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# REAGAN NATIONAL DEFENSE FORUM

## PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH IN AN ERA OF COMPETITION

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**DECEMBER 1, 2018**  
**2:00 PM – 2:45 PM**

**PANEL 9**  
**WILL THE U.S. REMAIN THE PREEMINENT MILITARY POWER?**  
**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY.**

**Panelists:**

- The Honorable Eric Edelman, Former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; Co-Chair, National Defense Strategy Comm.
- Admiral Gary Roughead (USN, Retired), Former Chief of Naval Operations; Co-Chair, National Defense Strategy Comm.
- The Honorable Heather Wilson, Secretary

**Moderator:** Ms. Barbara Starr, *CNN*

**Video:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6vKV1asnlQ&t=0s&index=13&list=PLHNOi2zcxo7sBxM7HfhmB\\_tf6QXeqj48K](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6vKV1asnlQ&t=0s&index=13&list=PLHNOi2zcxo7sBxM7HfhmB_tf6QXeqj48K)

**Starr:** And get a little bit of Admin done first. This is a group of people, yes, to use the cliché, who need absolutely no introduction. To my right, the secretary of the air force, Heather Wilson, who, of course, oversees a budget of about, when I looked it up, it was about \$138 billion.

**Wilson:** It's a little more than that now.

**Starr:** Give or take. Directs the strategy, policy and development of the air force. Of course, a very distinguished former member of Congress, Admiral Gary Roughead down at the end of the former chief of naval operations, has served at all levels of command, and, along with Eric Edelman, former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Ambassador to Turkey, Ambassador to Finland, and one of this nation's most respected professional diplomats. These two gentlemen, of course, chaired the recent report of the National Defense Strategy Commission, which, to some extent, if you haven't read it, it's online. You should. It forms the basis of so much of the discussion and the thinking that the Pentagon will be utilizing in the months ahead, and will be so important to business and industry, I suspect, in developing their plans and thinking in the coming years.

Starr: So we're gonna start right off the bat with the secretary, because the Air Force, when you talk about defense strategy and how to prepare for the future, I do think it's fascinating that the air force is dealing with one of the most preeminent challenges right now to meet the president's direction, to establish a space force, something I know we've all been reading about, and in the last several days have actually seen a number of stories that still in play. Should there really be a new space command, if you will, or something lesser, and how you begin to prepare for that unprecedented challenge given the baseline that this is an administration that wants to be prepared for Russia and China. Bring us up to date for a minute if you will, on this planning. What is it all about?

Wilson: Sure. We expect that the president will put forward a proposal in concert with the budget proposal that goes to the congress in February. I think it's important to realize why we're so focused on space at the moment. The United States is the best in the world at space, and we have been since the 1950s, and our adversaries know it.

Wilson: Either they are seeking to develop the capability to deny us the use of space in crisis or in war. And so it is our responsibility, in the case of the Air Force, about 90% of what is done in space is done by the Air Force. It is our responsibility to shift from being a global utility operating from space and enabling military operations to thinking about this as a contested environment where an adversary would seek to deny us the use of our satellites. And we're not going to let that happen.

Wilson: So we have put together, and the Congress has approved, in the fiscal year 19 budget, significant increases in capability to accelerate what we call defendable space, and also authorize the reestablishment of a unified combatant command for space, which we had up until 9/11.

Starr: And do you think it requires a new, separate military service, and how much is it going to cost?

Wilson: Well, there's a number of options that are being worked through and that I think the president will decide what kind of were proposal he wants to put forward, and the cost depends on what the options are.

Starr: So you are looking at things other than a separate department of the military, a sixth military force, if you will.

Wilson: Well, when you say six, that includes the fifth, which is the Marine Corps, which is part of the Department of the Navy. So there are a number of options here. From my perspective, the most important thing is to make sure that we develop the capability to fight and win in war, irrespective of what the org chart is. And for the airmen, that's what I focus on.

