

051719 Air Force Association Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, National Defense Industrial Association, and Reserve Officers Association Capitol Hill Forum with Tom Mahnken, President and CEO of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments; and Kathleen Hicks, Senior vice President of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, on “Providing for the Common Defense”

(For additional information on AFA/NDIA/ROA seminars contact Peter Huessy at phuessy@afa.org).

MR. PETER HUESSY: Good morning, everybody. My name is Peter Huessy, and on behalf of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies of the Air Force Association, thank you for being here at the next in our seminar series on “Nuclear Deterrence, Missile Defense, Proliferation, Arms Control and Defense Policy.”

As many of you know, we started this series back in March of 1983 as part of the Scowcroft Commission agenda, and we have continued it ever since. We added missile defense in 1984, and then we added space issues in 1992. But we now have a separate space series called “Space Power to the Warfighter,” and our next even is with Dr. Fred Kennedy, who is the head of the new Space Acquisition and Development Agency. He’ll be speaking on the 14th of June.

Our next events after today is the 23rd of May when we’ll have Peter Fanta, who is the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Matters. After that we’ll have Frank Miller on the 24th of May, who will be here to talk about keeping and maintaining the consensus on nuclear deterrence and modernization.

We have two wonderful guests today who were critical members of the Commission on National Defense Strategy Commission, which was mandated by Congress. Tom Mahnken, who is President and Chief Executive Officer of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. He is also a senior research professor for strategic studies at Johns Hopkins University Paul Nitze School.

As a member of the commission he has been critically important in telling us what it is they came up with. Previously, he also was deputy assistant secretary of defense for policy and planning from 2006 to 2009. He helped craft the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review and the 2008 National Defense Strategy.

Our first speaker is going to be Kathleen Hicks, who is the Senior Vice President, has the Henry Kissinger Chair, and is Director of the International Security Program at CSIS. She has a staff and network of non-resident affiliates to help undertake her international security program work, which is probably one of the most ambitious research and policy agendas in the security field in the country. She’s a frequent writer and lecturer on geopolitics and national security, served as principal deputy undersecretary of Defense for policy, and the deputy undersecretary of Defense for strategy, plans and forces during the Obama administration. She also led the

development of the Defense Strategic Guidance of 2012 and the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review. She also, of course, was a member of the Commission on National Defense Strategy.

I want to thank our guests who are here from the Embassy of Japan. I want to thank my sponsors and guests as well who are here. Both Tom and Kathleen are going to talk about the commission findings, but related specifically to the national security issues of nuclear deterrence and missile defense.,

So with that, would you give a warm welcome to the Senior Vice President of CSIS, Kathleen Hicks?

(Applause).

MS. KATHLEEN HICKS: Good morning, everyone. Thanks for coming. What Tom and I thought we would do is just give you some broad outlines of how the commission did its work, what our findings were with regard to the actual National Defense Strategy, and then as Peter said, try to comment a bit on the issues that are most important to all of you here on nuclear issues, missile defense and space.

Just stepping back, the commission was established by Congress to evaluate the National Defense Strategy. There were various versions of the legislation, that's how the legislation ultimately came out. I'm happy to talk in Q&A if folks are interested in what a future such commission might do.

The NDS, as you probably know, was published in January of 2018. We had begun our work in advance of that and did a lot of background briefings, talked to a lot of people across the department, outside the department, and then published our own report last fall, the fall of 2018. The general outlines of our report, a bipartisan group -- Tom was brought onboard by a Republican member of Congress. I was brought onboard by a Democratic member of Congress. The composition was even in terms of the numbers.

What I think was really amazing to us quite early on was the degree to which there was a community of common viewpoints on the concerns we had about security for the nation and the sense of urgency about the United States needing to pace the threat more effectively than it has been. We did not view that as a reflection on the Trump administration or on the NDS that we hadn't even seen yet. More than anything, we viewed that as a 20-plus year challenge that many of us, including Tom and I, had personally lived through.

The position we were in was to try to translate for a public and Congressional audience a lot of the things that the security community talks about routinely internally. So with that in mind, when the NDS came out we were very happy in general with the gist of the rhetoric of the NDS, the fact that it focused on China and Russia as the long-term pacing challenges, particularly China as the long-term pacing challenge, while recognizing the threats from Russia and Iran and North Korea and counterterrorism. All

of that we thought was -- for a very short unclassified document and then what we saw in the classified -- we thought they had a general sense of the problem set right.

