Center for Strategic and International Studies

“Press Briefing: Previewing the Upcoming National Defense Strategy”

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COLM F. QUINN: All right, folks. Thank you, first of all, so much for braving the two to three inches of snow to get here. Thank you very much. To those who are calling in, thank you for calling in.

I am going to speak the least here because we’ve got a lot of people lined up today. I’m just going to do brief introductions and hand over.

First up, who’s going to give you kind of a general overview, is Dr. Kathleen Hicks. She’s senior vice president here. She’s the Henry Kissinger Chair, and is also the director of the International Security Program.

Following her, Andrew Hunter – sorry, Mark Cancian is going to run through the force structure. He is the senior adviser in our International Security Program.

Following that, Andrew Hunter, the director of our Defense-Industrial Initiatives Group and senior fellow in ISP, is going to follow that.

Rebecca Hersman will then be talking about the NPR. She’s the director of our Project on Nuclear Issues and a senior adviser here.

After that, Seth Jones, our newly arrived Harold Brown Chair – he’s also director of our Transnational Threats Project and a senior adviser – will follow up.

And taking it all home to discuss the budget is Todd Harrison, the director of our Defense Budget Analysis project and also director of our nascently launched Aerospace Security Project, and a senior fellow at CSIS.

So, to kick on, I will give over to Kathleen Hicks.

KATHLEEN H. HICKS: OK, great. Thanks very much, Colm. Welcome, everyone, this morning for joining us. I appreciate it. I am, as Colm said, going to give you a very quick overview. Just as a reminder, the National Defense Strategy is scheduled – I think the invitations went out finally last night – to be rolled out Friday morning by Secretary Mattis over at Johns Hopkins. So this is intended as a pre-brief, if you will, not based on the document but based on our expectations of the debate that will be surrounding the document, what you might want to be thinking about in advance. We will be here after it comes out to do any follow-ups based on the actual reality of what’s in the document.

But first of all, the NDS, you probably know, replaces the QDR. So it’s required every four years. So at the minimum, this is the first term of the Trump administration’s first NDS. They can update it by statute as needed, as felt appropriate by the secretary. But I would think that you could probably consider this the blueprint for their defense approach.

(Background noise.) Do you want to wait?

(Off-side conversation.)
MS. HICKS: So the first thing we have already been told, and probably many of you know, is to expect a very short document in the unclass with further flesh provided in the classified document. So think more like the defense strategic guidance of 2012, which is around nine pages, than a typical QDR, which can range anywhere from 30 to 80, roughly, pages.

Also, I would expect a key question following this is will the chairman put out a new National Military Strategy. I think the answer to that will be yes. You may recall that Chairman Dunford put out a National Military Strategy just before the administration came in, which is an unusual timeline for an NMS. So an update from the chairman is not – timing-wise will not seem like it’s been very far. But in terms of the sequence of events from the National Security Strategy cascading down, it is appropriate for the chairman to do a National Military Strategy. So it’ll be interesting to see what he chooses to do there.

Things I’m going to be looking for, first, of course, is consistency with the National Security Strategy. And I very much expect to see that based on everything we’ve been told about how well they’ve been coordinating internally. What that will probably mean is ambitious goal posts reflected, focused on China first and foremost, and to a lesser extent Russia, and then everything sort of follows from that. I’ll also be looking for a link – a clear link, hopefully – between those goals, those desired goals, the ways that the secretary and his staff lay out how they want to get there, and the means and particularly the dollars and capabilities to achieve them. And that’s why we’ve lined up the folks we have here, because I think there’s a lot to talk about in there.

In particular, I expect there to be a very ambitious funding assumption set under this – underneath this strategy. I personally do not see that funding as likely in the current environment, but I’m going to defer to the end, to Todd’s portion, and happy to answer questions on my views on that later.

I also think you’re going to see continuing nuancing shift in what they call the force-sizing construct. Sometimes you’ll hear this called the force planning construct. There is a difference between those, but I think the issue is the sizing. What is the maximum number of contingencies, roughly, simultaneously against which they size the future force? Not the force, if you will, usually, but a force within the FYDP timeframe.

There used to be, as you probably know, in the ’90s and into the early 2000s a focus on two major contingencies. Over time, that has been nuanced as the threat environment has changed because all threats are not alike, each contingency is not alike. And so where you last left off in QDR 2014, there was a focus on what they called defeating one adversary while denying another. I think you’re going to see continued nuance and probably new language in this. What I have heard is that it’s more like a defeat and deter. So I will be looking for what does “deter” mean, and how is that different than deny, and does this shrink the emphasis on capacity for the force.

I don’t want to take much more time, but I just would say that my overall expectation is that very – you’re going to see much more continuity than change insofar as the rhetoric is going to change, maybe the sense of urgency will be much higher than we’ve seen in the past. But, like the Obama administration before it, I think you’re going to see a continued mismatch between pretty ambitious goalposts and the lack of ability in the broader political context of Washington to get the resources and momentum to achieve all of that while undertaking lots operations overseas.

So, with that, I’m going to turn it over to Mark to talk more about forces.
MARK F. CANCIAN:  Sure. Thanks, Kath.

Well, annually I do an assessment of U.S. military forces – and it’s online if you’re interested – so I’ll be looking for changes that have – that are in this document and then also come out later, particularly in the budget. And there are two things I want to – I’m going to be looking at particularly. The first one is the capability versus capacity tradeoff, and the second will be the force-sizing construct that Kath talked about.

And on the capacity versus capability, that is, is the strategy going to emphasize capability – you know, the ability to take on a high-end threat like Russia or China – or is there going to be a lean towards capacity – in other words, building more forces? Now, Mattis has clearly signaled that he is leaning towards capability, and that would be consistent with what we saw at the end of the Obama administration. Deputy Secretary Bob Work was very emphatic that the United States should focus on modernization and building its capabilities for the rise of great-power conflict, particularly with China and Russia. And the kinds of programs that he proposed in the Third Offset – I don’t think it’s going to be called Third Offset – but those are the kinds of programs that you would expect to continue. The tension there is going to be – putting out forces for crisis response and presence was quite a tension in the Obama administration.

You may remember Secretary Mabus pushed back on the desire to focus on high-end capabilities because he argued that you needed forces out there every day that may was being pushed to deploy a lot of forces for day-to-day requirements. There’s also going to be a little tension with the president’s force goals that he has laid out, particularly when he was a candidate back in September 2016. He put up some numbers on the board, the 540,000-solder regular Army, for example, and of course the 350 ship Navy that you’ve all heard about. So there’s a little tension there between focusing on the high end, where you buy fewer but more capable units, and those kind of numbers.

