TRANSCRIPT
Press Briefing
“Analyzing the 2022 National Defense Strategy”

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Thank you, and welcome, everyone. My name is Paige Montfort. I am the media relations manager here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, and today we have a great briefing lined up for you analyzing the newly released '22 National Defense Strategy. You will hear today from six senior experts across the Center, and then we’ll have some time for Q&A.

So first we’ll have Seth G. Jones. He’s senior vice president, Harold Brown Chair, and director of our International Security Program.

And then we’ll have Mark Cancian, senior adviser in the International Security Program.

Next, we’ll have Kathleen McInnis. She’s a senior fellow in our International Security Program and also director of Smart Women, Smart Power Initiative.

And following that we’ll have Emily Harding. She’s deputy director of our International Security Program and also senior fellow.

And then we’ll have Max Bergmann. He directs our Europe Program and the Stuart Center here.

And finally, we’ll have Tom Karako, last but not least. And he’s a senior fellow with our International Security Program and directs our Missile Defense Project.

So as a reminder, each of these experts will start off with about five minutes of remarks. We’ll open it up to your questions and remind you how to queue up for that when it’s time. And there, as always, will be a transcript available within just a few hours after the call. If you’ve RSVPed, we’ll send that out to you directly. It will also be on CSIS.org.

I also want to bring your attention to another event we’ll be hosting in about two hours here at 4:00 p.m. Eastern. That will be a livestreamed event focused on the implications of the defense strategy for China and the Indo-Pacific, and we’d love to have you tune in online for that event as well on csis.org.

So now, without further ado, I’m going to turn it over to Seth Jones to get us started.

Thanks, Paige, and really appreciate everybody for joining us. We’ll try to be brief in our introductory comments because I think folks are going to want to get into the questions.
Let me just say a couple of brief items. One is just to start with I think on what the National Defense Strategy does reasonably well. I think it does highlight the threat that the U.S. faces by China. I mean, it is, when one looks at military power, economic power, diplomatic activity, and just broader infrastructure development around the globe and technology, the Chinese, certainly compared to the Russians, the Iranians, the North Koreans, are the most significant threat faced by the U.S. So it, as did the last National Defense Strategy, puts the threat squarely in the area of China. In addition, I think the National Defense Strategy does a good job – and this is certainly a divergence from the previous administration – focuses a lot on the importance of allies and partners in areas like both Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

There’s a bit of an irony here – and Max may get to this, Kathleen may as well – that the prioritization of China and the Indo-Pacific may continue to be received with concern in Europe. And we may have seen sort of the heyday of NATO with the U.S. now squarely focusing, or trying to focus, anyway, on the Indo-Pacific, and the partners to balance against China.

But let me just briefly touch on one issue that it does not say, and I think which gets a little bit to a gap between what the National Defense Strategy says and what the U.S. is prepared for. This really is an industrial base that, at least in my judgement, is in no way fully prepared to fight, let alone deter, the Chinese. Let me just talk for a minute or so about what I mean by that. The war in Ukraine, I think as all of us are aware, exposed deficiencies in the U.S. defense industrial base. Did the same thing with our European partners and allies. It’s depleted stocks of some weapon systems and munitions, Stingers, for example, M-777 howitzers, 155mm ammunition and Howitzers, Javelin anti-tank missile systems.

But these concerns are even more acute when we look at the Indo-Pacific, which is really where the National Defense Strategy focuses. If we look at the roughly two dozen iterations of a war game in the Taiwan Strait that Mark, who is on this line, led, along with a group from MIT, the U.S. expended all of its joint air-to-surface standoff missiles and long-range precision guided anti-ship missiles within the first week of the conflict. And we’ve seen similar war games done by government agencies, including one where the U.K.’s third division exhausted national stockpiles in just over a week.

There are a range of challenges we’re seeing with our industrial base, including our defense companies not wanting to take financial risks without contract – particularly multiyear contracts – in place. We’re seeing workforce and supply chain constraints on increased demand for weapon systems and munitions. We’re seeing some other supply chain issues. There are vulnerabilities with some rare earth metals, which China has a near
monopoly of. We've seen challenges with titanium, and aluminum, and semiconductors, and microelectronics.

And then we've got a big issue of constraint which is time – probably the biggest, time constraint. Even if we wanted to get up those munitions' requirements for a war and certainly deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, we're talking about significant time lags. At least two years to deliver first missiles. There's about a two-year production timeline for everything from PAC-2 and PAC-3 air and missile defense systems, Tomahawks, air-launched cruise missiles, long-range precision strikes. We ran out of the JASSMs and LRASMs in those war games. If you're talking about brick-and-mortar investments, you're talking about even longer.

So what I would just say, in closing, and in handing this over to Mark, is the national defense strategy does a – I think does a good job and a fair job of highlighting the threat that China poses. What's left, though, is what are we going to do about it? And our timelines are shrinking. And we've got big problems with an industrial base that is still generally operating in a peacetime as opposed to a wartime footing. So with that, I'll turn it over to Mark.

Mark F. Cancian: Thanks a lot, Seth.

