

Oral Statement of the Honorable James R. Locher III

Chairman Snyder, Ranking Member Wittman, and members of the subcommittee, I am delighted to appear before you to testify on national security reform. I want to commend the subcommittee for its leadership on this critical issue. It reminds me of this subcommittee's role in formulating the House's version of the landmark Goldwater-Nichols Act.

The lessons of Goldwater-Nichols are instructive on the role Congress must play on national security reform. Goldwater-Nichols has been a historic success: It produced the world's premier joint warfighting force. But it must be remembered that entrenched Pentagon interests bitterly opposed this legislation. A four-year, 241-day struggle between the Armed Services Committees and DoD ensued. The committees used every tool at their disposal to pressure, prod, question, and introduce new ideas. National security reform will require even more congressional energy to overcome Executive Branch inertia. Despite its difficulty, national security reform is not impossible. Again, the Goldwater-Nichols experience is instructive: When work on that act began, ninety-five percent of the experts predicted it would never happen.

President Obama's National Security Strategy has reinvigorated the drive to transform the national security system. Let there be no mistake, the strategy's goals cannot be achieved without sweeping transformation. In organizational terms, the strategy calls for (1) strengthening national capacity through a whole-of-government approach; (2) updating, balancing, and integrating all tools of American power; (3) broadening the scope of national security; (4) emphasizing the foundations of national power – sound fiscal policy, education, energy, science and technology, and health; (5) aligning resources with strategy; (6) taking a longer view; and (7) forming strategic partnerships with organizations outside of government, taking a whole-of-nation approach. These goals endorse many PNSR ideas.

With Congress' important role apparently in mind, the subcommittee asked for testimony on "pragmatic, near-term steps that can be taken to move forward on creating a more effective and functional interagency national security system." My written statement identifies ten such steps. I will speak to three important ones.

By far the most important step would be to require the president to submit an implementation plan for the organizational changes prescribed by the new National Security Strategy. Most National Security Strategy documents contain a lofty set of goals which go unrealized when there is no follow-through. Congress must insist on Executive Branch attention to the organizational goals that the president established. For each of his twenty-three goals, the president should identify the specific reforms that are needed and milestones for their achievement. Every year, Congress should ask for a scorecard measuring progress toward these reforms and for an updated implementation plan.

A second and related near-term step would be to require the assistant to the president for national security affairs to submit a plan for achieving the needed organizational capacity of the National Security Staff. Realizing the whole-of-government, integrated approach articulated by the National Security Strategy will require a significant strengthening of the National Security Staff. Today, that staff is under-resourced and institutionally weak. The assistant to the president for national security affairs, who does not even exist in law, has only an advisory role. The National Security Staff has become the most important staff in the national security system, if not the world. This evolution has not been properly recognized. That staff totals 230 people; has a tiny budget (\$8.6 million when General Jones was appointed); and is poorly supported. National security reform needs to start at the top of the system – with the National Security Staff.

One of the most, if not the most, important reforms advanced by Goldwater-Nichols was joint officer management. By creating incentives, requirements, and standards for joint officers, those provisions significantly improved the performance of joint duty and led to creation of a joint culture. Congress acted on the joint officer issue because it had concluded, “For the most part, military officers do not want to be assigned to joint duty; are pressured or monitored for loyalty by their services while serving on joint assignments; are not prepared by either education or experience to perform their joint duties; and serve only a relatively short period once they have learned their jobs.” Analyses of the interagency personnel situation reveal similar problems. A near-term step with enormous potential would be to establish an interagency personnel system to create the proper incentives, education, and training for personnel assigned to interagency positions. This reform is being studied on Capitol Hill and could begin the major transformation that is needed.

In conclusion, I once more commend Chairman Snyder and Ranking Member Wittman for holding this hearing and for searching for pragmatic, near-term steps that would compel the start of the bold transformation that the nation desperately needs. The national security system must be modernized to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. The task will be monumental, but there is no alternative. Without sweeping changes, the nation will experience repeated failures, wasted resources, and continued decline in America’s standing and influence. We can and must find the resolve and political will to create a modern national security system.