Now, on force sizing – Kath, I think, laid that out – the two things that I’m also going to watch there is whether there’s any indication that the day-to-day requirements that are put on the forces will have an impact on the sizing. Now, in the past, day-to-day requirements have been very important. In other words, the services have argued that irrespective of what might be needed for conflict, they need a certain level of forces just to get forces out there for, you know, rotations to Eastern Europe, for example, for the Army, and for the Navy to get forward-deployed forces for crisis response.

And the other thing is going to be on stability operations and counterterrorism. And I think Seth may talk more about this, but, you know, in 2012 stability operations were not – were taken out as a force sizing construct, but the strategy still said that the United States would be – you know, would still be involved with stability operations. So I’d be interested to see, you know, how much of that is still in the strategy. And so, with that –

MS. HICKS:  Andrew.

ANDREW PHILIP HUNTER:  Thanks, Kath.

And I, as mentioned, am on the Defense Industrial Initiatives Group. I’m going to focus today on modernization, which gets at my core issues of defense acquisition, defense industry. I’ve got five things. I’ll try and keep them brief. The first is nuclear modernization. I’ll be looking for the verbiage that they use to describe that, in part because so much of the current major investment programs that
are underway in the Department of Defense that will really become expensive and start to eat into – significantly into the department’s budget are nuclear modernization programs. And by that, loosely considered, would include B-21, the BGSD, and LRSO, and a variety of other programs that relate to nuclear modernization, which are going to be probably the biggest investments that become active during this administration’s immediate time in office, assuming, you know, at least one initial term.

The second thing I’ll look for is how they describe – and Mark referenced this – what the last administration called the Third Offset, which was an approach to modernization for the longer-term and a raison d’etre for doing that kind of modernization. It is my expectation they will not use Third Offset terminology. Kath and I wrote about this about this time last year. But there hopefully will be some similar concept that describes. And just in terms of what I would look for there, the last administration, Bob Work, who was the kind of godfather of this concept, really talked about the reason or the impulse for the Third Offset being long-term competition against near-peer competitors, peer or near-peer competitors. It’ll be interesting to see how they characterize the competitors that the strategy is seeking to address with its modernization program.

The second thing is Dr. Carter’s famous terminology was always talking about agility and obviously, with his DIUx initiative, reaching out to commercial technology providers. So it’ll be interesting to see how they describe that as a necessary part of the strategy or a strategic objective of the department. And then the third piece is how much they talk about the need for the department itself to invest its own dollars in research and development, because there has been a lot of talk lately about, you know, commercial industry, they’re investing so much money, they’re investing a lot more than the government.

And they are – there’s a lot of agility out there in the commercial tech sector. How much does the strategy focus on the government doing its own research and development and funding that? That funding really, really, really fell during the drawdown and the sequestration and the Budget Control Act era. And it is at historic lows in many cases on the research and development side. So that’ll be something to look at – at least for some of the services at historic lows. Not necessarily for the department as a whole.

The third thing I will look at is how they talk about the industrial base. I think there – some strategies have mentioned the industrial base. They rarely go into any particular detail about it. So, first thing, do they mention the industrial base? Second thing is, to what extent, if any, do they really talk about, characterize it, and the need for it? I know the National Security Strategy talks about the national security innovation base, which I expect that terminology would presumably carry over.

The fourth thing, that Mark touched on, is the extent to which, at all, they talk about tradeoffs between modernization and force structure, which are inherent. I know Senator McCain wrote a piece about what the strategy should do. It talked in there about you have to talk about the things that you aren’t going to do in a strategy. I don’t know how much they’re really going to do that, but to the extent they at least discuss some of the tradeoffs between force structure and modernization I’ll look for.

And then lastly – you know, the last administration has a big focus on space, cyber. And then in the first year of this administration missile defense has also really risen on the scope as a modernization priority. So I’ll be looking for the extent to which they go into those priorities in the strategy.
MS. HICKS: All right. Seth.

SETH G. JONES: Thanks. I’m going to highlight three issues and then leave a lot on the table for further discussion. I first want to talk about capabilities for current operations or near-current operations and what might be said and what I’ll be looking for. Second is the broader issue of allies and multilateral institutions. And then third on, as Mark mentioned earlier, terrorism, stability operations, issues related to that.

So the first issue that I think is – I’ll be looking at is how the strategy deals, particularly in the near term, with filling – or does it – with filling acknowledged gaps I think that could affect the outcome of current or potentially near-current operations. There’s been a growing concern about the capabilities of the Chinese and the Russians in particular. Their anti-access/area denial capabilities. What do we see in the sense of building capabilities, stand-off weapons, healthy air vehicles, the JASSM development, to help fill those gaps?

And, on related note, how do these states – how are they referred to in the document? I mean, I think the word choice has become important. I would expect to see, if there’s consistency with the National Security Strategy, words like: competitors, revisionists, states that try to change the international order. I mean, it’s very different kind of – I’ll be looking for the word choices in how some of these states are dealt with.

The second is the issue of how allies and institutions are dealt with. And here, let me just point out with the note here that, you know, it’s not just what is said in the document, but how it’s matched with changes in actions or just actions more broadly. So how are the role of allies outlined in the – for current and near-current future operations in the Indo-Pacific region, in the NATO alliance, some of the coalitions – counterterrorism coalitions in the Middle East? And how does that square with what’s actually being doing, actions? And I think there certainly are tensions with some of those actors in the Middle East based on the Jerusalem decision. There’s been tensions with European allies and then some in the Asia-Pacific region here. So how do you square what’s said with actions as well?

And then the final issue, on terrorism, one of the things I’ll be looking at is where the National Defense Strategy comes down on the role of terrorism in stability operations. I think it’s pretty safe to say in the word choices of at least the last two administrations there was a desire, including of the services, to move beyond dealing with terrorism. Not that it’s not important, but to focus on state-based actors. And obviously, when you look at what the Islamic State or al-Qaeda, Hezbollah have done or are capable of, they get a vote in this.

So where does this issue stand on the role of terrorism and the U.S. military’s role in that? And how does that square, I think, with the reality on the ground? I’ll just say, you know, most of the issues that I think we’ve had to deal with in Libya, Iraq, Syria, we’ve got plenty of problems there. So we’ll – we would expect to see that issue, I think, stay important.

REBECCA HERSMAN: OK. We’ll switch gears a little bit to talk about the Nuclear Posture Review. And let me just sort of – one caveat. It’s an unusual situation to have a reportedly final document leaked in full so many weeks before its formal release. I really don’t envy the administration’s position here because they’re taking hits on a document in ways they can’t respond to, almost that’s been a year in the making, and that may not have even been through the final stages of approval. So, for one, I am not going to consider this final until it’s actually final and released, and I will be surprised if there aren’t some at least minor changes that we see between the drafts that are
circulating and what is ultimately released. That said, I think we know the arc of the narrative, and I think we can draw some conclusions from that.

