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**Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**

Prepared Statement of Shawn Brimley

Vice President and Director of Studies, Center for a New American Security

Thank you Chairwomen Roby, Ranking Member Tsongas and members of the committee. I am honored to testify today on the important topic of the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). I had the privilege of serving as the lead drafter for the 2010 QDR, but I want to make clear up-front that I was not a senior decision-maker but rather one of many action officers participating in the year-long review. My comments reflect my personal views, not those of the Department of Defense (DOD) or the Center for a New American Security.

My comments are organized along several lines of approach: the strategic environment; the purpose and role of the QDR; key issues for the 2014 QDR; and the critical role of Congress during a QDR cycle.

The Strategic Environment

The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review will occur in a strategic environment quite different than the one the Obama administration inherited in early 2009. The global economy, though still uncertain, no longer teeters on the brink of collapse. The 100,000 U.S. troops that were fighting in Iraq are home. A transition strategy is underway in Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden is dead. Great power relations are stable.

President Obama's first term included several challenges that have carried over and will frame U.S. foreign policy for at least the next four years. Today's security environment features a Middle East and North Africa roiled by political change. The so-called Arab Spring is, at root, a story of people rising up to claim their rightful agency after decades of authoritarianism—even so, the implications remain unclear. North Korea's nuclear test and Iran's continued investments in a nuclear program keep the prospect of nuclear-armed pariah states on the front-burner. The war in Afghanistan may be winding down, but it is not over so long as tens of thousands of our men and women in uniform remain in harm's way. It is in America's interest to remain the security partner of choice in Afghanistan as part of a sustainable counterterrorism strategy and to influence the development of Afghan security forces.

The most important geopolitical story remains the rise of both India, the world's most populous democracy, and China, the world's most populous country. As India rises and looks increasingly east toward Asian markets, and as China rises and increasingly looks south into the South China Sea and southwest into the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean—their interaction will cause powerful ripples in the global security environment that we must factor into U.S. statecraft.¹

¹ See Robert Kaplan's, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (New York: Random House, 2010), and also "The Geography of Chinese Power," in *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2010).

This security environment will also be shaped by several powerful underlying trends of which I would like to highlight two:

1. *An energy revolution centered in the United States.* The pace of recent advances in domestic energy production has put the United States on a path to become the largest global oil producer by about 2020 and North America as a net oil exporter by 2030.² This development—due largely to rapid advances in hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling—will have profound geopolitical consequences that are only now becoming apparent. Policymakers must contemplate the future of U.S. defense strategy in the Middle East as the vast majority of exported oil shifts to Asia instead of North America; the resultant consequences for key U.S. alliances and partners around the world; and the diplomatic, trade, and defense investments that should begin today to prepare for this rapidly approaching shift. How this generation of U.S. leaders addresses these issues will have a generational impact on the international system and on the practice of American statecraft.
2. *The continued proliferation of advanced technology.* The scale and breadth of the technology available to state and non-state actors continues to increase. What Fareed Zakaria called the “democratization of violence” a decade ago has only accelerated.³ Rapid advances in global navigation and surveillance technology coupled with a significant diffusion of long-range, precise, automated, and increasingly unmanned technology will pose significant challenges to U.S. defense strategy.⁴ Systems and operational concepts long considered bastions of comparative advantage may become “wasting assets”—particularly capabilities designed to project U.S. military power in contested air and maritime domains.⁵ The coming years will see the continued spread of unmanned and autonomous systems, powerful offensive cyberspace tools, directed energy capabilities, widely available 3D printing platforms, human performance enhancement technologies, and a miniaturization of weapons spurred by advances in nanotechnology. It is not at all clear that the United States will lead in these areas.

The fiscal environment is also an important component of this strategic picture. The looming prospect of sequestration—a particularly astrategic method of reducing the defense budget—will reduce the readiness of U.S. military forces and thus their ability to properly secure U.S. interests while preparing for a range of

² See International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2012*. Also see Elizabeth Rosenthal, “U.S. to be World’s Top Oil Producer in 5 Years, Report Says,” *The New York Times* (November 12, 2012), and *A National Strategy for Energy Security*, a 2013 report by the Energy Security Leadership Council.

³ Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003): p.16.