I'm going to start by expressing a frustration from a force structure point of view. And I will be talking about forces. And that is that the document doesn't have a force sizing construct. In other words, it doesn't say how it came to the forces that it was going to support. There isn't a force table. In other words, it doesn't say how big any of the military services are going to be. And in fact, in the NDS there is not a single number.

And in this, it is similar to the 2018 NDS. And I think this may be a reflection of the fact that the legislation changed and that there's now a classified version and an unclass. What we're seeing is the unclassified version. The classified version, I know in 2018, had some numbers. It may well have numbers now. But what's publicly available does not have any numbers. And there actually could be some numbers, I think. The NPR does have both the ends and the means. They have the forces that they're proposing in the document.

So enough of my frustration. Let me talk about a couple of things that are interesting in the document. The first is about force size. The document talks about five attributes of force structure. It does not mention size. Now, it doesn't elaborate on that. In other documents, the services have all discussed their plans to get smaller. The Air Force is cutting 20 percent of its aircraft. The Navy is getting smaller also as it retires ships; all of the services getting smaller.
The services have talked about divest to invest; in other words, get small in order to invest the savings in new capabilities. The NDS does not use that phrase or really talk about that, but it is in other documents.

They talk about strategic prioritization of day-to-day force employment. And the idea there is to reduce forward deployments and therefore reduce the stress on the force, and also allow it to be done with a smaller force. The problem is that every administration tries to do that. The Trump administration tried to do that. They had almost the same kind of words. It's just very difficult to do when you have global interests and partners and allies around the world.

For NATO, they talk about providing denial capabilities, and key enablers with the allies providing conventional warfighters. And that would be a change in U.S. policy; that is, historically we’ve also provided a lot of conventional warfighting capabilities. So if we made this kind of transition where we provide more enablers, there’s a lot of sense to that. It would be quite a change.

They do talk about ensuring the ability to respond to small-scale contingencies. So they don’t ignore the gray zones. And that's important, because the focus on China, I think, makes many people nervous that we might be giving up entirely on smaller-scale deployments. Now, it’s not, again, clear exactly what kind of capabilities we're going to be keeping; might be mostly related to SOF.

And the last thing is that they talk about focusing mostly on Indo-PACOM and Europe with the other areas like the Middle East, Africa, South America, where we would leverage security cooperation and capacity-building with partners, implying fewer forces, although they don’t come out and say we’re going to be pulling out any of our forces.

And with that, let me turn it over – the floor to Kathleen.

Kathleen McInnis: Hi. Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you so much for joining us.

The 2022 National Defense Strategy has a construct at its center called integrated deterrence. And the construct has been getting a lot of pushback across the community, because nobody’s really quite sure what it means or how it might represent something new. Deterrence is a political and psychological calculation. It is convincing an adversary to not do something, to not cross a red line. And in order to do so, you have to synchronize your activities across the United States government, like we have to speak with one voice. The president has to be leaning forward in communicating what we are trying to deter.
So when the National Defense Strategy talks about integrated deterrence and integrating its activities across different domains and with different interagency, different partners, different bureaucracies and agencies in the U.S. government, as well as with allies and partners, a lot of people are sort of scratching their heads, because they’re like what’s new here? And the answer is not much.

But actually, that return back to basics is actually pretty important, because in recent years, especially, the department has been using the term deterrence pretty fast and loose. It’s meant things varying from the nuclear deterrent itself to a sort of strategic end state, something that can be established. It’s been used as a programmatic justification. Basically it’s been used as a term to describe ends, ways and means. At the same time, that’s the kind of opacity of language that leads to difficult if not less than rigorous national decision-making.

So the construct integrated deterrence isn’t new, but it’s a helpful return to basics. But the basics present a problem, the first being that when you look at the National Security Strategy, the integrated deterrence is, basically, given to the Department of Defense as a key task. But when you think about deterrence and how to implement it – again, it’s got to be whole of government, holistic activity – that’s something that the president ought to be doing, not the Department of Defense. So that raises a question in my mind about how different actors and different agencies in the government are reacting to integrated deterrence.

The second question is that working in the interagency is always hard. If you’ve ever sat in an interagency, you know, PCC, getting the government to speak with one voice and act in one manner is incredibly difficult, and we’ve seen this issue manifest itself any number of times over the years.

Before September 11th – the 9/11 commission attributed our failure to anticipate the September 11th, 2001, attacks to a failure of interagency coordination, amongst other things. Our inability to deliver stability on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan, also attributed, in large part, to bureaucratic stovepipes and the inability of the interagency to work effectively together.

The stakes are now incredibly high when we’re looking at Russia and China and so – but these interagency frictions and stovepipes still exist. There’s been any number of reports and recommendations over the years to address those but none of them have been implemented. So we still have some of the same bureaucratic problems but a much more robust challenge set.

And, finally, given that integrated deterrence or deterrence is sending a political and psychological signal and you’re doing so by communicating
with one voice your intentions, it’s hard to see how this can be properly tailored.