For me, the bottom line is that overall, while there’s a very different tone and emphasis from the 2010 NPR, this draft, in its nuts and bolts of nuclear posture and policy, suggests an approach that has more in common with the prior administration, especially with regard to nuclear modernization, than necessarily significant points of departure. There are not a lot of surprises, either, from what we might have been expecting, but there are a few important and significant issues that we should draw some attention to.

So what are a couple of big takeaways? Very significantly, it would appear that the draft fully supports the nuclear modernization program that was put in place by the Obama administration with little or not real modification. It does add an what I would say is much-needed emphasis on modernization efforts in nuclear command-and-control and in nuclear weapons infrastructure. That also is not surprising. It wasn’t absent in the prior reviews. But it is an area, I think, where the community largely agrees that more emphasis is needed.

Some of the big worries for some of us about this review don’t seem to be coming to pass. The document supports continued U.S. compliance with all of its treaty obligations, including adherence to New START and INF. There’s no recommendation for renewed testing or an expectation of an overall stockpile increase. So, in general, those seem to be elements of stability.

There is one major change that’s getting a lot of attention and a lot of play, and that is the reintroduction of a sea-launched non-strategic – by that we mean lower yield and range – capability into the force. In the near term, they propose the modification of limited numbers of SLBM warheads to provide lower-yield options. In the longer term, they appear to be proposing the reintroduction of a nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile – in essence, a replacement for the capability, the TLAM-N, that was retired as part of the decisions in the 2010 NPR.

There are still a lot of questions about this change, both in terms of what will be required, in terms of research and development, what sort of timeline this would be on, and in particular what would be the cost. So we really have no idea what that means.

I would say there is, just to get it started, four things for which we should all be looking for greater clarity about the administration’s plans and intentions. The first one on my list is their repeated reference to the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in deterring non-nuclear attack. Non-nuclear attack is a very broad, very general phrase, and it’s not entirely clear what is intends to capture, especially in terms of scale and scope. And I think that some significant detail and elaboration is going to be required there for there not to be a lot of confusion and a lot of concern that there would be a dramatic increase in the role of nuclear weapons. I doubt that’s the case, but the language leaves it open to a lot of interpretation.

The second area, for me, is the kind of hedgey language about supporting the nuclear testing moratorium, but returning to testing if necessary. Contextually, this is an idea where the administration does not intend to support ratification of CTBT. And even in the text, there’s some different ways that this is worded to suggest how strongly or not strongly they’re going to support the moratorium. So getting a better idea of the administration’s intentions will be important, and I would be looking for a strong reassurance that any new warheads developed for the new sea-launched capabilities can be safe,
secure, and reliable without breaking the moratorium. For me, that’s kind of a threshold – threshold point.

The third area that I think needs a lot more clarity has to do with the overall warhead plan. There is a lot of talk through the document about keeping certain warheads in the inventory longer, accelerating life-extension programs for others, leaving open decisions about common warhead options for sea- and ground-based missile systems rather than resolving them, and adding an additional warhead for the new sea-launched capability. This is a large burden on a nuclear weapons enterprise that is already really operating at capacity, and there’s no mention of the costs or requirements associated with that either. So there is really a lot of open questions here, and I would expect to see a more comprehensive warhead plan that helps to kind of clarify some of that.

Finally, on really more of the policy front, I hope we’ll hear more not just about how the administration plans to adhere to the NPT regime overall – the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime – but, in fact, how it intends to lead it, because without American leadership the system will dangerously falter. So the NPR clearly rejects many of the “if we lead, they will follow” approaches of the Obama administration. But you can’t beat something with nothing. So I think they’re going to need to explain how they’ll model responsible nuclear stewardship, how they’ll inspire it in others. And they’re going to need to find some ways to address the deep anxieties of many non-nuclear states emerging in areas such as the Ban Treaty. I don’t think a duck is going to be possible here. I think that this issue is going to have to be taken on a bit more directly.

So, with that –

MS. HICKS: Now pay for it all.

TODD HARRISON: OK, yeah.

MS. HICKS: Yeah. (Laughter.)

MR. HARRISON: So, my question, how are you going to buy that?

No, I think it’s somewhat fitting in a way that they’re going to be releasing the National Defense Strategy on the very day – January 19th – that Congress will be scrambling to try to pass yet another continuing resolution extending four or five months into the fiscal year to avoid a government shutdown. So the big question I’m going to have in the National Defense Strategy is: How do they consider or take into account research constraints? Because – many of you have heard me say this before, I’ll say it again – a strategy that’s set without regard for resource constraints is a strategy that risks being unexecutable in practice. So if it’s just a bunch of words on a page and it doesn’t have numbers that says this is, you know, what it’s going to cost, this is what we’ll be able to do, this is how we’re going to pay for it, then, you know, it’s going to leave a lot wanting. And, you know, in fairness, if you look back at previous QDRs and other strategy reviews, that often is the case – that it’s a lot of talk, but you really then have to wait for the budget to see what does it mean in practice, what are they actually going to do or not do. So I’m going to be looking for any evidence that resource constraints were considered; be looking for any assumptions about resources either explicit or implicit in the document; and in particular, you know, what kind of topline budget are they assuming here, what kind of growth are they going to need in the future, how realistic is that.
Another thing I’ll be looking for is efficiencies in the budget. Everyone likes to talk about making the Pentagon more efficient, and they should – should always try. And that can be an important part of your strategy, getting more efficient, because that gives you the ability to scale in the future if you need to, to build capacity. If you are more efficient, you can do that to a greater degree in a crisis. But, if taken too far, efficiency can also be a risk in your strategy. If you are assuming that you’re going to save a certain amount of money from efficiencies and then using that to pay for initiatives in your strategy, well, that’s risky. That may not happen. Those savings may not be achieved. And history is – recent history, even, is full of examples where that hasn’t happened, that folks have assumed that they could get 5 percent efficiency out of the Pentagon – I think Rumsfeld said that going in in 2001 – and it’s very hard to do. Nevertheless, you should try.

The other thing I would be looking at is: Is this strategy flexible and scalable? Because the resources you think might be available or you think you’re going to need may not be available, and the threats that are out there in the world may change as well. The last thing you want to do is build a strategy that is a point solution, that cannot be easily modified one way or the other.

I think a few years back, Ash Carter during one of the budget rollouts, I don’t remember if he was deputy secretary or secretary at the time, but he made some comment to the effect of our budget that we’re rolling out here is tightly integrated with our strategy. It’s like a well-tuned machine, you can’t tinker with it at all or else you risk making the whole thing fall apart. That’s not a good approach to Congress because Congress will tinker with it. It’s also not good strategically because things are going to change. Resource levels will change, threats will change, the world will change, so you have to have a strategy that is flexible, that can change with it.