Starr: Okay. So given that kind of baseline, because I think it's so much in the news right now and so much in the thinking of people developing their planning for the coming five years or so, let's shift a minute, both Eric and Gary, to the work that you've done on this commission, because the Department, of course, is very focused on Russia and China as near term competitors, and yet I was so struck this morning if you hadn't seen it, the secretary of State, Mike, Pompeo, from Argentina, put out a statement earlier today that Iran had fired a medium range ballistic missile capable of carrying multiple warheads that could range Europe or the Middle East.

Starr: So it still strikes me, old fashioned as I am, that you can look at near term great peer competitors, but there's plenty of countries out there that can cause you a lot of worry on a given day. Both of you, each of you take a turn here and talk to us about what you've found. Do you worry there's too much on near term China and Russia? Should we still be plenty worried about everybody else?

Edelman: Well, thank you Barbara. It's great to be here. It's great to be with Secretary Wilson. I think Mac Thornberry said yesterday that this is like the Davos of defense ad. To me, this is really like the Super Bowl, and I think we need to get Roman numerals after each one of these now. So this is Reagan Defense Forum number six and we'll be moving on to seven next year.

Edelman: What I would say about what we found was that it is totally appropriate for the United States to be prioritizing the longterm strategic competition with Russia and China at the top of its worry list. By the same token, the strategy as Secretary Mattis stressed to us, is a global strategy that includes responsibility for maintaining a Middle East in which Iranian power is contained, in which a violent Muslim extremists don't have a base from which to attack the homeland.

Edelman: And I think what we found there is that, while the strategy says we can take some risk there, we didn't see, actually, a lot to be gained in terms of those other theaters from this era. We're not in a period where we have a very large number of troops there. We don't have a carrier there, so there's not that much to be gained from this theater to help support the others.

Edelman: And we do think you have to continue to worry about those other missions. We did find, when we talked to people, we got different answers about where people thought the risk was. Was it in Afghanistan? Was it in containing Iran? Was it in the counter ISIL fight?

Edelman: So bearing in mind that I think you're always one lethal mass casualty attack on the homeland away from having to pull resources back into that theater, I think we have to count on being able to be effective in all three theaters.

Starr: So, Admiral Roughead, from the maritime point of view, how many times do we go down this road? It's so interesting. Iran, of course, can challenge you in the maritime environment pretty much on a moment's notice. And as the ambassador just said, the Navy hasn't had an aircraft carrier in the Gulf, I think, since the end of March. So, we're coming closer than ever before to a year without a carrier in the Gulf. You have seen the Navy shift to the South China Sea. You've seen the shift to the Indo-Pacific, but where are the operational challenges that you see for the Navy right now that might not be being met strategy-wise? You can't do everything.

Roughead: Right? And I agree with Eric, and in our report we talked about the fact that while we may wish to de-emphasize the Middle East, the Middle East has a way of not de-emphasizing itself. So, I do think we have to keep our eye on the ball. As you look at the maritime domain, it's important to look at the strategic straits and choke points, then clearly, as it applies to our allies in Asia, the energy flowing out of the Gulf is still going to be hugely important.

Roughead: And so, as we looked at the strategy, we essentially concurred with great power and competition, Iran, Korea, and jihadist movements. But, to get to your point, one of the other points that we made in the commission's report was the importance of thinking through and what are your operational concepts that you want to have in place for the areas that will present some challenges to the United States. And this gets into what's the concept, what do you need to make it work, and then how do you deal with some of the trade offs [crosstalk 00:09:37]

Starr: And how do you do that? And then I want to come back to the secretary. What did you find in your report on how to answer those very questions?

Roughead: Well, one of the things that we stated in our report is that the national defense strategy is a great first step, but it really needs to be fleshed out with what are the operational concepts. Because from that will determine forestructure, technologies, and then, as we move into the future, particularly as you start dealing with artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles, how do you evolve your operational concepts to take that into place?