I mean, if you said – just now in this conversation, there was – Seth raised the concern that that Asian allies have that, you know, deployments of forces to Europe might be signaling a lack of interest or will to defend against a Chinese or Taiwan contingency, and our allies in Europe and partners in Europe have the same concerns when we think about pivoting to Asia or sending forces or capabilities to the Asian theater. So how to tailor this strategy – how to actually tailor integrated deterrence – seems to me to be a very, very difficult nut to crack.

The next point that I wanted to raise, and echoing Seth’s point, this strategy pays a lot of attention to allies and partners. That is great. The question is now, again – once again, implementation.

Does that actually mean that we are bringing our allies and partners into the strategy development, actually listening to their concerns and that the – their actual national interests, which are often different to ours, how are we managing that? The United States hasn’t been so good at actually listening to allies and partners, particularly when it comes to defense and campaign strategies. So that’s one to watch.

And then the final point – and I think that this is laudable – this is – the 2018 Strategy mentioned this as well – the civilian workforce. The civilian workforce – the defense workforce is hurting, frankly, after, you know, over a decade of budget cuts, sequestration, furloughs. There’s been mid-career retention problems.

So the focus on trying to restore a, you know, healthy civilian workforce is incredibly important. Human resources initiatives tend to have the sort of appeal as plumbing does for a lot of audiences. But this is incredibly important stuff and I’m so glad the NDS has highlighted that as a priority.

And with that, over to Emily.

Emily Harding: Thanks, Kathleen.

As long as we’re talking about integrated deterrence I want to say a couple things about that. I think that the entire community has been struggling with how to envision what this new concept really means. To me, I picture a Viking style shield wall where you lock all the shields together and that is the integration of all these different pieces of national power, and, just like Kathleen, I think that’s great and also not new.
The caution that I would give the administration is that this can get overcomplicated very quickly. Sometimes rather than trying to coordinate all the pieces to put together a wall what you really want is just a swarm of activity and have everybody generally moving in the same direction with the same goal. There’s a line in the NDS that says “optimal combinations need to be tailored to specific settings and deterrence objectives in an integrated deterrence approach,” which is a bit of a word salad that also just really means policy coordination, and policy coordination is very important, but speaking from experience, if you over-coordinate and over-complicate, it’s going to actually get in the way of your objective.

So what I’m here to talk about today is emerging technologies and cybersecurity and how both are changing the way that we think about conflict and how that’s reflected in the NDS. There’s a real emphasis in the document on the necessity of incorporating technology into the way we think about national security, and I think they do a good job with that. They start off right at the top with a commentary about the threat. Both Russia and China are already using non-kinetic means against our defense industrial base and mobilization systems. And then it talks about the possibility these two adversaries could use a wide array of tools in an attempt to hinder U.S. military preparation in response to a conflict. And they highlight in particular critical infrastructure and undermining the will of the U.S. public. This is warfare off the battlefield. This is not just the way we think about, you know, army versus army; this is a whole-of-society approach to potential warfare. And I think it really speaks to the questions about what conflict looks like today. Who is a combatant and who is a legitimate target? What’s the actual difference between conflict in the cyber domain and conflict elsewhere? And then how do you put these pieces together for this whole-of-government, whole-of-society fight?

The flip side, of course, is this idea of deterrence by resilience, which is kind of a new concept they’re trying to introduce. I’m not really sure it’s deterrence; it’s more like, you know, you can try and throw everything you have at us and we’re still going to be able to fight through it. They talk about the ability to withstand, fight through, and recover quickly from disruption, and that really will be the critical challenge for a networked battlefield.

One of the things they highlight is modern encryption, and by this, what they really mean is encryption that can stand up to the compute power of today and also can stand up to a post-quantum-computing future.

So on that note, looking at the emerging technology they discuss in the document, they do talk a lot about making the right technology investments. In fact, the budget does reflect I think a $7 billion uptick from last year in the RDT&E budget, but, at the same time, like, we were already pretty far behind in this area so it might not be enough. I second what Mark said about how
there’s not a number in this entire strategy and the NDS seems pretty divorced from the budget entirely. It’s more of the poetry that goes along with the prose that is things like the budget. But on the emerging-technology front, they do hit I think all the right notes. They talk about research and development for advanced capabilities, directed energy, hypersonic, integrated sensing, cyber, biotech, quantum science, advanced materials, clean energy technology. Each of those is a huge bucket. The devil is going to be in the details on how the department goes about actually pulling in those elements to their strategy. And each one of those elements moves faster than DOD generally can move, so thus, the emphasis they place on what they call fast follower. We will be a fast follower where market forces are driving commercialization of militarily relevant capabilities. They stayed away from dual-use; they talked about militarily relevant. That’s probably important.

There is, I think, a question – there’s so many fancy, shiny new toys out there, what do you really focus on? What are the pieces that actually make a difference? And what I would really like to see as they execute this NDS is a focus in on these are the critical technologies that are actually going to be important for the future of warfighting.

I think I will stop there, except just to say that I find this the first NDS released after the death of Ash Carter and since he was responsible for pushing the department to really think differently about technology and think differently about acquisition, makes me very sad that we do not get to hear what he has to say about this NDS.

And with that, I will turn it over to Max.