And part of that is identifying up front, what are you not going to do or what are you going to do less of if you don’t get everything you want or if the world doesn’t turn out to be the way you thought it was going to be? So, you know, a strategy that’s just a list of here’s the things we’re going to do, here are all the top priorities, but does not include things that are lower priority, things you’ll do less of, things you can do without, that’s going to be lacking.

My final point before, I guess, we go for questions is, putting on my other hat here in the aerospace security project, I also want to look at, what does it say about space in the strategy? This is for Sandra. (Laughs.) What does it say about space and in particular the big, burning issue that’s not been resolved? You know, it was highlighted as an issue by the last administration, but I don’t think we’ve achieved a good resolution to it, is, what are we going to do in space to reestablish or improve a stable deterrent posture? We do not want to fight a war in space. That’s a war that’s not going to go well for anyone. If you know anything about orbital mechanics and orbital debris, we don’t want it to go there. And General Hyten has been very clear about this in the past, as many others have in the space community.

So, therefore, we need deterrence to work. And we’re at a point now where deterrence is not as clear that it will work in space. We’re worried about that, the Department of Defense is worried about that. So what are they going to do in this strategy to help reestablish a stable deterrent posture in space?

MR. QUINN: All right, folks. We’re going to open up to questions now. We are running a transcript on this, so please, when you are asking a question, if you could name who you are and what outlet you are from. I’m going to try and go from left to right just to keep it fair.
And so, Tony. I mean, I just – Tony, if you can grab a mic just so we can get you on. Thank you.

Q: Tony Bertuca, InsideDefense. Thank you for having us.

I wanted to return to some of Ms. Hicks’s concerns and some of the things Todd said about resources and the assumption that this document at 11 pages and unclassified is not going to wrestle with resources. It’s not going to wrestle with, OK, if you don’t give us this, we can’t do that. That it won’t be that explicit. This is one of the things that Chairman Thornberry told some reporters yesterday at breakfast. He hopes it will be as explicit as possible, so then whatever the threat the United States cannot answer in terms of national security will be known. Secretary Mattis doesn’t do that, he doesn’t like to silhouette U.S. weaknesses for our enemies. If we could discuss this a little bit I would appreciate it. Thank you.

MS. HICKS: Let me just start. You know, I have a probably sordid to many in the room background in writing lots of these documents. It is a real challenge. You are communicating in the public document to a multitude of audiences at once. One major audience are those you want to deter, so you want to get the resources you think you need, but you’re trying at the same time to deter actual threats. You don’t want opportunists to read a report like this and say, aha, in fact they are weak, or if they don’t get this, therefore, exactly this will happen.

This was a real challenge for the department, for example, during the sequestration period where there was a lot of pressure to specify what exactly DOD couldn’t do. For example, if it suffered under sequester, which, of course, it then had to suffer under sequester, and never was quite as explicit as I think some wanted it to be.

I think – I think Mattis will win that argument because of that challenge he faces at the strategic level, that communications challenge of not signaling too much weakness. But I can’t say until I read the document exactly how it will be resolved.

On the resources piece of it, again, with a short document, it will be built on assumptions, but it will rely on the narrative inside the FY ’19 budget and the rollout. So there’s both a written narrative and a rollout, in theory, to be associated with the ’19 budget and the associated FYDP. That’s where – and any administration can do this its own way, but I would expect there to see the greater detail of what exactly they’re relying on. Sometimes they’ll actually talk about the top line if it’s already through and approved. I’ll look over at Mark because he’s lived the OMB dream before, from both sides. But my expectation would be that we won’t even hear a top line out of Mattis on Friday, so we’ll be waiting to see the budget, which we, I think, still anticipate to be in February, if I –

MR. HARRISON: Yeah. No, I mean, I think the lesson from FY ’13, when we actually had the sequester hit, is a good one because the department did go and as the deadline got closer, in congressional testimony, they did try to forecast what would happen, they went a little too far. And you look at some of the statements that were made, like we’re going to have to kill the F-35 program or have to do all these things, well, that didn’t happen. Right? And so if you go too far, you know, you risk, you know, crying wolf and you get called on that and you lose credibility.

So what they can do, though, is be realistic and say, OK, you know, if you get 10 percent less in your budget, you know what you’re going to do? You’re going to cut back on maintenance, you’re
going to defer some maintenance. You’re going to cut back on training, so there will be some added risk there with forces operating. Maybe you cut back on peacetime operations in certain regions of the world. Where are you going to do that? You could slip some modernization programs; tell me which ones? You know, be realistic about what will happen.

That then will give Congress something to work with and say, you know what, you know, nuclear modernization is important to us, we think it’s strategically important. They’re saying they’re going to delay X nuclear program, you know, if they don’t get the resources needed. OK, we don’t want that to happen; therefore, let’s try to get together on a deal.

MR. QUINN: And a quick follow up because you talked about readiness and operations and maintenance and that has been identified by many as an area where the Defense Department needs to put more money, invest more money. Paul Ryan is coming here on Thursday to talk about military readiness. He said already in a few public appearances gearing up to this that, you know, sailors are dead because of a readiness crisis. Do the experts in this room accept that? Is that – is that true? Is there a readiness crisis? Is it leading to the deaths of soldiers, sailors, Marines? Is there a risk because of this?

MR. HARRISON: I would say, clearly, if you look at the incident reports on the McCain and Fitzgerald, absolutely there is a readiness problem, at least on those ships we know for sure. I would point you to some analysis that we did earlier, I think it was back in October – and Seamus Daniels is over here on the side, he authored this – looking at O&M funding per ship in the Navy and comparing that over time, looking for trends there. The truth is, O&M funding per ship in the Navy right now is about double, even when you adjust for inflation, double what it was in the ’80s and ’90s.

So I wouldn’t say that it’s a lack of funding. There’s not evidence of that, that that is necessarily causing the readiness crisis. What appears to be causing the readiness crisis, if you read the reports, is that we’re trying to do too much with a force that’s too small. We’re overstretched.

And so, yeah, you can build a larger Navy, some come back in 10 or 15 years, we’ll have, you know, a 355-ship Navy maybe, maybe 20 years. But in the meantime, what do you do? You know, we’ve got a mismatch between the demand on the force, what we’re trying to do and what we’re actually sized to do. In the meantime, I think you just have to scale back what you’re doing, cut back on your day-to-day operations. That’s the only way to rebuild that kind of readiness that I can see.

MS. HICKS: And I just would add – and I have a feeling I have at least a couple of people here that would want to add to this – I don’t see that happening because I think that scale of ambition is not reducing. I don’t see politically that that’s where the administration wants to go, with the Middle East being a slightly different case of how they manage the counter-ISIS and Afghanistan campaigns.