Roughead: Because we have been so focused for two decades on a very particular type of warfare in the Middle East, we've really gotten out of thinking about these more complex environments, and even though Iran may be a lesser challenge than Russia or China, technology still gives Iran the opportunity to challenge us. So we've got to work our way through those.

Starr: You just said something very interesting. I want to ask the secretary. We all, we think Middle East, Iran, but when you think Middle East these days, you might as well be talking about Russia in so many contexts because there are so deeply ingrained in the Middle East. So, as you operate, as the air force operates in the Middle East, and the Navy to a certain extent, you're not just facing Iran, you are facing Russian influence there. It seems to me that's something, I don't know that you can kind of divorce theater from tactical from strategic very much anymore.

Wilson: The National Defense Strategy recognizes the re-emergence, this great power competition, as the defining element of our time, but it thinks globally about strategy and it says that we have to prepare for five things simultaneously. We have to defend the homeland. We have to provide a safe, secure and reliable nuclear deterrent. We have to be able to defeat a peer adversary while deterring a rogue state, and counter violent extremist organizations at a lower level of effort. You have to do all of those things at the same time in a globally integrated way.

Wilson: And to your point, Admiral, I think that the National Defense Strategy, to me, is a much richer document than we've seen from a lot of them that have come out over the last couple of decades from the Defense Department. But you're right, is that now that we have this strategy and general concepts of what are the priorities, restoring the lethality of the force, working with our allies and partners, reforming the department, it's then up to us as services with the Joint Staff to say, "Alright, what are the operational concepts, what are the alternative ways of fighting?" And get deeply into the analysis of what wins and what reduces risk in a global way. And then build our programs toward those things. But the strategy on its own, it's only a roadmap. It doesn't build the equipment to be able to drive the road.

Starr: So how big an Air Force do you need beyond what you have to do that, and as you just said, fighting in different ways. Is it enough anymore to just count squadrons and airplanes? What do you really need?

Wilson: Well, put this in context, I was asked this morning. I was on the National Security Council staff for the first President Bush, and at the time of the beginning of the Gulf War, we had 401 operational squadrons in the United States Air Force. Today, we have 312, and that's across all kinds of different platforms.

Wilson: We've done the initial analysis of what is required to implement the National Defense Strategy unconstrained by budget, so a strategy-driven force. And our conclusion from that is that we need in the 2025, 2030 timeframe, so if we use the best intelligence, joint operating concepts developed by the Joint Staff, we need about 386 squadrons. The biggest limiting factors are our tankers and bombers and the pacing threat is China.

Starr: Not Russia?

Wilson: No.

Starr: Why do you say China?

Wilson: The pacing threat is China because while Russia is a threat in its desires to intimidate its neighbors, China is more rapidly growing and is more rapidly innovating. It's also a much bigger theater and much more difficult to project power.

Starr: You know, it's interesting because some people in the intelligence community will tell you, yes, Russia is a threat, but China, they will say, has the power to change the way we live. They have the power to change this country, should they choose to.

Wilson: I think China aspires to be a global military power, and they've been very open about that, and they have a timeline that they're working toward. They also are seeking to increase their influence, both globally and particularly in the Pacific, and not always in ways that are about developing alliances through persuasion, but more about buying fealty.

Starr: So, Ambassador, you have a lot of experience in Russia, and we're talking about global strategy, but I would come back to the notion and ask your thoughts on it. In just this last week, we have seen Russia take what essentially is a tactical action against Ukraine, in the Kurd Strait, and once again, Putin appears to be able to walk right up to the line, get everyone upset. What's short of that global military response, he knows nobody's coming after him. How do you deal with that when you're talking global strategy?

Roughead: You know, I think actually the previous panel was meant to address that question, but let me make an observation.

Starr: You have all kinds of expertise. I know you do.

Roughead: Let me make an observation about it. One is, I think this is a great example of how our potential near peer adversaries learn from one another. So, what Vladimir Putin did here was essentially replicate what we've seen the PRC do in the South China Sea. They've created a new geographic ...