We also were very encouraged by the fact that the NDS went out of its way to emphasize allies and alliances, which we think is a huge asymmetric advantage for the United States, and that it paid at least some attention to issues of efficiency through defense reform and the need to make sure we had a war fighting edge, which Secretary Mattis often captured as lethality.

That said, we had a lot of concerns with the degree -- as I indicated at the beginning, to which the NDS and the budget that had supported it immediately in FY '19 and the prior several budgets -- the degree to which those really indicated a true transformation, if you will, of the department toward this kind of urgent concern to pace the China challenge. We expressed that in our report. We talked about it first and foremost as a concern about operational concepts and how we do business, and the seeming lack of an ability in the department, based on all our interviews, based on looking at all their classified work and the analysis, that there was a significant black box problem between the stated objectives of the strategy and how they got to the program and budget they were supporting.

So we expressed those concerns, both around the lack of joint analytic capability in the department, which has seriously degraded. To the extent that it was ever strong, it has seriously degraded in the department. And then we also pointed out this big concern around operational concepts lacking in terms of, what's the theory of victory, how do we plan to fight, how is it going to be different?

Given that lack of understanding, what we were left with was, how well does the budget support what they say they want to do? Probably the most controversial thing for the Democrats on the panel was the fact that we came out to say you can't support this particular strategy the way they say they want to fight it with the budget that they've put forward. As Eric Edelman likes to say, you'd think they would have high-five'd us in the corners of the Pentagon for that, but they were somehow upset about it.

They've come around to high-five-ing us, I think. They've realized that that created some additional pressure they may have wanted internally. But again, from the Democratic side of things, it was very important for us to stress that that was based on their own assumptions about how to fight, etcetera, not based on a view that it was completely realistic to expect increasing defense budgets for the long-term.

On nuclear weapons in particular, there is a clear statement in the NDS Commission report that we support the NPR in its broad outlines. I think it says something like, in particular, it's emphasis on the triad, and I think that's exactly the right way to characterize it. We had no dissent on the commission with regard to the importance of maintaining the triad.

I think when you get to the more talked-about but less important elements of the

NPR, there certainly was room for disagreement. I call them the “trade space” issues: the two dangling low-hanging fruit, please pick them items that are in there. We didn’t go into detail on that. We just said we support the NPR and in particular its emphasis on our modernized triad.

On missile defense, we didn’t spend a lot of time in depth. The Missile Defense Review, as you all know, was not done. I don’t think we were even shown drafts. We basically took it as a given as we looked through the analysis the department had done with regard to managing China and Russia challenges and others, how the department -- the status quo push forward -- how the department would manage those challenges.

So we sort of baked in, I guess I would say, as an assumption that the United States has missile defenses along the lines of where they are now and the trajectory they’re planning. Again, this gets back to our concerns around operational concepts, challenges, exchange of fire costs. Missile defense is very concerning to us. This is where new operational concepts become important.

And then the last thing I’ll say before turning it over to Tom is that we also really wanted to stress -- and I think it’s important for this group -- the degree to which the department has become very comfortable in focusing at the high end where we still have a lot of challenges. And then sort of in a day-to-day way, it is really challenged to think about the spectrum of conflict the way, for example, the Russians do in terms of competition and in terms of linking -- in the case of the Russians in particular -- the nuclear piece to the conventional to the sub-conventional or grey zone.

That was a really important piece for us to push. We put recommendations forward for the department to have a civilian military deputy approach to looking at China and Russia in holistic ways, because in part they have this challenge in DOD of the nuclear people go work the nuclear problem and write the NPR. The missile defense people go write the Missile Defense Review, and then the conventional folks work on the NDS.

That is not, as we know, how the Russians operate; and in pieces of that spectrum we know it’s not how the Chinese operate. That’s not something we’ve seen a lot of progress on in the department. So, I’ll leave it there and turn it over to Tom.

(Applause).

MR. THOMAS MAHNKEN: Thanks, Katherine, I wouldn’t disagree with anything that Kath said. What I want to do with my remarks is maybe reframe a little bit and delve more deeply into a couple of areas. First, to put this effort into perspective, this was actually the third Congressionally mandated independent outside review of defense strategy. The past two instances were independent review of the Quadrennial Defense Review, and in this case, we provided an independent review of the National Defense Strategy.