Max Bergmann: Great. Thanks. Thanks, Emily.

So I come at this looking at kind of how this will impact the transatlantic alliance and Russia. I think the first sort of major takeaway is it’s clear Europe is second fiddle. I don’t think that will come as a huge shock to most Europeans. I think as Seth noted up at the top, there was a lot – a strong sense that China was going to be the major focus of this document of the defense strategy. They had been hearing the rhetoric about China being the pacing threat, and you know, I think in some ways being second fiddle isn’t that bad for Europeans, particularly considering, I think, you know, before the war you could argue that other challenges in the Middle East and elsewhere may have been given priority. But I think there is a clear focus on Russia. Russia’s identified as a real threat. And I think when it comes to the focus on Europe, it was notable to me the emphasis that was placed on Europe developing critical enablers. I believe Mark mentioned this. I think in some ways, though, this is where the document has sort of good rhetoric, but I don’t really – I haven’t really seen that much follow-through. When we
think about the focus on key enablers, such as, you know, air transport, air tankers, ISR, what we’re actually seeing from European investments right now is a focus on trying to just increase combat readiness.

If you look at the German Zeitenwende, it’s not – it’s about new procurements. It’s not so much about filling – about Europeans procuring critical enablers that would reduce some of the reliance on the U.S. And I think we may have missed a bit of a window here in the last six months in really pushing the Europeans to make investments to duplicate some of the capabilities that we have, that we provide for European security, that in a contingency with China may be in short supply. And so I think while the rhetorical focus is good, I’m not really seeing how that plays out in practice.

And I think this gets to maybe the final point, which is that when we talk about European readiness, and I think this is a point that Seth noted in the U.S. case of the defense industrial base, well, the European defense industrial base is in – is in much worse shape than the U.S. defense industrial base. And I think when we look at this document – you know, this is a document that I think has been ready to go since before the war. And I think it hasn’t – it doesn’t look like it’s really been updated to take into account many of the lessons learned from the war. But we have real defense industrial challenges not just in the United States but as an alliance.

I was in the U.K. earlier this week. And one of the senior U.K. officials in the Ministry of Defense gave a speech where the entire focus was on the lack of manufacturing capacity, not simply just defense industrial capacity but manufacturing capacity. Severely limits Europe and the U.K.’s ability to mobilize its economy if it were to face a war. And so this is something – this is a problem set that we, I think, will really have to think about, both in the United States but also as an alliance. Because it’s one thing that it’s great that we get, you know, ten arms sales to Europe and countries are buying F-35s. But we also need to think about the strength of the European defense industrial base.

And I think the lack of consideration of that in this document is not a surprise, given, you know, that’s sort of a difficult subject. But I think it’s one of the big lessons learned thus far of the war, and something that I think we really need to focus on. So that’s one area where I think there needs to be a bit more attention. And maybe I’ll leave it at that. And I’ll turn it over to Tom.

Tom Karako: Yes. Good afternoon, folks. Tom Karako.

A handful of folks have talked about the overall concept of integrated deterrence. I’ll just put in my two cents. First of all, I think the comment about the whole of government approach, but this time with feeling, is a fair
one. I might say, you know, the same about, frankly, some of the multidomain operations, which all too frequently sound like – they feel like, well, jointness, but this time with feeling.

Having said that, one of the points that was made earlier I thought really was underscored that it’s a little bit odd for the Defense Department to be highlighting not merely this whole of government approach, but also whole of government that in every sentence talks about diplomacy at its forefront. And so I think that really kind of reflects an instinct that was expressed earlier in the administration, even before the administration, that perhaps we wouldn’t be in the situation that we are today, wherein hard power is just so relevant. But we are where we are.

Now, the analog to very broad, integrated deterrence kind of thing has an application to the missile defense world, to the air and missile defense world, and specifically it’s with the Missile Defense Review’s embrace of this concept of missile defeat. Now, in – way back in calendar 2016, the Congress told the incoming then-Trump administration to do a missile defeat review. The Trump administration decided it didn’t want to do that. They do the Missile Defense Review. But this time around you see that. And this really reflects, at least in principle, at least at the level of theory, the – a more comprehensive, in some respects aggressive, approach towards the left of launch, toward the non-kinetic kinds of things, as opposed to merely the act of missile defense. Now, to be sure, the last Missile Defense Review certainly did talk about integrated air and missile defense, but this takes it a little further.

There’s a couple – in some respects, THE big question for missile defense and for air and missile defense, in my mind, is the degree to which it is aligned with the big question – what the last NDS called the central question of our time – which is, are you dealing with a major problem of China and Russia? And because U.S. missile defense efforts for so many decades have largely been focused on the rogue-state problem, that has required a bit of a shift. Now, on the nuclear policy review side it hasn’t because, frankly, the nukes have always been or primarily been about the bigs, to hedge against – to hedge against Russia and China and that kind of attack.

But with the missile defense area it’s required a bit more of a shift. The Nuclear Posture Review has – you know, they’re cutting the SLCM. I will say, you know, it is a little bit peculiar. Read the room. This is a little bit of an odd time to be cutting that vis-à-vis Russia. But nevertheless, relatively modest changes.