PART 1 OF 3 ENDS [00:16:04]

Edelman: PRC do in the South China Sea, they created a new geographic fact. In this case, instead of building islands, they built a bridge. And from that new geographic fact, they make extravagant legal claims that then allow them to violate, apparently with impunity, international agreements or customary international law. And in that way, sort of attack in a fundamental way, the international order that we have upheld since 1945.

Edelman: Ultimately, if we're going to continue to uphold that order, we have to maintain the military preeminence that we have had, it's not gonna be the same margin of superiority that we had because we're dealing with a much more complex set of challenges, but it can only be based on, I mean we can only maintain that system if we maintain some margin of superiority, which is why I think the resource issues that were discussed this morning are so important. And one of my biggest fears, and speaking personally now not for the commission but invite my co chairs reaction, one of my biggest fears is, if we don't adequately resource this which is one of the main concerns we have in this report is, we will not invest adequately in the capabilities we need for the future 'cause the temptation with lower funds, lower levels of funding will be to just buy what we already have.

Edelman: Buy more of an older capability and that's not what we need. We need to be able to invest in these [crosstalk 00:17:36] to be able to be competitive with China and Russia so that they understand that if the competition starts to escalate, we will still have what we used to call in the battle days of the Cold War escalation dominance.

Starr: [inaudible 00:17:51] Roughead what are your thoughts about this? I mean, just the Navy just need to get bigger, just the Navy need to get different?

Roughead: Yes. And the reason I say that is, you've heard many speakers on the panels talk about how small we are, we still have the global commitments, it is highly probable in the future that while the China Russia may not be alive or even Iran, I think that they will see opportunities while we may be preoccupied in one place to cause mischief and another particularly in this area of the gray zone where the responses are far more complex. An increase in size is required. But I would also tell you that the Navy and I would argue the other services need to think about introducing new technologies for example, the Great question of the aircraft carrier is always in play.

Roughead: I would argue that they become more valuable as more land bases are put at risk. But it is also important that the Navy in my personal view, we don't get into this level of detail on the commission's report. But deep, long range autonomous strike from an aircraft carrier is something that has to happen in the future. Networks of unmanned underwater vehicles working from a submarine as a mothership needs to be part of the equation. On top of that artificial intelligence and different longer reaching kinetic weapons need to become part of them.

Starr: When you say longer strike from a carrier. You mean, I mean, in the range of B2 B52 categories ever take?

Roughead: I would say, anywhere from 15 to 2000 miles. To be able to stand off out of the range where they are at risk, either from air attack or submarine attack.

Starr: That medium range ballistic missile that the Iranians fired today.

Roughead: If they have the targeting capability to do something I see.

Edelman: Barbara I might pick up on what Kerry just said because I think one of the things we were concerned about in the commission was that the shift to great power competition really requires a very big shift in how we think about conflict. We've been used to conflict over the last 17 years at the lower level of the spectrum, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism operations, we're talking about the kind of level of conflict we haven't seen an extremely long time and having to fight in a way that we haven't had to fight in a long time and to have our adversaries understand that we're capable of doing that. We're very used to allowing an adversary to, as they did in Kuwait, as Iraq and Kuwait to carry out an act of aggression. And then we take an extremely long time to build up the Iron Mountain of stuff in the theater because we have unimpeded access by both A and C. And then we go in and we roll back and we reverse the aggression because of our enormous qualitative advantages over the adversary.

Edelman: That's not what we're gonna be dealing with in the future. We're gonna be dealing with highly able adversaries who have consciously gone out and made it very difficult for us to get access, they've created impediments to us to be able to get somewhere I mean, one of the worst things we've done is referred to this as A2, AD 'cause nobody knows what that means. It means we can't get there and that's what we need the public to understand. So unless we are able to operate in contested environments. We're not gonna be able to sustain this strategy. I don't think everybody in the Department of Defense really gets that yet. And I think that's one of the things we hope that Secretary madam will use our report to do ...