I think there are a number of advantages of this approach. Maybe Kath didn't see it that way when she was in the Pentagon working on the QDR and we were on the outside evaluating it, but being on the outside this time, there actually are a number of advantages to that. First, and it's something Kath alluded to, we have a National Defense Strategy, we have a Missile Defense Review, we have a Nuclear Posture Review, as separate processes, separate reports, and in some ways as an artifact of legislation.

We had the luxury, with the National Defense Panel, of really just looking holistically at all these things together, although as Kath says, we didn't have access to the Missile Defense Review, the document itself. But we were able to really look at defense holistically, and I think that was good.

Second, whereas the National Defense Strategy was primarily a classified document with an unclassified executive summary, we were mandated to do an unclassified analysis. We had the option of doing a classified annex, but we didn't exercise that option. We felt that we could say everything that we wanted to say in an unclassified forum.

Also, thinking across these three efforts, 2010, 2014 and 2018, if you actually look at them -- and I would urge you to actually go back and read them -- I think what you see is a growing concern about our preparedness to fight and win a major war. I don't mean just strictly readiness, but our ability, our preparedness for some of the types of contingencies that we're likely to face. So when we sounded the alarm in the report, it was really kind of building on some previous commissions that had found some similar things.

I think also as outsiders at the most basic level we weren't bound by OMB guidance. We weren't bound by what the White House was saying or what others were saying, so we could really call it as we saw it. I think we said some pretty strong things, including the fact that in a war with China or Russia victory is not guaranteed. I think that's something that needs to be said, not to be alarmist, but really to, as Kath said, if you look at DOD analysis, if you look at DOD assumptions, it doesn't all add up.

It doesn't all add up because what we've been facing are some eroding military balances in key areas and in key regions. Whereas increasingly you'll hear DOD talking about great power competition, and I think in the main emphasizing correctly the imperative of dealing with China and Russia, a whole bunch of things follow from that. There are a whole bunch of second and third order effects. If you really take that seriously, you probably would rethink in a lot of way the way DOD does its business.

We heard good rhetoric, and we continue to hear good rhetoric -- and I'm using the word rhetoric not to denigrate or minimize it -- but saying the right things. Now there's a whole bunch of things that need to be done to focus those efforts. We found that having a concrete list of operational challenges that need to be dealt with really is helpful.

Past Quadrennial Defense Reviews have listed those very explicitly. The National Defense Strategy has a list of operational challenges. Secretary Mattis, for his reasons, elected to classify that. We, for our reasons, thought it was important actually to get our list out there in an unclassified forum as a way of trying to focus DOD efforts and give outsiders a way to assess the focus of DOD efforts.

Those efforts, as Kath said, we think one of the key areas there is developing new operational concepts. Whereas the department acknowledges the need to do that, we haven't seen a lot of forward momentum to actually bring those new operational concepts into being.

And then finally I would agree with what Kath said. Underpinning all that is analysis. One of the points we made very strongly in the report is that the analytical capabilities of the department really have eroded over time. I think that should be of concern for a number of reasons, including it should be of concern to the department to make sure we're doing the right things and buying the right things. But also, it should be of concern to the department and the government in terms of DOD's ability to make its case persuasively for what it wants to do, to have a strong analytical basis for what it wants to do, and also, I think, for the civilian leadership, for the secretary, to be able to impose and carry out his vision, the vision that is elaborated in the National Defense Strategy in the program over time.

So, with that, maybe we'll just turn it over to you and get to the more interesting part of it and get to your questions.

(Applause).

MR. : For both of you, because I don't know who the right person is to answer this, Congress comes out with their analysis -- I don't know what the Congresses' analytical capability is. Let's focus on the Nuclear Posture Review. Congressman Smith, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, has said we're spending too much money on the triad. We need a smaller force.

So, DOD has some analysis that they did to support the Nuclear Posture Review. What does the Congress have so that they can compare and contrast? I'm not familiar with that.

MR. MAHNKEN: I'll start and then I'm sure you'll want to add. This is maybe something we should have said up front. The legislation bringing into being the National Defense Strategy Commission stipulated that we reported to the President, the Secretary of Defense and Congress, although really it was sort of in reverse order. It was really Congress that brought us into being.

This effort, as with previous efforts, was an attempt by Congress, if you will, to get some analysis, an independent outside look at some of these issues. That having been said, I would say that Congress is in some ways in a very information rich environment,

but in other ways I think is in a very information poor environment. Speaking to members and staff much more now than I did before, they're looking for analysis. It's not what you can say, better or worse, good or bad DOD's analytical capabilities are, they still tower over what Congress has. You have CRS, which is a fantastic institution, but it's not the equivalent of CAPE or the Joint Staff or any of the service analytical capabilities. So, I think members are really looking for facts on which to base judgments.