So, therefore, to the point that Andrew Hunter raised earlier, what’s the billpayer? Logically, it’s probably the long term. And that’s not where they want to be, that’s never where any administration wants to be, but that is the reality if they’re going to have capacity to be in multiple theaters, which it looks like they feel they need to do, if they’re going to modernize against a fast-paced threat like China and, in some specific cases, Russia and others, and they have to be ready today because there are soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines who are at risk. Otherwise, that is a very painful place to be. It’s hard to be pretty radical in strategy.
And so I think that’s, more than anything, why I think you’re going to see this unfortunate continuation of the gap between the goals and ambitions and what we say rhetorically because we want to deter adversaries, we need to deter adversaries, and the funding and the manpower to actually keep that strategy.

MR. CANCIAN: Yeah, I just wanted to build on Todd and Kath’s points there.

First, on the readiness question and the question about tradeoffs, Mattis has clearly signaled that if he has to make a tradeoff he will focus on capability – that is, modernization – and trade off force structure. So, in other words, it’s not going to fix the problem that Todd pointed out that you – the forces are too small for what you’re being – what they’re being asked to do. And Kath, I think, highlighted that tension; that is, strategists tend to focus on, you know, the big threats, the high-end threats like China and Russia, but the services live in the day to day where the president and the secretary tell them: I need ships here. I need, you know, the Army to go to Eastern Europe to reassure our allies. And we need to send forces here and there. And then the forces get very stretched and you have tension. And then, ultimately, you can have tragedies like we saw in the Western Pacific.

MR. HUNTER: Can I just do one brief tag onto that? It occurred to me as I was doing my piece – and I mentioned space and cyber. Todd mentioned space too. And it occurred to me the question might arise why – you know, why? Why focus on those things as being critical in the strategy? And the reason why I think is because they are – they are new investment categories that are trying to displace, to some extent, existing force structure because in order to dramatically increase investment in space, the Air Force will probably be required to reduce the size of its tactical fighter fleet in order to be able to afford that kind of investment. In order – all of the services are being forced to reallocate force structure into the cyber mission in a pretty major way.

That’s hard to do. That means it has to come from the secretary. And that happened in the last administration, to the extent that it happened. And left to their own devices, it’s very hard for the services to make that tradeoff. And that’s why if it’s not articulated in the strategy, if it’s not coming from the secretary, it’s probably not going to happen.

MR. QUINN: I’m going to go right to the end here.


This question may be for Seth, in that it’s about allies and military cooperation. When it comes to Southeast Asia, you’ve spoken about China. You’ve spoken about the need for modernization. But where does military cooperation fit in, looking at China, looking at North Korea, at a time where the president likes to say make America great again and even threatened to walk away from the NATO alliance?

MR. JONES: Yeah, a couple of thoughts. And I think there are probably others here who would come in. I mean, I think when you look at the capabilities being developed by the Chinese, you also look at the capabilities of the North Koreans, the Russians, even Iran for that matter more broadly, I would just highlight a few things.

One is we’ve already noted some of the concerns here, force structure and capabilities. I think based on where the U.S. is right now, we need basing access. We need allies with additional capabilities. If you even look at the wars more recently in Syria and Iraq, look at how important...
partners were? Any of the war games people have, including I, have participated in have brought in allies, whether Taiwan Strait scenarios or South China Seas. And I think when you look at the need for diplomatic help, even in deterring a conflict, allies are very important.

So I think the question then becomes what does the National Defense Strategy say not just about the importance of allies, but how allies are important, how are thinking about continuing to develop relationships, why they’re important, and how are, I would say, going to improve the situation from where we are today? And again, as you look at air, sea, land, cyber, and the space domains in the area you’re talking about, I mean, it’s hard to overstate the importance of alliances. And you know, there’s a long – there’s really a long way to go right now. So, again, the question I’d say is not just what it says, but how over time do those actions then meet what the document says?

MR. HUNTER: Can I just tag onto that briefly, that I mentioned that the big drawdown in U.S. research and development over the last eight years. One possible way to address that gap is to leverage partner and ally research and development. They don’t spend as much as we do, but they are spending money. And certain nations are very good at specific kinds of capabilities and actually, you know, have pushed the edge and are maybe out ahead of us in some of these areas. So to the extent that we can leverage their research and development as well as commercial tech sector, that’s a way to address some of the gaps that have accumulated.

MR. CANCIAN: Let me add one thing, which is if you look at the National Security Strategy, it’s very emphatic about the importance of allies. Mattis has been also emphatic about the importance of allies. He’s gone around the world reassuring allies that they’re still important to us, and that they have a role with our strategy. I would expect to see that in the document. The bad news is that if you watched the National Security Strategy rollout press conference with the president, he talked almost entirely about making the allies pay more.


You all noted that, you know, the FY ’19 budget might give us a better picture of the kinds of resources that will actually be behind this strategy. But a few weeks ago, Deputy Secretary Shanahan told reporters that, well, actually, you know, the buildup isn’t really going to, you know, get going in earnest until FY ’20. And that’s going to be the first budget that’s fully informed by the strategy, because they were trying to build the strategy and the FY ’19 budget at the same time and get people into place.

So I mean, I do you think we should take the FY ’19 budget as – with a grain of salt, and maybe it actually isn’t going to indicate as much as we might like? What kind of resources will actually be behind the strategy? I mean, are we going to have to wait till FY ’20? Shanahan said they’re, you know, just starting upon ’20 this month. So it sounds like on a budgetary sense, they might not have actually fleshed out yet what kind of resources will actually be behind this strategy. I’d like to hear your thoughts on that.

MR. HARRISON: Yeah. I mean, you know, I think the reality is that in a normal year, a normal, you know, administration at this time, you would say, no, we should expect to see their priorities reflected in this budget request. The second budget request of a new administration is normally where you see big changes in defense plans reflected in the budget. But, with that said, in this administration a lot of the senior positions were left unfilled for many months. I think we’ve just recently gotten an undersecretary for policy. The deputy secretary, I think he got in there in, like, July.
So a lot of these key positions – you know, the director of CAPE, the comptroller, the service secretaries – they went unfilled for so long that the PB ’19 budget process, you know, kept moving.

And so really they were only able to affect that at the tail end, during the program review process. And at that point, the services have locked in all the details and you’re just, you know, making changes on the margins really. So I think there’s some truth to that, that they probably did not have enough time to really implement the kind of strategic initiatives in the budget that may be called for in the strategy and we will have to wait for another budget cycle. I don’t know that Congress, though, is going to be willing to wait for that. I think Congress in hearings are likely to call folks up to testify and say: OK, tell me what you’re thinking about in PB ’20, and what can I go ahead and add into PB ’19, even if the administration hasn’t done that.