Starr: I have to be the one to jump in and say it. It's just so striking to me. Of course today as we remember President Bush because for many of us in the press core old enough to say Desert Storm was the first war we covered as reporters. I remember the night we all came back to the Pentagon at seven o'clock because the bombs has started falling and you have just made me think in my mind when it be a fascinating war game to run right now especially today could you do Desert Storm again today with the construct you have in the region Russia there around Syria with, there's just not a lot of airspace access that you would get.

Wilson: Of course, we got 28 nations every day running an air tasking order and In the Middle East. But I actually wanted to pick up on something that you said Ambassador which is, has to do with the funding of this strategy. I think that the greatest threat to our national security right now and to implementing the national defense strategy is the erosion of public support and awareness of the need to maintain a strong national defense. And Center King was right this morning. It is not a large percentage of our gross national product, but it is absolutely vital to maintain our national security and keep that high level of support for national defense and that's the biggest risk.

Starr: This is where we'll see if I can manage to use the clicker and I wanna put up one of the charts from one of the survey that the form has been working on here ...

Edelman: Barbara I think my coach wanted to ...

Starr: I'm so sorry ...

Roughead: Go ahead, Barbara 'cause it looks like you're still working on that there. But ...

Starr: Or it's the green button or the red? [crosstalk 00:24:02]

Roughead: While you're doing that, because I think it will actually apply to the slides that you may be putting up. But one of the points that we make in the commission's report is that, some of the challenges that we have remain classified when they need, in our view, need not be classified. And I would argue, madam secretary in the realm of space, the challenges that we face in space and have to address the American people don't understand what they are simply because that information and what they need to hear and see in order to make decisions to support the types of investments we're talking about, just on available to them. I think that it is a fine line about what do you reveal, what don't you reveal, but I think when you look at some of the public perception based on, we have inadequate military or we have a too large military, the American people haven't had the opportunity to have this discussion to where you can have a more informed debate.

Starr: So then, I just want to point out one of the slides to everybody to take a look at in this survey it found clearly the majority of Americans felt that the size of the military is just about right perhaps a different question is, the capabilities of the military and making that leap ahead been able to deal with it today. While you make the leap ahead to China and Russia that are developing hypersonic missiles that general heighten the head of strat comes says, he's got no defense against is me ...

Wilson: I always have a problem with these kinds of surveys because I, before I was returned to federal service, I was a college president, Western South Dakota. I can tell you that the people in Rapid City South Dakota today even just 20 miles away from Ellsworth space are not seized with the defense the country today. They're not thinking about whether it's big enough for small enough, they count on the Congress and the Pentagon and the Defense Department to steward our nation's defense. I worry about the Congress and I'm worried about it when I was in it, about the determination to make sure that we adequately fund defense and if you look at the decline in defense and as a percentage of the size of the federal budget over the years, I think you can see that gradual deterioration. Now you're worried about your kids get into school on time and health insurance whether you should apply for that new job and they depend on us until it's too late ... and then it matters to them.

Starr: Right. I was just gonna say, "until God forbid" It's September 11 somewhere in the world. Because they think, right. I mean, that's and hope, hopefully that ...

Wilson: I don't blame Americans for that. I understand it completely. We are such a wealthy country. We are so fortunate in World War Two, one in 10 American served in uniform. So every third house on the block had a blue star in the window. Today, it's two in 1000. So if your son or daughter is serving in the military, you have to go 167 houses to find another family who is personally feeling connected or at stake. That's how wealthy and fortunate we are as a country. But the rest of us have to support those men and women and make sure they have what they need to win.