MS. HICKS: I completely agree with that, and also what underlies that from Tom. For those of us who are now on the outside, we do a lot of interaction with the Hill and they're very hungry for quality input. They do have really three major organs beyond the staff themselves: CRS, CBO, GAO. They use them all. All of them are operating, if you will, in the nuclear space in terms of providing input and feedback.

But staffs are diminished compared to where they were pre-mid 1990s. They were larger, you had policy teams, if you will, in the Armed Services Committees. You still have staff, obviously, but you have major turnover and longevity issues and you have a shrunken capability in terms of numbers.

So yes, I think the Hill feels very much at a disadvantage in these ways. But to the point I think we're trying to make, DOD is not nearly -- it's a joint analytic paper tiger, frankly. It can cow members into believing it knows what it's talking about, but if you lift the lid -- as two people who oversaw pieces of the analytics, where we are today is not healthy for the major organ of discretionary spending for U.S. taxpayers. There should be much more quality analysis going on, and it's not that hard to do. It just requires institutional investment.

MR. : I'd like to understand better the nature of that failure and why you describe it as a paper tiger. I just have to imagine the United States Air Force can just amaze you with the analytical rigor of why they need an F-35. What I'm thinking that you're saying is that we don't know how these different fiefdoms of war fighting actually add up together in the joint fight, especially the relationship of nuclear weapons and conventional war fighting and missile defense. It sounds like you don't even trust the Missile Defense Agency's analytical capability to understand the relationship of missile defense with nuclear war fighting. Is that the major concern, the relationship of the entire enterprise, or do you have failure even in the stovepipes over different weapons systems.

MR. MAHNKEN: Sure, I'll lead off, unless you want to lead off on this one? Traditionally, we're talking about analysis at the top in support of the strategy. So, you have a National Defense Strategy or you have a Quadrennial Defense Review in the past, and the logical question is, how are we doing? What do we actually need to implement this strategy?

I think traditionally, up until recent years or the past decade or so, you had three key actors leading that effort. One was OSD Policy, the second was CAPE or PA&E before that, and the third was the Joint Staff J8. You had a three-legged stool that really represented the interests of all concerned, the services through the Joint Staff. You had

budgetary concerns, effectiveness concerns, through CAPE. You had policy dealing with the strategy issues, the force development issues. They really drove the agenda to ensure that our strategy was being implemented.

I think for a various reasons over time, to include the BCA and austerity within DOD and changing civil-military dynamics, that stool became sort of unbalanced. As a result, it's not to say that analysis doesn't go on, the point is the analysis is less and less able to deliver the answer to that crucial question, how well are we doing relative to our strategy? And I'd say that the analytical agenda is also less and less able to drive that behemoth that is the Defense Department towards making sure that it's actually focused on implementing the strategy.

MS. HICKS: I agree with everything Tom just said. I think back to what you're asking, to go a little deeper into that, where the department is best -- perhaps this is a backhanded compliment, but it's not meant as one -- is on system cost and performance. So if the question is, is MDA good at assessing the quality of the Patriot in a particular set of circumstance in a controlled line of questioning, that is where it is best.

CAPE is best on the CAIG side, at this point in time -- CAIG, the cost assessment side -- in large part because that's what Congress really cares about, and has driven incentives to make that rigorous. So, there are areas where the department is very good. I was careful in what I said to say joint analysis for a reason, and it is because the services have always maintained relatively decent funding for their analytic capability.

The problem the department has had, particularly over time, is as those investments continue the services are in a relatively better position compared to the secretary of Defense and the chairman to make the case for why their particular system approach is a preferred approach. Then the secretary's, to Tom's point, his decision-making process is how do you weigh where to prioritize investments, how to build the joint picture? That's the piece that has become very weak. There's no silver bullet answer and there wasn't one thing that did it in.

I will add to everything we've already said, the complexity of how you have to think about the war fight is a huge piece of it. Beginning in the '90s in particular, and moving forward to today, as you moved away from force-on-force modeled representations being an accurate way to think about the challenge set, people became more and more uncomfortable, disillusioned, dismissive, of what the analytic community could bring forward. One possible response to that could have been, let's improve how we do analysis in order to have the decision support.