The biggest changes on the missile defense side – or air and missile defense side are that they, well, frankly, talk about air defense more, and you see an explicit embrace within the paradigm of missile defense for cruise missile
defense, specifically of the homeland. In fact, there’s quite a bit of attention to the new emphasis on homeland missile defense, although not for the rogue state ICBMs, but for, frankly, conventional cruise missile type of attack.

There’s also a pretty significant emphasis on Counter-UAS. This was not in the last Missile Defense Review of 2019. Good to see it here. I’d like to say Counter-UAS is, in fact, a part of air defense.

You also see discussed here what in some respects ought to be the poster child for the Biden administration’s missile defense approach, and that is a defensive log. You know, just on the budget documents we’ve seen so far, this is about $4 plus billion for the defense of Guam.

The Missile Defense Review today notes that Guam has a unique position. It’s both U.S. territory – it is a U.S. homeland, unequivocally they say, but it is also emphatically very much a regional base for power projection. And so, especially that latter point, that, frankly, is why you’re seeing the emphasis on it. We can’t afford to not defend it because we have to project power.

Now, there’s a lot of continuity here in terms of kind of the parsing of what we’re trying to do with active missile defense. They kind of repeat the Trump and the Obama mantra about, hey, we’re not trying to stop a big strategic attack from – nuclear attack from Russia and China, but there is something different.

And back to the homeland cruise missile defense effort, the document today talks about, frankly, the need to stop nonnuclear strategic attack on the homeland – whether be it not just Guam, not just Hawaii, but also here in CONUS for the 80 percent or so of conventional forces that we keep here at any given time.

Just to state the obvious – and this goes for the whole NDS – it’s a relatively short document, which is good. The Missile Defense Review piece is 4,700 words in contrast to the 29,000 words of the last Missile Defense Review.

There’s also a handful of things that are not done, and in part that’s because of a brief document. Mark mentioned the lack of numbers. There’s also no numbers in the Missile Defense Review. I would say there’s also no timeline.

So we’ve got these really great new mission areas that I applaud – defense of Guam, Counter-UAS, homeland cruise missile defense, hypersonic defense, space sensors. But there’s no specificity for when they will arrive, which, I have to say, is a little bit peculiar because the first sentence of the National Defense Strategy – and repeatedly you see reference to – the decisive decade.
Well, the question is, will these great capabilities – be it missile defense, be it something else – will they arrive during this decisive decade, or will they be pushed off to the next decade?

Another thing that’s not included here is the usual reference to arms control. The last two – Trump and Obama – had both said, hey, we’re not going to accept arms control limits on missile defense, just not here.

Another thing that is, I would say, peculiar given the – about to be really big demand signal in Europe and elsewhere for our allies to replenish the air defenses they’re giving to Ukraine is, where’s the talk of production? Admittedly, that’s probably a little more of a Bill LaPlante topic, but it deserves policy guidance and direction, which is the aim of the NDS.

Acquisition authorities, likewise; the last two Missile Defense Reviews, 2010 and 2019, emphasized the importance of preserving the agile acquisition authorities for the missile-defense enterprise. That seems to have dropped here as well. And that’s a little bit of a concern as well.

Happy to talk about this and anywhere else folks want to go. Thanks very much. And back to you, Paige.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you so much, Tom. And thank you to everyone for your insights and your analysis on this.

I’d like to turn it back over to our moderator to let everyone know how they can queue to ask questions. We have about 25 minutes here left on the call if we have any questions from those of you who have called in today.

Operator: Thank you.

(Gives queueing instructions.)

We’ll go to Eric Tegler with Forbes.com.

Eric Tegler: Yes. Yes, this is Eric Tegler with Forbes.com. My question is for Mark, Max, or Seth. Any of you can take this.

You know, there’s a lot of discussion in the documents about some of the challenges and the headwinds that we face. I don’t know if you feel that the industrial base gets enough attention in the document. But one thing that I didn’t hear you mention, nor have I heard anyone else mention, is any focus on leadership, any focus on getting the president, the administration and U.S. senior military leadership to inform the American public about the challenge we face, about how short we are in so many ways; an American public that
knows more about the abortion policy of the military and violent extremism within it than it does about its strategic setting right now.

So if any one of the three of you could address those two things – focus on the industrial base and what I see as a total focus of lack of leadership communicating the problems that we have to the American public.

Dr. Jones: This is Seth Jones. I’ll just start there, and others may want to jump in as well.

What I think this gets to, Eric (sp), I think this gets to some of the issues that many of us have touched on, which is there are a number of words in the document. What we don’t necessarily see are two things. One is specifics on how to get there. And I think your point on the industrial base is very true. If we look at the period leading up to World War II, for example, it took a huge change in the U.S. defense-industrial base to shift us from a peacetime to a wartime environment.

And at this point the U.S. is partially involved in the war in Ukraine. Its weapon systems, its munitions, intelligence that’s being provided, training, is leading to the deaths of Russian soldiers and the loss of territory of Russian forces on the ground.