Edelman: I think we have not done a very good job. We collectively in the Defense Committee of explaining to the public what Secretary Hagel said a few years ago that we quoted in 2014 National Defense panel report which was that are, "qualitative margin of



superiority over these adversaries was shrinking at an alarmingly fast rate.” And I think our panel looked at it and was actually even well informed people were taken aback by how rapidly it's shrinking. I think there's a lot of complacency in the public, assuming that we have a superiority that we no longer really have. And it's all the trend lines unless they're reversed, are only going to make things worse. This, I think imposes on us requirement to explain this to public, and I think we thought our report was a step in that direction. We consciously tried to draft this in a way that's accessible to the lay person that they can read it and understand it without a lot of jargon, and with some pretty explicit scenarios suggesting what could happen that might be really, really bad. I think we've lost the ability to think after 25 years of, sort of uncontested power in the world that we've lost the ability to think of how bad things can really get.

**Starr:** Stop right there for both of you. And then I'll come back to the Secretary, let's start with you Gary Roughead, could the US, do you agree with the Secretary of Defense at lunch today? Could the US without question, win against Russia and China? How big with the risk be. How bad would it be? Could you when?

**Roughead:** I would say in a way it depends on where you are and what you're trying to do? I think as Eric mentioned, the capability gap is closing more than we would like it. But I think it's also important to be mindful of capacities. In other words, how much stuff do we have because I think in the type of conflict that we're talking about with Russia and with China. The military will be faced with loss of capital assets that they haven't had to deal with in the Middle East. To think that we are going to go into the air defenses of China particularly in areas for example the Taiwan scenario that we call out and think that we are going to go in there and having a Maculate air War, I think is nuts.

**Roughead:** To think that we will be able to move ships around in that area without losing any to submarines, bad assumption. Consequently, that's when the awareness of the American people becomes important because we have not lost a crew in combat since World War Two. Air losses in numbers that we sustained even in Vietnam. We can't just think it's all about capabilities, which I we tend to get captured by that, capacity matters. And it's going to take a level of effort for, particularly with regard to China and air and maritime. And then I would argue, in Europe in a Russian scenario, our ground forces are going to be stressed in ways that they haven't seen before. I would say depends, but we don't have the margins that I would like to say to guarantee a win.

**Starr:** Eric.

**Edelman:** No, I agree. And one of the things we wrestled with on the commission was, and again, it gets it really gets back to the question of adequately resourcing the department and when we say that, I mean some of it is the top line but I want to stress one of the points we made is, it's not just the top line, it's making sure that we have predictable Funding which the department can adequately use because

PART 2 OF 3 ENDS [00:32:04]

**Edelman:** ... funding which the department can adequately use because we've had this herky jerky, every couple of years we get a bipartisan budget amendment. In the intervening period we have a series of CRs, which make, as I'm sure Secretary Wilson will be only too happy to tell you, make it extremely difficult to operate because of the limits that

come with CRs, both the numerical limits but also the inability to have new starts with money from CRs, etc.

Edelman: It makes it extremely difficult. The danger of inadequately funding this strategy is that we will short change both the capability and the capacity issues and will do a bad job of both. The most dangerous place for the country to be, in my view, is to pretend that we can do all these things that Secretary Wilson outlined that we're supposed to do under this strategy and actually not have the wherewithal to do them.

Edelman: That ultimately ends up being a strategy of bluff, and some day someone will call our bluff, and the cost will be as Secretary Mattis quoted in his remarks today, not just some abstraction about the international order, it will be paid for in lives.

Starr: Secretary Wilson, I know that one of your strategies to deal with this dilemma that we're setting forth here is that the Air Force, I suppose like the other services, but you're working on the Air Force, has to move faster. I'd like to ask you, talk about that for a minute. That helps you not be, I suppose, doing just what you need to do today but thinking about what you need to do.

Wilson: Yeah. One of the elements of reform that we've been asked to look at and are implementing very rapidly is that we've got to buy things faster and smarter. We can't wait for ten years to develop a new capability. The Congress has given us new authorities to do this, prototyping, experimentation authorities, and contracting authorities. We're moving forward with these very aggressively.