Through a series of things, most of which you could categorize generally speaking as a lack of institutional investment over time in making sure they had good answers to that, and a short horizon view of let's just get through the next strategy review, program cycle, the other path was chosen, which is essentially, our analysis doesn't help. Why do analysis? I've got it all in my head, or the war fighter has it all in his head, or the CoCom, and there's just very little analytics going on. To the extent you

have analytics going on, there's a lot of distrust in it because the tools haven't -- and I say tools not just technically. The means, the ways that you do analysis have not kept pace.

One effort to improve that, when Bob Work was the deputy, he did make a big investment in more gaming. That's a good thing. Some of that money, as I understand it, may be lying a little fallow right now. They're not even really doing that. But I'll just rush to add, I do like war gaming. It is one tool, it is not the answer.

The other major piece of this, which doesn't maybe sound like analytics but is very much connected, is the lack of major joint experimentation going on. So this is all of a type, because from 9/11 forward we took a lot out of that emphasis we had going in the late '90s forward under a different set of assumptions. I think when Don Rumsfeld set up the Office of Force Transformation, there was a view of the future that looked more like how we are talking today. But a lot of that investment stream and thought process came off-line, and now the question is, how do we re-imagine that for the future?

MR. MAHNKEN: And to actually link it back to the previous question, when DOD goes up to the Hill and says, I want X Columbia-class submarines, you should be surprised when members say, based on what analysis? And why isn't it X-2 submarines? Show me why X is the number. And if you don't have a convincing story to tell, you shouldn't be surprised if members go, let's do X minus two then.

MS. HICKS: And the topline debate is a clear example of this. It's \$750 (billion), except you can take \$9 (billion) for the wall and you can put it in OCO, but it's not OCO. It lays bare how little is actually able to be brought by the department to defend where it ends up.

MR. : But going on with force-on-force, what else it that you're looking for besides force-on-force?

MR. : Just to complicate the picture a bit further, you indicated there's no assurance we would do well in a battle with the Russians or Chinese. What about our allies as part of the mix? If we look at the overall picture of us as a working coalition, how does that contribute to the overall picture.

MS. HICKS: In terms of the capability to achieve goals? Everything we saw from the department affects what you're asking. It bakes in in the cases of campaigns you could imagine, whether they're in the Pacific, Europe or elsewhere, the role that allies will play. There are obvious deficiencies in the case, for instance, of NATO from every level: infrastructure, air support, you name it. Those aren't areas where I feel the department has over-reached in terms of the investment plan it has for U.S. improvements.

It has seemed to be pretty realistic, particularly through EUCOM, in making the case where NATO -- other NATO partners and allies -- need to step forward to fill in pieces of that. Some of them are well positioned to fill pieces of that. Ground forces is

an obvious place where you have seen the Poles and others step forward.

Then there are some areas that are obviously tension points for the alliance. Missile Defense would be a clear one of those. But I didn't come away with any concerns that the U.S. approach, the department's approach, was assuming too little of the allies and thus overcompensating. I think it's acknowledging where the allies are weak and trying to press them forward. Whether we will close those gaps, either on our side or on the part of our allies, is unclear.

MR. MAHNKEN: I would agree. I think from a U.S. strategy and force development perspective, it's a tricky balance to strike. As Kath said, and I totally agree, allies are a great strength, so we shouldn't count them out. But on the other hand, we shouldn't attribute magical capabilities to them, or we shouldn't stake our defense on potential future things that they might or might not do.

So, how do you strike that balance? Also, when it comes to future operational concepts, I think we believe strongly that the allies should be a part of that. I would even go so far on major weapons systems.

I just don't think we should be, with some notable exceptions, we should be building weapons with the intent to export, or export some version of it. I think that makes a lot of sense from an allied standpoint and from a coalition standpoint. Actually, it makes a lot of cost sense as well.

MR. : Thanks for your comments this morning. My question has to do with the interagency and countering Russian new generation warfare or hybrid warfare, whatever you want to call it. You know in this era of great power competition countries like Russia and China don't want to fight us. They don't want to get into a military conflict. They want to achieve their goals below that threshold. So what is it that the commission recommended or discovered as a way forward for doing that better?

MS. HICKS: What the commission wrote, which conveyed what we discovered, is that -- as I mentioned in my opening remarks -- this idea of competition occurring across a spectrum is central to our understanding of how others are approaching us, and that we, the United States, need to also be able to think multi-dimensionally. We point in our report to how much of that challenge is owned outside DOD, so we say explicitly in the report this is not DOD's problem to solve.