⁴ See Michael Horowitz, *The Diffusion of Military Power* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁵ See Andrew Krepinevich, “The Pentagon’s Wasting Assets,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2009). Some have argued that aircraft carriers employing relatively short-range tactical fighter aircraft fit into this category. See Henry Hendrix and Noel Williams, “Twilight of the Superfluous Carrier,” *Proceedings Magazine* (May 2011). Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jonathan Greenert has written on “the limits of stealth design in getting platforms close enough to use short-range weapons.” See Jonathan Greenert, “Payloads over Platforms: Charting a New Course,” *Proceedings Magazine* (July 2012).

plausible contingencies. While I believe that the U.S. defense budget can be responsibly reduced by a reasonable margin given the massive increase in spending over the last decade, the failure to give the Secretary of Defense the ability to be precise and targeted with these cuts amounts to an unnecessary self-inflicted strategic wound.

The combination of a changing geopolitical environment; accelerating energy and technological revolutions; and a much more constrained discretionary spending picture will combine to make the 2014 QDR perhaps the most important review since the 1993 Bottom-Up Review.⁶

Purpose and Role of the 2014 QDR

QDRs are best understood as “snapshots” in time along the entire arc of the post-Cold War era.⁷ These snapshots should be viewed together—from the Base Force and the Bottom-Up Review to the previous QDRs. When viewed this way, recurring contours of inquiry come into sharp relief:

- How to best assess the sufficiency of the current and planned force;
- How to understand core missions and how those missions relate to one another;
- How to address lowering entry barriers and access to increasingly advanced technology;
- How to understand U.S. security commitments to key allies and partners;
- How to conceive of America’s forward deployed forces and overseas bases;
- How to account for stability operations in doctrine and force sizing; and
- How to preserve America’s ability to project power given the spread of anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities.

Beyond the above relatively constant lines of inquiry, individual QDRs are also highly dependent on other factors, chief among them the disposition and priorities of the Secretary of Defense. While QDRs are in the most important sense an obligation to Congress, most Secretaries of Defense also consider QDRs as an important tool to affect positive change in DOD.

The principal challenge with QDRs is that they have generally attempted to satisfy multiple purposes. QDRs are often judged by their ability to be:

1. A response to specific Congressional legislation;
2. An enterprise-wide long-term strategy document;
3. An important near-term lever for the current budget cycle;
4. A vehicle for the Secretary of Defense to advance particularly important initiatives; and
5. A critical public relations and strategic communications document.

⁶ The 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance was a consequential document but it was not designed to be as detailed as the four previous QDRs nor the two reviews done at the end of the Cold War—the so-called “Base Force” in 1991 and the Bottom-Up Review in 1993—all of which contained implementation guidance and specific recommendations on force structure.

⁷ Points in this section draw on comments I delivered on January 25, 2013 during a conference at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

No QDR has ever been able to fully satisfy all five of these expectations. In 2009, Secretary Robert Gates made a choice that the 2010 review would be “a wartime QDR” designed to help him focus the Department on ensuring that the tens of thousands of U.S. troops in harm’s way in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere were given the resources and attention they needed and deserved. This is why the 2010 QDR prioritized “prevailing in today’s wars,” and focused on so-called “enabling capabilities”—manned and unmanned intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, rotary-wing assets, and counterinsurgency capabilities—that tended to be overlooked by a Pentagon focused on plausible but hypothetical future conventional wars.⁸ I believed then and now that *when the United States is actively at war*, the QDR process should be used to assist the men and women in harm’s way as much as possible.

The tension—as existed in 2009 and 2010—was between a Congressional requirement to focus on an ideal force structure 20 years into the future with no resource limitations, and a Secretary of Defense focused on prevailing in ongoing conflicts and managing the most complex budget in the world.⁹ Some might argue the Pentagon can do both, but the same senior civilian and military leaders charged with executing a QDR are the same figures the Secretary relies on for advice on how to prevail in ongoing conflicts and support the troops in harm’s way. I believe the 2010 QDR did a reasonably good job at identifying ways to help resource U.S. troops at war and in setting parameters to guide the evolution of the force over time.¹⁰

This tension will be much reduced in the 2014 QDR. While U.S. troops remain in harm’s way in Afghanistan, the transition strategy has been set and it is proper to shift more fully toward the question of how to sustain and enhance the best all-volunteer military in the world over the long haul. In order to enable this focus the 2014 QDR should deprioritize the perceived need to be a public relations document—delineating in detail core U.S. interests; overall defense strategy; the importance of particular alliances and partnerships; and various other perceived requirements—and provide Congress a 20-year vision coupled with a detailed examination of how that vision can be best applied given constrained resources. The essence of good strategy, after all, is an alignment of ends, ways, and means.