MS. HICKS: I just want to add, as Todd mentioned, it’s the second year – second budget of the administration. If they wait for ’20, which – to be sort of the major thrust of their strategy, that’s going to be their only year. That’s the problem for them. Because then it’s the next team gets to play with that, whoever it is. It might be them again, but you would have to bank on that. No administration ever wants to bank on getting that second term when they’re thinking through getting their priorities done. So there is a lot of risk, I guess I would say, in a strategy that looks to ’20 to really be the key year for consolidating their strategy.

MR. CANCIAN: If I could just add one thing. One thing that I think is adding confusion, particularly this go-round, is that the top line wasn’t decided until after Christmas and that, in fact, the department got more resources than it had been planning on. And working through the allocation of those resources and the last-minute decision is one reason why you’re probably not going to see many numbers on Friday.

MR. HUNTER: And I would just also say, assuming that Mark is correct, that the secretary’s focus will be on this capability side rather than the capacity side, that suggests that they might be looking to initiate some new modernization efforts. Those are inherently things that execute over a very long period of time. As most of you know, if you decide to start a new acquisition program, you know, the real money begins in year four or five, and so it’s kind of – if the focus is on capability, then you’re going to see it’s a more extended timeframe to deliver results than if the focus is on improving readiness, and even to some extent on force structure.

MR. QUINN: OK, back over to this side there.


I’d be interested to ask you about the process that produced the NDS. So as recently as last week the Pentagon said that it had not yet sent drafts to the White House. Yesterday Mac Thornberry said he’d not seen a draft of it yet. Yet, Patrick Shanahan as far ago as mid-December was talking publicly about some of the details in the document, like the fact that climate change was not going to be included, for example.

Is that common in terms of the process of producing this kind of thing? What does that say about how this particular document was produced? And how much – excuse me – how much feedback do the White House and Capitol Hill usually offer before a final document is released?
MS. HICKS: So I don’t have insight into—much insight into this year’s process. What I can tell you is, it is not common to share drafts with the Hill in advance at all. It is relatively common to share drafts at a very late stage with key advisers I guess I would say, red teamers, things like that. I imagine that they have done that. And by the way, I’m on a congressionally mandated commission to examine this strategy, so I’m trying to keep my hats straight here.

So after the strategy comes out I think is really when Congress—whether it’s through an independent commission and/or through their regular business, their staff, et cetera—expect to dig into a document. Often you build into that rollout plan, and so we’ll have to see what their plan is from Friday, the public release. Are they doing something in advance of that with the Hill? So I would expect to see something today or tomorrow, quiet and closed-door if they haven’t done that already, with, say, Chairman Thornberry and others.

There is no single pattern. That would be my bottom line. Some teams like to hold the document extremely close. Some make sure to circulate it pretty widely, particularly with the services to make sure that there’s, you know, not going to be any surprises, if you will, in terms of people stabbing you in the back. So that’s really up to the administration. I don’t see anything particularly unusual, frankly, in the way, from what I’ve seen, how this process has gone forward relative to past ones. And I strongly think that they’ve been working with the national security strategy. Even if they haven’t shared documents, they’ve probably—they have the NSS, they’ve been able to talk across the things that they wanted in the NSS that will pre-stage what will be in the NDS, and I’m sure the White House will get to see this document if they haven’t already before it goes out.

MR. JONES: Just to add one point there. I mean, I think it would be reasonable to expect that the White House has certainly been involved in discussing broad issues with the folks at the Department of Defense. You know, the NDS—the national security strategy’s already out, so we can see the themes and the way it talks about threats. So, I mean, that will automatically have influence, including those individuals who wrote it, on the national defense strategy.

MS. HERSMAN: Just same thing on the Hill. You don’t share the document, necessarily, beforehand. That would be unusual. But you absolutely would be having conversations. I have every reason to expect that they’ve been doing that at least at the staff level.

MR. QUINN: OK. I’m going to turn back over to this side of the room, to the very end.

Q: Hi.

MS. HICKS: It’s not on. Push the button.

MR. QUINN: There you go.

Q: Not had coffee this morning. (Chuckles.)

So you guys—sorry. Leigh Giangreco, FlightGlobal.

You guys talked about the friction between the high end and the low end. I was wondering if you have any sense of what’s going to happen to the Strategic Capabilities Office. We saw Will Roper leave and go over to the Air Force. How does that bode for not only the SCO, but just more broadly
Bob Work’s Third Offset strategy? Is it going to be, Seth, I think as you said, a change of language, or will SCO actually be on the chopping block?

MR. HUNTER: I’ll make my point, and then maybe Todd will make his point. (Laughs.)

So I think in the near term the SCO will survive. You know, Secretary Mattis has embraced the SCO. And the – to a surprising degree, at least from my perspective, having been there at the birth of the SCO, the services have actually embraced the SCO in the last couple of years. And so I think it has a momentum as a result of that and it has programs that are in work that, you know, would be pretty – I think it would be very ineffective to just drop those or to try to, you know, right now hand them off to another organization. But having said that – and I won’t make Todd’s point, but Todd has an excellent point on this, too.

MR. HARRISON: I’ll throw a wet blanket on it. No, I mean, I agree with all of that. And, you know, there are a lot of important and I would argue, you know, very necessary and good things that SCO has been working on, is working on. Do the services continue to buy into this office? You know, they had a good incentive to buy into what the SCO was doing before because the SecDef himself had bought into it, right? So that gives you a good incentive to go along with it.

You know, the SCO, during the reorganization of AT&L, they’re getting moved. They’re getting more institutionalized. They’re going to be transitioning to a new leader. Will Roper’s moving out. So a lot of change going on. If you’re going to institutionalize an organization and you’re going to communicate to everyone that this organization is not going away in the next few years, it’s going to be around, the way you do that institutionally is you give it a budget wedge, right? You give it a wedge in the FYDP to show that it’s going to be around. In the last administration, every year – and this was by design – the SCO and its FYDP projections, the funding peaked in the first year and then declined to almost nothing at the end of the five-year period. You know, and the argument was they’re going to come back every year and with a justification for what they need – new things, right? – and it’s going to be short-term items, so it’s naturally going to look that way. If you’re going to institutionalize it, though, you need to show that, hey, we’re actually going to maintain this level of funding in the future. It’s not by default going to go out of business. So that’s one of the things I’ll be looking for in the budget request, is they do – do they give a budget wedge, and that would indicate that it’s still going to be a major priority for this administration, not just for the next few years, till they finish the things they’re currently working on, but going forward.

MR. JONES: On your – just to answer the question about the Third Offset, I think we mentioned before those kinds of programs are very consistent with a focus on great-power competition that I – you’ve certainly been hearing from Mattis and I expect you’ll see in the document. I don’t think it’ll be called Third Offset, but those kinds of programs I would expect to continue.

Q: But it’ll still be hypersonics and swarming and those sorts of things.

MR. JONES: Those are the kinds of programs, yes, that would be consistent.

Q: OK. Just a different name, a rose by any other name.