We note some nice things the National Security Strategy had to say on this point. Just like we applaud the language of the NDS in general terms, we applaud the NSS pointing to this multi-dimensionality. There are even a couple of hooks in there for things like the national security innovation base, a couple of things that point to understanding this is a broad societal challenge.

But again, nothing has happened. So we were deeply concerned that there is obviously under-investment -- obvious to us -- in diplomacy. The trade piece is not

progressing as an inducement strategy to bring others toward us along the lines of the rhetoric that's pro-alliances.

So there's a lot of concern that DOD is trying to advance on the high-end war fighting piece, where we have concerns, and then no one really is filling the rest of that piece very effectively. That's where we ended up at.

MR. MAHNKEN: Of course, that creates a challenge for DOD. We've had this discussion in a number of different variants over the year. On the one hand, you diagnose the problem and you diagnose it so that we in DOD are part of the solution, we're not the whole solution. And yet, DOD really can't compel all the other actors, all the other bureaucratic players to do what DOD thinks they should do. So, that winds up being a challenge.

The other thing I would say, taking it more narrowly to DOD, I think one of the asymmetries we see is we face competitors that have a very graduated view of force, competition and conflict, whereas we tend to view things dichotomously. Either we are at peace or we are at war. Or now, since we've changed our vocabulary, either we're in competition or we're in conflict. But it's a dichotomy either way.

I think the way the Chinese, the way the Russians think about that, it is not like that at all. So we can talk about it in an interagency context, and I think we should, but even when it comes to DOD and when it comes to deterrence, I think we have to have a much more nuanced view than we're comfortable with.

MR. HUESSY: Let me ask you a question exactly on this point. One of my early clients was George Washington University, and one of my friends is Amitai Etzioni, who is on the left. But he wrote at a conference that he invited me to, why are we trying to pick a fight with China? This was about 10 years ago. Basically, they're our friends and why are we doing this?

We would like them to be friends, as someone who lived in that part of the world and went to school. Here are the questions. What are the goals of China and Russia?

I understand the point that it is not a matter of the goal that will be implemented by attacking or invading Taiwan, but it's an all of government, all the time, approach. How do they see nuclear weapons as a lever or coercion to get what they want? And what about their rogue state friends: Iran, North Korea, Syria, Venezuela, the people that they use either as cut-outs or allies to achieve their goals?

There are those on the left and right who say, why are we -- in the famous words of President Adams -- why are we going overseas seeking dragons to slay? That's an important point. I think a lot of Americans intuitively don't like going overseas. Throughout our history we have said, let them -- leave them alone, we don't want to go there. Given the threats we see, could you address how the commission saw the goals and objectives of China and Russia?

MS. HICKS: You want to do China and I'll do Russia?

MR. MAHNKEN: Sure. I can't help but rise to the bait when you talk about going overseas. I think yesterday was the 199th anniversary of the first U.S. naval vessel visit to China. So, this is not a new thing.

I'd also like to point out when you talk about going overseas we've got U.S. territory in the Western Pacific.

MS. HICKS: It's so inconvenient for people.

MR. MAHNKEN: Anyway, as to the Chinese Communist Party leadership's goal, in my view, first off, is to remain in power. But in order to remain in power, what do they have to do? They have to deliver economic growth, and I think increasingly also they have to deliver on a vision, a vision that Xi Jinping has set out, of China as a great power, a great nationalist force.

The Chinese Communist Party has established a narrative not only of China as being an aggrieved party -- and I'd say it's a narrative at variance with history in all sorts of ways that we could delve into in boring detail -- that is leading to an increasingly aggressive pattern of behavior and increasing dissatisfaction with the international status quo. So, to me, the international status quo, the international system such as we've enjoyed it since the end of World War II, is not about going overseas to slay dragons. It's about preserving a system that has benefited the United States and benefited much of the rest of the world, to include China.

It's not about misunderstanding, it's not about even primarily what we do. I think it's primarily about a set of objectives that the Chinese Communist Party has. If you look at it, if you look at taking it back to us, what are our objectives -- going back to the commission? Any government's most sacred responsibility to its people is to protect the lives of its citizens and its territory. For us, it's also about helping to defend our allies, because unless you live in a fantasy world where you can just sort of tear up treaties and just disregard them, we have allies.