Wilson: We set ourselves a goal seven months ago in the Air Force. We were going to strip a hundred years out of our procurement plans. A hundred years. We're going to strip it out and we're going to do it within 12 months. We are, as of this week, we're at 67 years. We have taken advantage of new prototyping authorities to very rapidly get capability tested and potentially to the war fighter.

Wilson: I see your head of Space and Mission Systems Center here, General Thompson. He has been one of the most aggressive at using new authorities, and in January, set up a consortium to try and get small and innovative companies to work with the Air Force. 228 companies are now part of that consortium. 75% of them are companies that never have done business with the Air Force before. We've let 34 contracts through that consortium in the first ten months. The average time from solicitation to contract signature is 90 days.

Wilson: We need to do more business like this. Just last week we set ourselves a goal to do 40 contracts in 40 hours. We actually did 104 at AFWERX, our innovation cell in Austin. In March, we are going to have a pitch day for the United States Air Force. We're going to put out some of our toughest problems. Give us a five page paper. Don't do 150 page proposal. Five page paper on your concept to solve one of our wicked hard problems. For the best and most interesting ones, we're going to invite you to a pitch day. We're putting \$40 million into this. Come do your pitch and you can walk out that day with a contract and your first payment swiped on a government credit card. We are inviting primes as well as angel investors to come and listen to the pitches.

Wilson: We are determined to get innovation into the United States Air Force for a reason. We are going to out innovate and defeat any adversary so that they will never want to take on the United States Air Force.

Starr: Can you tell us what a couple of those wicked hard problems are?

Wilson: Just some of the ones-

Starr: Or just of the things that have your attention.

Wilson: Sure. Last week at AFWERX, there were some initial ones that we did in 3D printing, we did some on cyber, we did some on specialty materials, some on some of our development operations in computing for command and control. The first set of them are probably going to focus on some intelligence surveillance, reconnaissance, and command and control problems. They will be areas where we need to do some rapid innovation.

Starr: As we begin to sort of wrap up here, Eric, I want to come back to you for minute and Admiral Roughead. I know in your report one of the things that grabbed everyone's attention was you spoke about your concerns, I want to make sure I get this right, that there was currently perhaps too much focus on uniform military senior influence, oversight, decision making, and there needed to be a bit more back towards this civilian control, senior official oversight. Tell us what you found and why you came to that conclusion. Then, I'll ask the Secretary to conclude by giving us her view about where she thinks all this stands right now.

Edelman: I'll start. I know Gary has some very strong views about this as well. Let me say what our recommendation was not about. First, it was not a criticism in any way, shape, or form of Secretary Mattis or General Dunford. This has been a problem that's been growing for a long time. A lot of it has to do more with the civilian side in some ways than the military side. What do I mean by that?

Edelman: Professor Edwin Corwin, who is the great constitutional expert, once said that the constitution is an invitation to struggle between the legislative and executive branches over the control of foreign policy. In my view, the National Security Act of 1947 is an invitation between uniform military and civilians to struggle over the control of defense and national security policy. It means that there's got to be an inherent, healthy tension managed in a constructive way.

Edelman: I think one of the things that's happened over the last few years is, when I was Under Secretary, we had routinely a 25% vacancy rate in OSD policy. A difficulty of filling positions, too much personnel churn on the civilian side. That inevitably leads to an imbalance in how the process works. I think what we're saying is some attention needs to be given to making sure that we have balance in the process so that the tensions which are inevitable can be managed in the most productive, constructive way for the nation.

Roughead: What I would add is, if you ask me, I think this imbalance began back in 1986 with the passage of the Goldwater and Nichols Act that began, not intended, but began to create large military staffs on top of which we began to insist on a higher level of professional military education and advanced degrees within our military. As you take a look at what

Eric has described and then you see mass building within military staffs, very capable people, a culture of moving very quickly, that has changed the balance.