Recommended Areas of Focus for the 2014 QDR

A core challenge for any defense review is the powerful gravitational pull toward the perceived need to cover everything. This QDR cannot afford to be a mile wide and an inch deep, and it need not be. This will be a second-term QDR that has a very detailed predecessor and, more importantly, a recently concluded strategic review overseen in detail by the Commander-in-Chief. The 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG) is an effective document that sets clear strategic priorities for a Pentagon facing

⁸ A good impartial assessment of the 2010 QDR can be found in Stephen Daggett, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2010: Overview and Implications for National Security Planning* (Congressional Research Service report R41250: May 2010).

⁹ The final report of the QDR Independent Panel contained similar tensions, lauding the QDR’s focus on today’s wars but criticizing the report’s lack of a clear 20-year view. See Stephen Hadley and William Perry (co-chairs), *The QDR in Perspective: The Final Report of the QDR Independent Panel* (U.S. Institute of Peace, July 2010).

¹⁰ See 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, p. 39-45.

constrained budgets. The 2014 QDR therefore should not retread ground plowed by previous efforts, but rather use the DSG as the baseline strategy and focus on how best to implement the strategy over a 20-year period at varying plausible levels of resources and risk. I believe the 2014 QDR can best achieve this by focusing in part on the following strategic issues:

Preserve Investment in Game-Changing Technologies. Absent extraordinary leadership and vision, in constrained budget environments the natural inclination of each military service will be to preserve capabilities it considers “core” to its unique history, traditions, and threat assessments.¹¹ The current budget environment reflects a relatively “normal” defense drawdown by historical standards, so most analysts expect continued defense reductions over the next decade absent a major strategic shock. The biggest challenge in this environment will be to ensure that investments in “generation-after-next” technologies continue. Congress should ensure that programs designed to sustain the ability to project and sustain U.S. military power over long ranges into contested air and maritime theatres are prioritized and protected. A good example of this is the ongoing attempt to develop a carrier-based unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV) that can provide real capability in contested environments.¹² It is unclear whether this capability will be prioritized in the face of continued budget pressure, or whether it will wither on the vine in favor of developing yet another manned fighter aircraft after the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

Protecting investments in game-changing technologies (and the experimentation required) in very constrained budget environments has been done before. The so-called “interwar years” of the 1920s and 1930s saw America and other nations develop, refine, and field tanks, long-range bombers, radar, submarines, and aircraft carriers. If these innovations could be achieved in the context of the greatest economic downturn in history—the Great Depression—surely we can find a way to prioritize and preserve innovation today.¹³

Reverse the Declining Value of the Defense Dollar: The 2014 QDR must deal forthrightly with the largest budget challenge—the ballooning cost of military personnel accounts. As several leading analysts have concluded, if the defense budget is held constant in real terms and personnel costs continue to rise at the same rate as the last decade, the entire defense budget will be consumed by personnel accounts before the year 2040.¹⁴ As retired Major General Arnold Punaro has colorfully put it, “We’re on the path in the

¹¹ See Carl Builder, *Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1989).

¹² The recent testing of the Northrup Grumman-built X47B should continue—to include carrier landings and aerial refueling. For the most detailed argument in favor of developing a carrier-based unmanned precision strike platform, see Robert Work and Thomas Ehrhard, *Range Persistence and Stealth: The Case for a Carrier-Based Unmanned Combat Air System* (Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2007).

¹³ Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, eds., *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Clark Murdock, *Planning for a Deep Defense Drawdown* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012), and Todd Harrison, *Strategy in a Year of Fiscal Uncertainty* (Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2012). The report of the QDR Independent Panel came to similar conclusions.