So we have territory in the Western Pacific. We have lots of Americans in the Western Pacific. We have allies in the Western Pacific. To the point of the international system and supporting free trade, the free flow of goods and information, that has benefited us -- and is something back to our first naval mission to China -- that's something that we have been supporting for many decades.

And then there's the whole, the thing that we don't like to talk about, but historically where we have acted pretty strongly, is in opposing the rise of a hegemon on the Eurasian continent. We don't like to talk about it, but even offshore balancers of today, neo-isolationists of today, wouldn't push on, of course we would resist that. So those objectives of the Chinese leadership versus our objectives as a nation over decades,

yes I think we have some disagreements. One doesn't have to come up with these conspiracy theories to see why we might have some real differences.

MS. HICKS: I agree with all of that, so I'll just comment briefly on Russia. Some of it is similar to China, though everything underlying, I guess, is completely different. The general view that we had on the commission, and I would maintain to this day is, Putin is interested in maintaining power for as long as possible. He has, as is well documented, a view that the fall of the Soviet Union was a catastrophe for the Russian people. So I think it's a mix of his own personal economic welfare legacy, but also a very strong Russian nationalist viewpoint, which resonates with his public.

Everything about Russia is going in the wrong direction, almost everything. They have a different strategy about how to maintain power for as long as possible. That, along with some natural inclinations of Putin himself, leads to the opportunism that we see.

So, I think the easiest way for the United States -- it's dangerous always to short-hand anything -- but the easiest way for the United States to think about Russia is anything that is good for the United States is bad for Russia, in Russia's view right now. If you can make us look bad, it helps maintain that power, it helps their system look successful. You can clearly see that in all the messaging that they do.

RT doesn't have to work hard to undermine and create new seams, they just take the ones we already have and amplify. So you see a lot of that, anyone who watches RT, which I hope you don't do in excessive amounts because it's pretty overwhelming, but that's where Russia is.

And, it's a nuclear power, to your point. So you can't dismiss that, you can't overly minimize it. At the same time, it's not China. China should be the pacer in terms of how we're thinking long-term, but you've always got to watch your back on Russia.

I think you were asking about how some of the different parties can come together. Obviously in the case of Russia, they work with Iran very comfortably in Syria and elsewhere. They have shown some inclinations to work with the Chinese. They have this major exercise with the Chinese and the Mongolians -- but a lot of that is show, again, because it makes us look bad and gives the idea of coalition capability. But there's a lot of enduring challenges between the two that I think would limit their cooperation. We shouldn't assume that will always be the case and act as though they can't come together. That would be dangerous. But I don't think we're looking at a situation where Russia and China are naturally inclined to ally together against the United States.

MR. MAHNKEN: And I would just add on Russia and on the nuclear issue, just an unpaid advertisement. I'd highly recommend a new book by Dimitry Adamsky, that just came out from Stanford University Press called "Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy." It's a fascinating book about the Russian Orthodox Church and its relationship to the Russian nuclear enterprise.

It is a fascinating book about basically the symbiotic relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian nuclear forces, nuclear infrastructure, and how they have basically reinforced each other in the post-Soviet era. It's a fascinating book, and you could do worse than try to get Dima over here from Israel to do a talk at some point. It's a really fascinating work.

MR. HUESSY: I want to thank you for your answers, and I agree with you. But you get across your desk the National Interest, Cato, the Friends Committee, left and right, both say we are too militaristic and have too big of a defense budget. I debated a guy who wrote a book called "Base Nation." He didn't realize that two-thirds of all our troops are in Japan, Korea and Germany. Many other places are gas stations or seaports, which enable us to have access.

So your answers were very concrete, and what I hope is that will help people on the Hill, particularly understand how real this is. So your answers really were excellent and thank you.

David, did you have another question?

MR. : I think I understand the nuances of these joint and multi-domain and beyond DOD issues that people are struggling to model. That's what I gather from your remarks.

MS. HICKS: And I would go beyond model. They're struggling to create decision support mechanisms that help frame the way a decision maker should think about and then weigh different things. I don't think the answer can all be in modeling.

MS. : My question is multi-stage, but it is a question. As someone who focuses on Russian strategic forces, that's really my lane, I always like to unpack this concept that Russia has this particular advantage in combining the conventional and nuclear pieces in its strategic doctrine. Specifically, as one who reads their strategic doctrine in the original Russia -- and it hasn't affected my mind -- I noticed actually very little substantive change in their doctrine since 2010. I see a lot of this interpretation of, for instance -- (inaudible) -- nuclear war fighting strategy and all that, coming out of interpretations of how they time their Zapad exercises in the fall around the ICBM tests in Plesetsk or what have you.

