

**Statement of Chair Harman and Vice Chair Edelman
Commission on the National Defense Strategy
Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee
September 18, 2024**

Jane Harman

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the House Armed Services Committee – it is good to see many former colleagues and be back at HASC where I served from 1993 to 1999. This Committee, like HPSCI where I also had the honor of serving, has enormous responsibility and an increasingly rare record of bipartisanship.

I am very pleased to be joined by Vice Chairman Eric Edelman to present the bipartisan, unanimous report of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy. After releasing it in late July, we are now focused on implementing the recommendations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the report today.

As you know, Congress created our Commission to review the 2022 National Defense Strategy (or NDS) and offer a clear-eyed, independent view. It has been a pleasure to serve with Eric and the other six commissioners, appointed by the leaders on both sides of the aisle of the Senate, the House, and the two Armed Services Committees.

Our Commission believes unanimously that the National Defense Strategy is woefully out of date. It was written by early 2022, before

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China and Russia's strategic partnership, and HAMAS' horrific attack on Israel last October 7.

As Ambassador Edelman will detail, the threats to our national security have been mounting for two decades and are greater now than at any time since the height of the Cold War, if not World War II.

Our basic message is this: Significant and urgent action is needed, but for years our government has failed to keep up. Our entire system, and the Pentagon in particular, are risk averse and slow to act. In my opinion, the change needed will only happen through the bold, bipartisan leadership of this Committee and your Senate counterpart.

Our report includes actionable recommendations, including one that you are implementing with today's hearing: better informing the American public. Their support is critical to implement the changes we need to make. Leaders across government need to make the case to the public and get their buy-in now, before the next Pearl Harbor or 9/11.

Unfortunately, another of our recommendations – and the single top request from the Department of Defense – will not be achieved in two weeks when the Congress fails to pass on-time appropriation bills and places DoD and the rest of government under a CR for the 15th year of the past 16. We understand that several of you strongly opposed a six-month CR last week and we agree that tying DoD's hands for that long would be catastrophic to our national security.

Eric Edelman

Several of our Commissioners served on the 2018 NDS Commission. In fact, General Jack Keane and I served in the 2010 Commission, which said that we were facing a train wreck as threats were gathering and U.S. defense spending was decreasing. In 2014, the Commission found that the Budget Control Act had been a strategic misstep and needed to be undone. In 2018, we warned that the United States was losing its decisive military edge.

Six years later, the threats are more serious and we as a nation have failed to keep pace. There is potential for near-term war, and potential that we might lose such a conflict.

The partnership between China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea is a major shift in the strategic environment. It makes each of those countries stronger militarily, economically, and diplomatically and weakens our tools to deal with them. And it makes it more likely that a future conflict would expand across theaters. We could find ourselves in a global war on the scale of World War II.

The force construct that the NDS proposes to meet this challenge – essentially a one-theater military with additional resources to deter aggression elsewhere – is inadequate. There are wars in two of the priority theaters already and substantial threat for a third with China.

The 2022 defense strategy identifies China as “the pacing challenge.” We find China is in some ways *outpacing* the United States. The U.S. still has the world’s strongest military with the farthest global reach. But when we get within 1,000 miles of China’s shore, we start losing military dominance and could find ourselves on a losing side of a conflict.

In addition to its growing and modernized conventional and strategic forces, China has infiltrated U.S. critical infrastructure networks to prevent or deter us from engaging against it. China is likely able to contest our logistics, disrupt power and water at home, and otherwise remove the sanctuary of the U.S. homeland that we have long enjoyed. The public is not aware of the consequences of an attack at home – and the U.S. Government is not at present prepared to stop it.

Our report also describes the threats posed by a reconstituted Russia and what Vladimir Putin seeks to do beyond Ukraine, and the threats from emboldened leaders in Iran and North Korea. ISIS and its affiliates along with other terrorist groups remain a potent and increasing threat, capable of launching large-scale external attacks.

We share the goal, unanimously as a Commission, of the NDS of deterring major war but we have serious doubts whether the smallest force in decades and an insufficient industrial base can deter increasingly capable and cooperating competitors and adversaries.

We recommend a multi-theater force construct, better use of commercial technology, and strategic investments to restore the U.S. edge.

Jane Harman

Mr. Chairman, rather than read into the record our findings and recommendations, let me return briefly to an earlier comment: this Committee, as well as your Senate counterpart, is critical in reversing the trends that Vice Chairman Edelman just described. Let me give you a few examples.

1. As you know, the Executive Branch is severely stovepiped. The National Defense Strategy itself is, by law, authored by the Secretary of Defense and focuses internally on DoD. We credit Secretary Austin with prioritizing “integrated deterrence” in the 2022 NDS, but DoD simply can’t make the rest of the bureaucracy focus on great power competition.

Congress is stovepiped as well but you all sit on other committees and can work across the House in support of an integrated national security strategy, across government and with the private sector.

2. The same stovepiping happens on appropriations. We can’t keep pitting defense spending against non-defense spending as if the Departments of State, DHS, Treasury, and even Education and Labor don’t contribute to our national defense. The Commission recommends that spending be increased across all elements of national security.

We unanimously recommend returning to the levels of spending on national defense, proportionally, as we did in the Cold War. We also call for paying for it through higher tax rates and reforms to entitlements – I know it is easier for us to say that than you, but if we are going to get serious about deterring and winning wars on the scale of the Cold War, this is necessary.

3. We also implore the 59 members of this Committee to work with your colleagues to stop relying on continuing resolutions and let the government function. You understand the harm that these CRs do, and how they cause the United States to fall behind our adversaries.
4. Finally, from your oversight you know full well that getting things done quickly at DoD is almost impossible. We support programs like the Defense Innovation Unit, the Office of Strategic Capital, and Replicator – but these are specifically designed as end-runs around the normal Pentagon model. The culture and the regulations at the Pentagon are a major impediment to readiness and warfighting. You need to drive change.

Ukraine and Russia are innovating on the battlefield on the scale of weeks, not years. China can build more ships and nuclear weapons in a year than we can in a decade. If DoD can't move at speed and scale, it will lose. That isn't the culture there – and this Committee needs to help the Secretary and Deputy address it.

I have sat where you are now, so I understand the incentives to maintain legacy programs in your district or putting something in the NDAA that you can run on. I get it. But in the Commission's view, we need to be approaching national security as if we could go to war at any time – and doing everything possible to get ready now.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for your role in establishing our Commission and inviting us to share our report with you. We welcome the opportunity to answer your questions.