In addition, there’s not a lot on the budget. You know, how does the strategy translate into a defense budget? Mark mentioned the lack of numbers in there. And I think the bigger point here – and this does get to how is this going to be communicated, and what’s the – you know, what’s the leadership strategy going to look like to tell the American public several things?

One is, how serious is this threat? And then, based on that, what – you know, what sacrifices, if any, does the American population need to think through? Do we need a bigger defense-industrial base? Do we need to spend more money on defense? If not, then how do we reprioritize spending? Obviously, inflation is high right now. There are broader concerns, as we can see both from Democrats and Republicans, with assistance to Ukraine. You know, there may be some resistance to support to Taiwan in the case of a war.

So I do think an important part of a next step has to communicate to the American public the importance of these issues, and when we get to specifics, why specific judgements about budgets, about force size, about industrial base, et cetera, why we need to make those decisions and what is at stake. And I think that may be – in some ways, the toughest part is selling this.

Eric Tegler: Well, let me stop and ask you this. And, again, any of you: What if the NDAA included a proposed section for communicating our issues to the American
Mr. Bergmann: This is – go ahead, Seth. Go ahead.

Dr. Jones: Yeah, no, no. Go ahead.

Mr. Bergmann: Well, I think it would. Look, I think one of the challenges here is that the lessons of the war are being processed and internalized over the last few months. And one of the things that strategy documents, you know, tend to be reflective of is the conventional wisdom that has tended to congeal a while ago. And it’s – in some ways, you know, it can sometimes be overtaken by events fairly quickly. I think in this case, I don’t think the NDS has been overtaken by – is out of date. I just think that there is a need for a lot more resources. I think there is some language about how to streamline processes and procedures. I’d defer to Mark and others on whether that’s anything new or sort of boilerplate language that we’ve sort of seen before.

But I also think this is largely, you know, something that the Department of Defense just needs to prioritize. I’m not sure this requires a degree of national public mobilization. But I think it requires, you know, engaging with Congress, that I think will be committed to trying to solve this. So in some ways I think this is – look, I think this is probably more of a technocratic challenge. You could argue it needs some budget – more budgetary resources. But I think in the support for Ukraine, Congress has demonstrated a willingness to provide more aid. So I think the next step is – I think is the administration sort of trying to develop a plan on how to address this, and then – and then taking it to the Hill. And then if Congress isn’t supportive, then it requires, I think, a broader public mobilization.

Dr. McInnis: This is Kathleen. Could I jump in? I just – your question is a really good one. But this is also a perennial issue. Recall – hm? Oh, sorry. Recall after the 9/11 attack and we – the U.S. got involved in Iraq and Afghanistan. And the response at the time was, you know, for the American public to support the troops, to be part of the counterterrorism was to go shopping, right, and to keep the economy going. Because we didn’t want the terror attacks to disrupt our way of life.

This strategic situation we find ourselves in is different. There are impacts that are affecting economies across the West, across Europe. And so I think you are right to point out that new kinds of communication of the kinds of implications this threat environment is needed. Whether that be through an NDAA-appropriated mechanism, or simply, you know, the president using
the bully pulpit and getting out there and communicating these risks, there’s a variety of different ways to tackle this.

I would also note, however, that it’s not just the U.S.’s message to communicate. This is an issue that is – that is – that is hitting Western European – Western economies. And so leaders across NATO, across the Indo-Pacific, also are going to be faced with expressing the risks and the challenges associated with this.

Operator: Thank you.

And next we’ll go to Tony Bertuca with Inside Defense. Please go ahead.

Tony Bertuca: … Inside Defense. Thanks for talking with us today.

One of the things that DOD officials, when they rolled out all the documents today, really wanted to point out is all this has already been at Congress. All this went over to Capitol Hill with their budget submission already. And they believe there was a strong resource linkage and everything was done, you know, in parallel for the first time. It was all integrated.

Isn’t it fair to say then we’ve already seen the Biden administration’s approach for this strategy when it comes to the budget? We’ve already seen the FY ’23 budget request, right? And that request, like a lot of presidential requests, right, instantaneously dead on the Hill. But now it stands to be boosted by as much as, like, $45 billion over in the Senate. What does anyone make of that observation that, you know, sort of we’ve already seen what the resource plan was?

Col. Cancian: I’ll jump in there, because this was my frustration, and it is true that the Biden administration sent over a classified version of the NDS in the spring and, of course, they published their FY 2023 budget and there was a lot of explanation and justifications that went along with that budget.

This was an opportunity to make an argument about strategy ends, ways, and means to tie together their goals, where they wanted to go with programs, forces, and then personnel and resources and its – and I think that the problem that they ran into in the spring is still here – that is, a strategy that is very expansive, has a lot of support, but will, presumably, cost a lot of money but it doesn’t really lay out how much money they’re allocating for that budget for that strategy and, therefore, we may have a strategy resources gap and have this conversation continually about, you know, how much is this really going to cost.

Tony Bertuca: And so given what we’ve seen of the documents, what they do point out is something they already pointed out in the budget. It was they’re going to cut
the SLCM-N and one of the gravity bombs, although Congress might not allow that. Given our read of this, what do you think DOD is going to propose that it stopped doing when it submits FY ’24 to connect with these documents?