So what I'm looking at from you is, what concrete or distinct advantage does Nikolai Patrushev, the national security council, get out of having a conventional voice in the room with a nuclear voice and creating this doctrine? Why is that specifically an advantage? From a doctrine standpoint and from an operational standpoint with their exercises and deployments, I've actually not seen that much of a difference perhaps from what we would have with the Strategic Deployment Guidance of 2013 saying that we can respond to a cyber-attack with a nuclear test.

MR. MAHNKEN: I'll give my view, which is I think the Russian armed forces still have a more integrated view of nuclear weapons and conventional weapons. All your points, I think, are well taken. I guess the contrast I would draw would be between the Russian armed forces and the U.S. armed forces, where for the U.S. armed forces nuclear weapons have been -- not just even organizationally, but doctrinally, even just in terms of thinking about nuclear weapons -- it is so far removed not just from thinking about conventional weapons, but far removed from just about anything. I do think that the Russians have a more integrated way of thinking about things. Some people may take it too far, but they do see them as being instruments of deterrence, instruments of coercion.

To take it to the Chinese side, if you look at the Chinese writings on deterrence they'll take it even another step. It's all sorts of military and non-military instruments that are all part of deterrence. To me, it goes back to my previous statement about how we just view things dichotomously.

Either it's this, or it's that. We have a National Defense Strategy, and then we have this thing called the Nuclear Posture Review, and then we have the Missile Defense Review. This is as opposed to something that would truly be the national defense strategy that would include the nuclear and include everything together. That's my simple-minded way of coming at it.

MS. HICKS: The only thing I'll add to that is I don't think it's new. I think there are writings that are newer that people have been able to reflect upon, but I don't think you have to show that it's particularly new to the Russian way of thinking that they just look at things more multi-dimensionally than we do. So we need to understand how they look at it, rather than mirror imaging. I think that's really the biggest issue that the U.S. faces, understanding that others aren't drawing these hard lines the way that we have become used to doing.

MR. : I had kind of a specific question on that. I apologize if it's too specific. Our use now of modifying a D5 to a low yield, and then obviously as an interim solution to the SLCM, to the sea-launched nuclear cruise missile presumably, is that a good strategy within the spirit of the NPR to be able to get to that kind of a modernization? It's obviously a good time to modernize while we're already modernizing the D5, but is that a good strategy to be able to have that as our first play from a low yield nuke to counter this "escalate to de-escalate" as it has been purported to do? Or, is that something that we would be better off looking at other solutions?

MR. MAHNKEN: I think it is, and I would say for a number of reasons. First, if you look at what the nuclear enterprise is capable of delivering in the short-term, it's a good option. And if part of this is keeping the nuclear enterprise going and keeping some of these design skills going and integration skills going, then I think it's a good move.

I think it's also a good move to the extent that policy makers are always looking for options, and I think that's important. The two of us were formerly in that position,

and in general more options are better than fewer. I think the language of the NPR on the SLCM was a little bit muddled.

On the one hand it was strictly put forward in the context of Russian treaty violations. But on the other hand our allies in Asia, primarily the Japanese, are looking at it as a replacement for their extended nuclear deterrent, which we retired. So I think the wording there was a little bit muddled because the logic is, if the Russians magically perhaps would come into compliance, then we wouldn't pursue the SLCM.

MR. HUESSY: Maybe we would.

MR. MAHNKEN: But on the D5, personally, it makes a lot of sense.

MS. HICKS: I'll answer more generally. I am in no way compelled to believe that we need to add, or add back non-strategic nuclear weapons. It's not compelling to me that they create a greater deterrent than we can create without them.

I, in fact, think we have a lot of challenges on defending the triad. We as a community, the defense community, cannot explain in English why we invest in our triad but then say it's unusable, and no one believes we'll ever use it. It's very confusing to people.

So, I don't think this helps. I think it makes it worse. And it certainly doesn't help on the full range of nonproliferation goals that we have with regard to the Russians or anyone else.

MR. HUESSY: With that, Kathleen and Tom, thank you. Wonderfully done.

MR. MAHNKEN: A real pleasure.

MS. HICKS: Thanks.

(Applause).

MR. HUESSY: We'll see you next week with Peter Fanta. Thank you all for being here.