MR. HARRISON: Yeah, but I would look for artificial intelligence, say unmanned systems. I mean, if that’s in the document, that takes – that’s also in the gist.
MR. QUINN: OK. Dancing back over to this side. Mike.

Q: Mike Mosettig, PBS Online NewsHour.

To pick up on a point that Mark was making in an earlier question, when the national security document came out, the document seemed to be saying one thing and the president seemed to be saying other things. How important – and I’d like to get the views of some of the rest of you – is cohesion – I don’t want to use the word coherence – in going from step to step to step and actually making this more than just a piece of paper?

MR. CANCIAN: I’ll just say one thing, and then I’ll pass to Kath.

I think for this document Mattis and the document are totally in synch. Mattis has been involved all through the process. I think that the themes will reflect things that he’s been talking about for a long time, so that that kind of tension that maybe you saw in the national security strategy isn’t going to be there.

MR. HUNTER: Yeah, I just wanted to weigh in a little bit on why that’s so important, that you do have that cohesion, because it is still, I think, very hard to appreciate just how big the Department of Defense is. And we talk about the millions of people involved. I had a discussion on a very arcane issue I won’t get into at one point, where someone said, well, why can’t the department just show leadership and get its contract and workforce to do the right thing. Well, there are over 25,000 contracting officers. So how many of them can the leader personally call up and tell them what they need to do be doing? You have to put out these kinds of documents, strategy documents, other policy documents, and then the workforce has to hear a consistent message over time in order to be able to really follow the guidance, because they hear inconsistent messages. They may get paralyzed. They may decide to hear what they want to hear. And so that cohesion really is critical in an organization like the Department of Defense, which is so incredibly vast – it has so many people out operating quasi-independently in their own spheres – that you get that cohesion.

MS. HICKS: So I mentioned for the many audiences for a document like this, and I think in particular what Andrew just said speaks to the in and down, which is very important. And then this will then be translated itself into typically classified but more detailed guidance internally for purposes of programming, planning, force deployment, force development, et cetera. So that’s very important.

But I think, just to – if I can get the gist of where you’re going, I do think, yes, you’re in this continual question right now of just fine; that’s what you – that’s what’s written. I think many of us believe that’s what Mattis – what comes out will be what Mattis himself believes, that he invested himself, as Mark said, in this process. But he is – he is one Cabinet member, if you will, in a broader national-security team. And, you know, he can’t alone be able to hold up everyone’s beliefs in what this administration is going to do or say and the consistency of that.

That creates opportunities for those who are seeking to undermine us, and it creates questions for those who want to support us, whether internally, inside the United States, or allies and partners abroad.

So I hope this document helps strengthen, you know, the security of America. I think that is certainly its intent. But I think the reality of having to constantly bridge this unpredictable messaging and action sequence is hampering – will hamper. And Mattis is ever, I think, working to try to
overcome what is somewhat insurmountable in terms of managing the reality of an administration whose foreign policy is deeply questioned at this point by those who want to support it.

MR. HARRISON: I would also add that, you know, not only – not only do you need buy-in within the executive branch, from the president on down. To execute a peacetime defense strategy in a democracy, you also have to have the buy-in of Congress. You’ve got to – you’ve got to sell it to the board of directors, 535 members of Congress. You don’t need all of them to buy into it, but you do need a substantial majority in both chambers that are bought into the general strategy, the approach that you’re putting out here, so that they will help you, that they’ll resource it and they’ll do what they need to do on the legislative side to make it possible.

MS. HERSMAN: Yeah, I just – so I think especially in the nuclear-policy realm this is actually a critical question. You know, it’s a common phrase you hear that the U.S. nuclear arsenal are the president’s nuclear weapons. So I think in – when it comes to some of the programatics, can the policy handle a little bit of divergence or squishiness between general statements made by the president and the specifics that are in the program plan? Yes. That’s manageable.

Where that becomes incredibly challenging, and where we have to look carefully for the relationship between the president’s words and what is in the document is probably most profoundly in declaratory policy, because as these are the president’s weapons, our declaratory policy has to be the president’s words. So we really cannot have divergence on the basics of our declaratory policy. And that is what we have to look for, sort of a reunification of our formal statements there.

MR. JONES: Just one last comment. I mean, I think this is an important issue. This is the military’s strategy. It’s the national defense strategy.

On the broader point of coherence, I think it is worth taking a step back over the next couple of months and look at how resources are allocated to other departments, because there are going to be important aspects of what is in the National Defense Strategy, I would assume, that get into diplomatic efforts and development efforts. And part of the question becomes then where does the Pentagon sit compared to other agencies, and how are they funded, and how much then falls in the Pentagon’s lap because resources are not allocated to other organizations? So, you know, it is a – it is a note for broader coherence and funding beyond the department.

MR. QUINN: So I’m aware of the fact we’re at 10:34. Are you guys OK to stick around for a few more? I don’t know if you’ve got appointments or something, if you need to jump out. I’m going to jump back over to this side. Yeah, Sandra, go ahead.

Q: Thank you. Sandra Erwin with Space News.

Picking up on Todd’s point about you want to hear more from the administration how they would handle deterrence in space, the Nuclear Posture Review, the draft that was posted in the Huffington Post, has a little mention in terms of how, if there was a conflict, they say, the Russians or the Chinese would immediately strike space. So is that – is that a change from how this discussion was pursued in the past? I mean, maybe Rebecca, I don’t know, do you see that as maybe a major shift in the thinking about how – the nuclear posture vis-à-vis the space threat?

MR. HARRISON: I mean, I think, in the nuclear realm, it’s long been understood that if you’re actually getting into a nuclear conflict, a shooting conflict, that of course both sides are going to try to
take out the space assets of the other, because, you know, we use satellites for missile warning, for nuclear command and control, and then just broader control of our general-purpose forces. So in a nuclear conflict, if you’re at that point, you know, the gloves are off. This is unrestricted. Anything goes. So I don’t think that that’s particularly new.

I think what is newer – this is also – you know, I’m just talking since the end of the Cold War, really – what is newer is that many of these nuclear – these satellite space systems that are used to support the nuclear mission are also dual-use. They also support nonnuclear missions. And, in fact, on a day-to-day basis, that is primarily what they’re used for is supporting tactical uses, not strategic users. So things like MILSTAR, Advanced HF, protected communications satellites, on a day-to-day basis they’re not used for nuclear. I mean, they’re always there in case we need them for nuclear. Day-to-day basis, though, they’re being used by tactical users. And the same is true for our missile-warning satellites.

So what is different and what they do need to address – and the previous administration worked on this quite a bit – is how do we architect these systems to do what we need them to do in a nuclear crisis, but also to be resilient to attack in a nonnuclear crisis? We want to deter people from attacking these systems in something that is not a nuclear crisis.