Col. Cancian: Well, Tony, to be – to be fair to the administration, in the ’23 budget and in the service statements they have talked about getting smaller – all of the military services getting smaller, some substantially smaller. The Air Force is going to cut over the five-year period 20 percent of its structure, and this is the way that they will free up resources to invest in new technologies.

You know, the opportunity, I think, they missed here was to explain what they’re doing and why they’re doing that. So, you know, we’ll see maybe when the ’24 budget comes out a little more explanation about this, you know, divest to invest and, you know, how they’re going to pay for, you know, these new capabilities.

Tony Bertuca: And also I think it was Mr. Karako who mentioned the Missile Defense Review doesn’t seem to take a position on keeping that acquisition authority there in the Missile Defense Agency. Could you tell me a little bit more about, you know, why you think that’s significant that it was left out and what you think it might mean?

Dr. Karako: Yeah. Thanks for that, Tony. Appreciate it.

So, they do have one – again, it’s a short document – I think they have one sentence in there about their desire to retain, quote, “adaptive acquisition approaches.” Those three words are, you know, quite a bit less than what the Obama and Trump folks had. They each had, like, a chapter or at least a big section on this because it’s been important historically in a bipartisan basis and Congress has, you know, weighed in on this, like, every other year in the NDAA, as you know.

Frankly, I think this is a little bit of the legacy, one of the ghosts of the Trump administration that is reflected here. There was a Trump DTM – directive-type memorandum – from 2019, I think it was, that began to cut away at this and I think that’s what you’re – what you’re seeing.

And so it’s kind of odd. Even while they’re kind of pushing down decision authority in the services – acquisition decisions lower – here, they seem to be pulling it back up and out of MDA. And that’s – you know, it’s peculiar, and I think it’s probably not a good development.

And so, frankly, I hope that the Biden administration does not allow itself to be shackled by this legacy of the Trump – of the Trump – of the previous – the previous folks.
Tony Bertuca: Thank you.
Operator: Thank you.

And next we'll go to Sean Carberry with National Defense magazine.

Sean Carberry: Thanks.

So in terms of the – you know, the conversation about the defense industrial base and the fact that it's ultimately a strategic vulnerability for the United States, I mean, we've seen that Russia's defense industrial base is not in great shape, and in the wargaming that was discussed earlier about how quickly the U.S. would expend certain munitions and things in a conflict with China, what is the assessment at this point of China’s defense industrial base? And how much of a gap is there? We hear a lot about the U.S. weakness, but is China’s base as good as it needs to be for them to feel confident to potentially do something, you know, aggressive in the South China Sea?

Dr. Jones: Mark, do you want to answer that first based on your game? And then I'm happy to go after that.

Col. Cancian: Yeah. Yeah. We ran a project that developed a wargame about a U.S.-China conflict over Taiwan, and this question came up about inventories. Seth noted that on the U.S. side we run out of particularly anti-ship missiles very quickly in the first week. The Chinese also run out of missiles but their inventory lasts two or three weeks, although it is true, by – you know, by the end of the third or fourth week, both sides ran out of long-range missiles. So it's a problem that both the U.S. and China have. In fact, this problem about munitions is a problem that every country going to war has; none of them ever stockpile enough munitions for that transition. But the fact that the Chinese have been building weapons and munitions at such a rapid rate over the last decade means that their stockpiles are deeper than ours.

Dr. Jones: I would just add to what Mark said that there are at least two concerns compared to the Chinese that I would have.

One of them is based on some of our work. The Chinese do have deeper stockpiles.

Second – and I think this becomes important – is the wars that we’re looking at and I think the wars that are in U.S. OPLANs plans with the Chinese are in places like the Taiwan Strait, so it’s essentially in China’s backyard. We would have to pre-position a lot of material, which we have not. We’ve pre-positioned some. So you’re talking about a war that breaks out in China’s backyard where they have their industrial base located, and unlike in
Ukraine, where the U.S., for example, could bring in weapons systems into Ukraine through countries like Poland because the Russians never block it, Taiwan’s an island; it will be virtually impossible to get in weapons systems into Taiwan once a war has started because it’s a contested environment. So there are some challenges to fighting a long, protracted war in an area that you do have some tyranny of distance.

So that’s, I think, another area where insufficient supply of munitions becomes a problem when you’re talking about great distances, and where China has essentially geographic access to its supply, we do not. We are a very long way from the U.S. homeland, and it’s going to be very difficult, either by ship or by air, to bring in munitions anywhere close to a war once it’s started because it will either get sunk or shot down. So I think those are some issues that highlight some concerns with the U.S. side of this compared to the Chinese.

Ms. Harding: Yeah. Seth, this is Emily. I’d add one more thing. Part of it is also a supply chain issue and the depths of the supply chain. If you look at our defense industrial base, a lot of the raw materials and parts they depend on come from either China or near China. So even if you’re looking at ramping up that defense industrial base to make up for the shortfall, there’s a question as to whether you can actually get all the materials that you need from places other than China, and that’s the move towards “friend-shoring” and on-shoring and trying to really dig deep into those multi-, multi-layered supply chains to be sure that you can actually rebuild.