Roughead: We are more than willing to send a military officer off to professional military education advanced degree. What about the young civilian policy person? What is offered to them? How do we enhance their intellectual capacity? I think that also is a factor in drawing more people into an organization that values them and is willing to invest in them.

Roughead: There's been a change in how we manage the uniform force. I would argue along Eric's lines, we've made it much more difficult and less attractive for people to come in and serve in a civilian capacity.

Starr: Do you feel that way? Can you attract and recruit the senior civilians that you want into the highest-

Roughead: I could, Barbara. Mid, and I would say seniors.

Starr: Okay. Good point.

Roughead: You need to build the seed core.

Starr: Right, right.

Wilson: Each of the services is a little bit different in this regard and how things are organized. I would say that in the Air Force one of the things that's been interesting to me is under the statute, the service Secretary has all of the authority. The Chief of Staff has tremendous influence. If you work together constructively you can get a lot done.

Wilson: As a service Secretary, I would be unwise not to ask for military advice. I generally get very good advice. We have a very good, and I think healthy, tension at the moment in the Air Force that makes the whole service better. We were able to attract some exceptional Assistant Secretaries into the Air Force that I would match against any in the history of the service. They are just topnotch people as civilian leaders.

Wilson: I would agree with you though, Admiral, that we need to look at the development of the civil service, not the part-timers like me who come in for a bit, but the civil service, and making sure that we invest in young civil servants as much as we do our young officers and enlisted.

Wilson: The one thing I would say is we did find a gap in engineering and science ability and expertise in the Air Force. We're heavily dependent upon it. One of the reasons is, in the wake of sequester, the Air Force stopped its summer intern program. If you're not recruiting interns in college, you're never going to recruit them in as first year employees.

Wilson: We re-started it last summer. We had 450 college interns. Three quarters of them were engineers and scientists, and some of them will be coming in this next summer as employees of the United States Air Force.

Edelman: Barbara, I know you want to move on to questions from the audience, but I just wanted to pick up on one thing that Secretary Wilson said. She correctly said that the service chiefs have plenty of authority in Title 10. I agree with that. I would say the same on the policy side.

Edelman: I don't think we need the Congress to legislate new authorities for the Under Secretary of Defense for policy. We just need the policy folks to be executing the authorities they already have. I'm not suggesting John Rood is not doing that, but I just think it's important to bear that in mind.

Starr: Let me wrap up with one ... we had a couple of questions from the audience, but let me wrap up with one that is the one I should be asking that someone in the audience, thank you, has asked. It's for the Secretary. Given the national defense strategy, given the Air Force strategy, are there any Air Force programs, procurements, or plans that may have appeared necessary in the past that are now overtaken by these strategies and are no longer affordable or necessary? Is there something that you don't need to be doing or a program you don't need?

Wilson: Yes.

Edelman: I love those kind of answers.

Wilson: No. The way ... Those of you who have worked in the Pentagon and many of you have or are now, there's an annual process we go through in developing our budget. We did a baseline. We did a zero base review of our budget that Matt Donovan, our Under Secretary, did to identify programs that we no longer need to do or were not adding value for the money that we were spending.

Wilson: You start out there and then you start to build a budget based on the strategy and the missions that we have to accomplish. I think the prioritization of the return to great power competition has identified things we need to invest in.

Wilson: The real question is, are we going to be able to reduce our level of effort against violent extremism? Is the combatant command going to be comfortable with lowering that level of commitment? If we can't do that, if we can't ... you know, you think about it, I've got roughly eight squadrons in the Middle East, we've got eight fighter squadrons recovering from being in the Middle East, and eight squadrons getting ready to go to the Middle East. We only have 56 fighter squadrons left in the United States Air Force. We cannot continue this high level of effort and get prepared for a high level fight. The question is, are they going to reduce their level of demand?

Starr: Well, now we can all rest easy. It's all solved. Thank you, all three of you, very much. As always, a really terrific discussion. Thank you for the audience for sticking with us. We really appreciate it.

PART 3 OF 3 ENDS [00:45:17]