In the past it was pretty simple. It was us and the Soviets. The Soviets were the only ones that could really, you know, pose a substantial threat to our space systems. And we basically had an understanding between the two countries. You know, if you attack our space systems that are used for these missions, then we’re going to regard that as a prelude or a part of a full-scale nuclear war.

That just doesn’t hold. That’s not credible anymore, because we’re using these space systems across the full spectrum of conflict. Even from, you know, counterinsurgency operations, we’re using space. So why wouldn’t an adversary, even a nonstate actor, try to disrupt these systems? And we’ve seen evidence of that, things like jamming our SATCOM signals, you know, in Iraq and Afghanistan even.

So, yeah, I think that – it is a much more complicated deterrence problem that we have today. We can’t simply assume that the threat of nuclear retaliation is going to deter someone, especially a nonnuclear country, from interfering with our space systems, and especially if it’s a form of attack where attribution is difficult, where it is not publicly visible. You can’t prove it. There’s not something blowing up. It’s, you know, photons interfering with one another. That – you know, can we really deter those types of attacks anymore? And if we can’t, we need to go to architectures in space that can withstand that, are resilient to it, and a posture that makes us more credible that we can deter these types of actions.

MS. HERSMAN: If I could just add on to that. I mean, I think Todd’s exactly right about the growing complexity of a potential conflict and kind of bridging across the conventional and nuclear domains. And that does center, in large part, on the incredible dependency, which ergo can translate into vulnerability we have with regard to the space domain.

So I think, in the Nuclear Posture Review draft, what you see is that playing out in a couple of areas. One is, as I had mentioned, this added emphasis on the overall nuclear command-and-control system and a recognition that, as part of the modernization process, this really needs to be amped up. And I think, actually, collectively across the community there’d be strong agreement with doing that.
The second thing, which is a bit more controversial, has to do with a broadening of this terminology, the non — you know, deterring nonnuclear threats, because one could imagine this might be the area — this type of catastrophic space attack, which leaves us completely vulnerable, uncertain what’s coming, might be the sort of thing we might be trying to signal by opening that deterrence conversation to these nonnuclear areas. So I think that’s the other place where they’re trying to kind of manage that growing risk.

MR. QUINN: OK. I’m going to jump to the back here, this gentleman here. I want to – Paul, if you could grab that mic. Thanks.

Q: Good morning. I’m Tom Squitieri with Talk Media News.

Yesterday Congressman Thornberry, among others, have said, as you all have addressed, the issues of cyberwarfare and warfare in outer space are growing in importance and need. Is it time to consider perhaps creating a new branch of the service to deal with those areas?

MR. HARRISON: Why don’t you shift that to me? (Laughs.)

Well, so Congress did consider that in the last year’s NDAA. What they decided on is not yet. And they said: We’re going to, you know, do some studies on this. They mandated that DOD do a couple of different studies. And they’re going to come back and reconsider that. So I think — you know, if you go — I think eventually, yes, you have to have a separate service for the space domain. The question is, when and how do you make that transition? If you go all the way back to the 2001 Space Commission Report, that report looked at this and said: Yep, we need to get on a path to transition to an independent service for space if not an independent department for space. That — you know, and it was interesting that, you know, Rumsfeld chaired that commission and then he became secretary of defense, and then kind of let it go. (Laughs.) And it didn’t progress from there.

So I think, you know, Chairman Rogers in the House and others have picked up this up. And I don’t think they’re going to let it die. I think they’re going to keep pushing it forward, inch by inch. And, you know, in my view, I think you can make a transition to a space corps within the Department of the Air Force probably, you know, in five years or so. That would be a reasonable timeline in which you could accomplish that. You know, maybe a little more, little less depending on how aggressive you want to be. But even short of that, that obviously is going to require Congress to put that into law.

Even short of that, there are things the Air Force could already start doing, like creating a separate acquisition workforce within the Air Force, for space acquisitions. You know, it’s not plausible to think that you can take any acquisition professional who’s worked on other types of systems and plop them into a space program and expect them to perform to the level that we need them to perform. You know, building a satellite is not – does not have that much in common with building a fighter jet. No more than building a tank has a lot in common with building a fighter jet. You wouldn’t take an acquisition professional from the Army – you know, from tracked vehicles, and put them in charge of the F-35 program.

Why do we do that for space? Why not create a special cadre of acquisition professionals, both in the military workforce and civilian workforce, that focus on space? They can do that within the Air Force today. And I think, you know, those are the kind of changes that Congress would likely welcome, to see that kind of renewed emphasis on creating a cadre of space professionals.
MR. QUINN: I’m going to take probably one more, just from the side here. Yes, ma’am.

Q: Hi. Caroline Houck, Defense One.

Just a quick question. None of you seem particularly optimistic that it’s going to wrestle – the strategy is going to wrestle, at least in the unclassified version, with the resource constraints that you say are fundamental to the strategy being useful. Do you expect the longer, classified version to engage with that at all, or do you think it’s a systemic issue of just assuming there is going to be – that, like, the budget is going to be there?

MS. HICKS: I expect even the short document – I would expect in general that such a document would speak to its dependency on resources. I do expect that, at a rhetorical level. And I think the 2014 QDR actually was quite explicit in the same way, that it was dependent on certain budget assumptions. And I absolutely expect in the classified that the risks will be outlined in some way – the risks both of being able to get said funds, maybe a little less so, but certainly the risks of not getting those funds. Now, as all of you know, classified documents do leak. So just because it’s a classified document, I don’t expect it to be totally explicit.

I think that’s more in the level of conversation that happens with key leaders in Congress and other stakeholders that are – that the administration decides are critical to getting what it thinks it needs in the strategy. But I do think there’ll be more, as I said earlier, kind of flesh in the classified document with regard to the risks that – and it’s required to statute, frankly, for them to do so. So that’s a good oversight point, I guess I would say, with Congress. If they’re dissatisfied with what they see in there, that’s a good beginning for a conversation about what those risks look like, and how you might have to adjust the strategy.

MR. CANCIAN: If I could just add one note. I think before you write the story that, you know, they haven’t considered resources, I think you have to wait for the ’19 budget to come out. Notionally, you know, first week in February, because my expectation is that that will – well, that will certainly have a top line. So you have some sense about what the resources are. And I would expect that there’d be a lot of discussion in the text that goes with the budget about relating those resources to the strategy document that came earlier.

MR. QUINN: Folks, I’m going to call it there. I want to thank our expert panel for joining us today. Thank you, guys, for coming in. There will be a transcript of this discussion later on today. If for any reason you think you may not be getting it in your inbox or you didn’t get the initial one, I’m going to put a sheet at the back of the room. Throw your business card down, put your email on it, should all be covered. Any other questions, please send them to CQuinn@CSIS.org or Andrew Schwartz. Thank you.

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