads to **direct U.S.-China conflict.**
  - U.S. military **unprepared for high-end war** due to decades of neglect.
  - **China has industrial and military advantages** in a prolonged war.

**These Challenges are Not Theoretical**



# Recommendation #1

---

## Conduct a Comprehensive National Security Reassessment

- **Initiate a new NSC-68-style review** to realign defense strategy with modern threats.
- **Recognize failures of deterrence** and fix U.S. military imbalances.
- **Develop a whole-of-government approach** to address coordinated threats from China, Russia, and Iran.
- **Ensure U.S. military commitments match available capabilities** to prevent further deterrence failures.

**Recognition of the Problem is Key**



# Recommendation #2

---

## **Restructure the Department of Defense (DOD)**

- **Reform or replace the Goldwater-Nichols Act** to correct its structural failures.
- **Restore Service Chiefs to the chain of command** for strategic oversight.
- **Reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies** in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to streamline decision-making.

**Effective Deterrence Requires and Effective Organizational Construct**



# Recommendation #3

---

## Increase the Defense Budget to Align with Security Needs

- Expand **defense spending from 3.6% to 5-6% of GDP** to support deterrence and modernization.
- Transition from **one-war to a two-war force construct** to prevent strategic overreach.
- Direct increased spending toward:
  - **Expanding military capacity** to counter China and Russia.
  - **Modernizing aging platforms** to restore technological advantages.
  - **Strengthening nuclear, space, and cyber capabilities.**

**Defense Budgets Must Match the Threat**



# Recommendation #4

---

## Shift Investment Toward Cost-Effective Warfighting Capabilities

- Implement a **cost-per-effect analysis** to guide **military spending and procurement**.
- Avoid **legacy-driven funding** and prioritize **capabilities that enhance deterrence**.
- Conduct a **Roles and Missions Review** (like 1995-96 CORM) to determine the most effective service investments.
- **Redirect resources from counterinsurgency to high-end warfare capabilities (naval, air, and space deterrence)**.

*“Nobody has ever won a war by trying to run it on the cheap. Nothing is so expensive as losing a war by saving money.”*

-Sir Frederick Handley Page





# Why This Matters Now

---

- **The window for action is closing—U.S. deterrence credibility is at risk.**
- Without action, **the U.S. faces either strategic defeat or a catastrophic war.**
- **Reform is not optional**—it is essential for national security and global stability.