Sean Carberry: Thanks.

Operator: Thank you.

(Gives queuing instructions.)

And we do have a question coming in from Thomas Novelly with Military.com. Please go ahead.

Thomas Novelly: We greatly appreciate it.

I want to talk about one element of this, and that is space, and also the context of some comments from the Russian Federation recently. Recent comments to the U.N. yesterday pointed out that commercial satellites could be considered legitimate targets for retaliation. And with that comment, I was curious, does the National Defense Strategy – does it adequately explain or talk about – you know, are we prepared to defend and protect those commercial assets in space. And also – and I know it’s different, of course, but with the National Security Strategy that we’ve seen from the White House, it took a less aggressive tone when it came to responding to this,
versus the Trump administration. And really just kind of wanted to ask how this strategy, you know, is it adequate that America could respond to threats to their commercial satellites?

Ms. Harding: So this is Emily. I can take an initial stab at that, sort of in a broad sense too. I think that it does not address the question that is going to become a central question of this kind of conflict, and that’s who is really a combatant? If you look at the role that, like, Maxar has played, or Planet has played in the Ukraine war, they are providing assistance and military support to one side of a conflict. And I think that does raise questions about who is a combatant and who is not, and what is the responsibility of various governments to protect those kinds of companies.

Now, I do not know the extent to which DOD has really wrapped its head around that. I suspect they haven’t done it enough. Maybe some of my colleagues know. I do know that from the commercial side, a lot of those companies and corporations are debating internally: What have we gotten ourselves into? What does this really mean for the safety of our employees, for the integrity of our systems. If the next war is a little bit less clear as to who is the aggressor and who is the victim, what would our role be next round? Would we try to assist both sides in defense? Would we try to support the human beings that are sort of affected by the conflict, in the sense of there’s a critical infrastructure to protect, or there’s hospitals to label, or whatever the role may be?

You know, a company that desires to be altruistic, what are they seeking to actually do to play that altruistic role, but then still not make themselves a party to the conflict? I think the legal community is going to spend some time wrapping its head around this as well, but I do not – I do not think this NDS tackles that question. And I think it’s going to become a very pressing question in the next few years.

Dr. Jones: Thomas, this is Seth. Tom Karako may want to weigh in because I know he’s dealt a fair amount with the space world as well, as well as Kari Bingen, who’s not on this call.

But as Emily noted, you know, the – and just to highlight – the war in Ukraine certainly was, at least in my view, a turning point in the role of the private sector in becoming directly engaged in a war. And that’s – you know, Emily mentioned Maxar and Planet. And obviously Microsoft, on the cyber defense side. And then as we get into the space field, the direct involvement of SpaceX and Starlink.

And, you know, Starlink was used by – and is used by the Ukrainians for offensive combat operations as well, including artillery. Getting information from forward-deployed UAVs to artillery to conduct strikes against Russian
positions. So Starlink has had both a – just a civilian use in command and control and communications, and also an offensive military role as well. The Chinese have indicated publicly that they would shoot down, or attempt to, any company – including by name SpaceX – if they helped Taiwan in a crisis.

It is an interesting question. It’s not addressed here. But it’s an interesting question as to how the U.S. would respond in that case to an attack against a U.S. or a multinational space company, particularly one that was involved in supporting an ally or a partner of the U.S. So, I mean, this is a very, very interesting question, and I do think the war in Ukraine highlights the role of the private sector currently in war and one that I think will be – will be a role that will see companies – some companies may play in the future. But it puts the U.S. in a very difficult position, is how do they treat an attack against a commercial satellite, especially if they’re U.S. companies?

So I think, Tom, you may want to weigh in on this as well on the space side.

Dr. Karako: Yeah. Yeah, just real briefly. To pull one of those threads there, there’s just been a whole lot of attention on basically P-LEO proliferators, LEO, over the past couple years. That’s where so much of this, you know, space renaissance, launch cost revolution is going on.

At the same time, there’s a conversation going on – and there are hints of this in the NDS and the MDR, and certainly in the budget documents – of the need to diversify our basin, because you put all your eggs in the – in the P-LEO basket and bad guys will find a way to counter that. And so there’s a conversation going on: OK, it’s good we’re doing P-LEO, but we probably need to be doing more MEO, EO, and maybe GEO. And so it’s diversifying in that kind of way to thicken that element of resilience as well.

Thomas Novelly: Thank you very much.

Operator: Thank you. And we have no further questions in queue. I will turn it back to Paige for any closing remarks.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you so much.

Thank you to everyone for joining us today. As a reminder, we will have the transcript ready within just a few hours here. We’ll put it on CSIS.org. I’ll share it out, as well, to our email lists. And I also wanted to remind you that in about an hour here we are having our live-streamed event on the implications of the Defense Strategy for China and the Indo-Pacific, so if you’d like to talk about that with us please tune in. And thank you all for joining. Have a nice day.

(END)