

**Statement of The Honorable Elbridge Colby, Under Secretary of War for Policy**  
**2026 National Defense Strategy**  
**House Armed Services Committee**  
**March 5, 2026**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Smith, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the distinguished members of this committee to testify on the Department of War's 2026 National Defense Strategy.

The animating purpose of this Strategy was to put into reality the logic of President Trump's common sense, America first, peace through strength approach. At its heart, as detailed in the 2025 National Security Strategy, this approach is channeled through the principle of flexible realism: that is, the effort to practically and realistically advance and protect the concrete interests of regular Americans. The core of a strategy, as the NSS eloquently describes, is to evaluate, sort, and prioritize. Needless to say, this is of special importance in the realm of war and peace. The heavy responsibility of effectively doing so motivated our work at the Department to produce the 2026 NDS, and we believe under Secretary Hegseth's leadership that we have done so.

Under President Trump's leadership, and with your support in Congress, the American military is, and will be, the world's finest, an unmatched fighting force that has impressively demonstrated its prowess in recent months in Operations MIDNIGHT HAMMER and ABSOLUTE RESOLVE.

At the same time, we recognize that, as Secretary Hegseth has aptly put it, we cannot do everything, everywhere all the time. This is, of course, a practical reality. The American military, while without peer, is not infinite in its application and resources. Potential opponents have been building their strength and capabilities and it is not fair, just, or sustainable to ask the American people to bear burdens that are inequitably distributed with those of our allies and partners.

As a result, we must prioritize. And this Strategy does so. It does not do so in a way that is pinched or hesitant. Instead, it does so in a way that prudently, practically navigates between two unreasonable extremes: on the one hand an isolationism that pretends we can retreat from the world and that a favorable stability will emerge, and on the other hand an unfettered use of military force for overly expansive ends that would drain the American people's will and resources in unnecessary and overly ambitious conflict. This Strategy, rather, prudently adopts a middle course that will actually put us on a far firmer, more successful, and thus more lasting course than either of these extreme alternatives.

In particular, the NDS does so by intelligently and strategically allocating our resources and that of our incredible armed forces towards the priorities that most affect regular Americans and where our efforts are most material and necessary to achieve American interests in the world. This is a reflection of common sense, America First thinking.

As a deduction, the Strategy is built on four pillars.

First, it restores, after decades of neglect by some administrations, the military's role in securing our Homeland and ensuring our key interests in our native hemisphere are protected. This is critical for regular Americans because we must ensure that we are directly protected and secure in our own home area. While the military is only a part of this effort, and often far from the leading element, it does play a critical role that will be enduring.

Second, the Strategy focuses our military effort on ensuring the preservation of a favorable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, the world's largest market area. America's interests there are real and significant because of the scale of that market. At the same time, our interests are not limitless. We do not need to dominate that region, rather, we only need to prevent that vast and dynamic region from being dominated so that we can trade and interact with it on fair and reasonable terms for regular Americans.

As a result, our Strategy there is to deter China through strength, not confrontation. We understand that China is a very powerful country that is undertaking an extraordinary military buildup. That is a simple fact. At the same time we are clear that we do not seek conflict with China. To the contrary, we seek to avoid it. We make clear that our interests with respect to China are scoped and reasonable – we do not seek to strangle China nor compel a change in its form of government. Rather, we seek to prevent China from becoming the hegemon of the Indo-Pacific.

In particular, this requires – as the NSS clearly states – being able to deny the feasibility of successful aggression along the first island chain. Because of its significance and the central importance of the military role in meeting this requirement, meeting this standard of an effective denial defense along the first island chain is the primary focus of the U.S. armed forces. At the same time, ensuring our forces can pace to this challenging standard will ensure that the Department can always offer the President the operational flexibility and agility required for other objectives, especially the ability to launch decisive operations against targets anywhere – including directly from the U.S. Homeland.

It is critical to emphasize here that our Strategy is well aligned not only with the interests of our allies in the Indo-Pacific, but many other countries as well that are not formally our allies. These states seek to preserve their autonomy and thus their ability to chart their own national futures on their own terms. This too is our goal, as Secretary Hegseth eloquently laid out last year at the Shangri-La Forum, and our military focus, alongside the efforts of our allies and partners, is designed to uphold that ability.

Third, we recognize clearly that there are other real threats around the world that imperil our allies and indeed our own interests directly. We do not neglect that. To the contrary, we see it clearly. But we also understand that we need to allocate our own resources realistically and prudently and that we must account for our allies and partners' ability and will to meet those challenges as well. This is why the Strategy so strongly emphasizes burden sharing, which is its third pillar.

The logic here is to encourage, enable, and wherever necessary press our allies and partners in other theaters to take primary responsibility for their conventional defense. This makes sense because, as is so often pointed out, we are allies with many of the world's largest and most advanced economies. As a result, we have an alliance network that has tremendous latent military power.

Unfortunately, over the last generation – partially due to our own permissiveness and perhaps even hubris on this point – many of our allies have functionally demilitarized. This is untenable and unreasonable – and our allies know it and are moving rapidly and substantially to step up. They are no longer, because of President Trump's leadership, "fighting the scenario." Rather, they have now accepted they must step up and are beginning quickly to do so.

As a result, our approach has adapted to one of "let's get down to business." In Europe, we are urging our allies to move to a model of NATO, 3.0, in which wealthy European allies take the lead for the conventional defense of European NATO. On the Korean Peninsula, we are urging our South Korean ally to do the same vis a vis North Korea. And the good news, distinguished members, is that this is working. Our allies are indeed stepping up along these lines. Now the issue is helping them do so and making this transition as rapidly and effectively as possible.

In other regions, we are also urging and seeing progress with our allies. Along the first island chain, with countries like Japan and Australia, we are urging these wealthy and capable allies to do their part for collective defense, as the NSS urges. In the Western Hemisphere, we are working with many like-minded countries in the region to address shared threats to our prosperity and well-being. In the Middle East, we are working with our model ally Israel and other regional partners to address the threat of Iran and terrorism.

The final pillar of the Strategy is to supercharge the defense industrial base. The NSS and NDS both call for a national mobilization of our industrial capacity to arm both our own forces and those of our allies and partners. As you on this Committee know so well, this is vital because we must be able to arm our own forces and those of our allies and partners with the best weaponry quickly, at scale, and at a reasonable price. We are seeing tremendous progress on this front thanks to President Trump, Secretary Hegseth, and Deputy Secretary Feinberg's efforts as well as your support and leadership in Congress, but this will be a critical area of focus in the coming years.

In closing, this Strategy promises under President Trump's leadership to put our country, and our allies and partners, on the path to lasting security. In just a few years, we can expect the war fighting ethos to have been restored in our armed forces and for them to be armed with the most modern effective weaponry at scale. We can expect our wealthy allies and partners around the world to have stepped up to do their part for collective defense and their own security. We can expect our potential opponents to see the peerlessly formidable armed forces of the United States and the highly capable forces of our allies and partners together, and to conclude that peace and restraint is the better course for them. Thus, we can very much reasonably hope for a decent peace for Americans, for our allies, and – for that matter – for our potential opponents. This is a very good future to which we can reasonably aspire.

At the same time, however, we at the Department of War know that we cannot take this future for granted. To the contrary, we will hope for the best but prepare for the worst. We will ensure that our armed forces are as ready as they can possibly be in line with the priorities outlined. Should our potential opponents spurn this reasonable offer, Members of the Committee, your support in ensuring that our forces are ready will be absolutely vital.

Thank you very much. I look forward to your questions.