Department of Defense to turn it into a benefits company that may occasionally kill a terrorist.”¹⁵ A close second to personnel costs include the massive overhead in the Pentagon, defense agencies and headquarters staffs.¹⁶ The 2014 QDR cannot be confined to defense strategy and force structure alone—to be truly meaningful it must identify specific ways to flatten the cost curve of personnel, overhead, health care, and infrastructure. This will require elements of DOD not typically involved in the year-long minutia of a QDR to be structurally integrated into all aspects of the review.¹⁷

Enhance Overseas Presence: The 2010 QDR helped to accelerate what has become known as the “rebalancing” strategy toward Asia. The review concluded that U.S. defense posture needed to remain operationally resilient in Northeast Asia, but also more geographically distributed into Southeast Asia. This insight helped to accelerate discussions with Australia and Singapore that resulted in a growing contingent of U.S. Marines rotationally deployed to Darwin, Australia and U.S. Navy Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) being slated to operate out of Singapore on a rotational basis.¹⁸ These initial moves reflected not only the strategic need for increased U.S. presence in Southeast Asia, but also an emerging realization that, over the long term, forward air and maritime presence can be more affordable than constantly deploying air and maritime forces over transoceanic distances. I believe that if the United States is to fully resource the “rebalancing” strategy in Asia over a 20-year timeframe and also retain credible air and maritime deterrence in the Persian Gulf, DOD must continue to assess in detail the nature of forward presence and creative ways to sustain and enhance it.¹⁹

Provide Detailed Risk Assessment: The 2014 QDR report should provide Congress with a detailed assessment of the missions required under the defense strategy and the force structure required to execute them under several combinations of plausible scenarios. Having met the basic requirement to provide a force structure unconstrained by the current budget, the 2014 QDR ought to then provide various alternative force structures which can be plausibly sustained given the current and expected budget environment. The QDR should then identify how these alternative force structures would perform under the scenario combinations and the different ways each alternative would pose strategic, operational, force management, and institutional risk to the overall defense strategy. In a way not dissimilar to the 1993 Bottom-Up Review, the 2014 QDR should recommend to Congress a force structure that best balances prudent budget choices with risk to the proposed defense strategy. As I will outline below, this element of the QDR should be classified.

¹⁵ Quoted in Tamara Keith, “Health Care Costs New Threat to U.S. Military,” National Public Radio (June 7, 2011).

¹⁶ See Michèle Flournoy, “The Right Way to Cut Pentagon Spending,” *The Wall Street Journal* (February 4, 2013).

¹⁷ The usual QDR players tend to be: OSD Policy, AT&L, and CAPE; the strategy and force structure directorates in the military services and the Joint Staff; and the various combatant commands. Other elements of DOD that focus on military personnel, health care, retirement, and infrastructure tend to not be involved until the very end of the process, if at all.

¹⁸ This logic also applied to U.S. defense strategy in the Mediterranean, where four U.S. Navy Aegis ships will be forward deployed to Rota, Spain.

¹⁹ See Shawn Brimley and Ely Ratner, “Smart Shift,” *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2013), and also Michèle Flournoy and Janine Davidon, “Obama’s New Global Posture,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2012).

The Important Role of Congress

Congress plays a critical important role in any QDR cycle. The frequency, nature, and quality of its oversight during the review have a powerful impact on the final product. I recommend Members consider the following recommendations during their oversight of this QDR cycle:

Empower a Bipartisan QDR Independent Panel (QDR IP): Congress and the Secretary of Defense should carefully consider appointments to the panel, biasing toward former policymakers with experience at the highest levels of the Pentagon, and those with a bipartisan pedigree. Also important will be the selection of a small support staff with previous QDR experience. The staff should also be balanced to ensure a bipartisan ethos. The QDR IP should be provided with the material necessary to fully execute its charter, to include: the QDR terms of reference; the set of scenarios used for force sizing and shaping; the methodology used to assess strategic and operational risk associated with various options; and a detailed assessment of the drivers of military personnel costs and plausible options under consideration to reduce their rates of growth. The panelists and support staff should also be provided with detailed monthly classified briefings by OSD, Joint Staff, and Service representatives. The panel's staff should be provided a secure space in the Pentagon, and reasonable administrative support. The panelists should also be expected to brief Congressional leaders and the Secretary of Defense on their findings throughout the process, not simply after the QDR is published in 2014. Led, staffed, and resourced properly, the QDR Independent Panel could be a valuable tool not only for Congress but also for the Secretary of Defense.

Require an Integrated Classified Review: Previous QDRs have made use of classified materials submitted to Congress, but the 2014 QDR ought to formally integrate one or more classified sections into the review itself. One of the biggest challenges in the 2010 QDR was explaining, in an unclassified format, the force sizing and shaping construct that informed the force structure recommendations. The use of integrated sets of contingency scenarios overlaid on a so-called "steady-state" global security posture was a powerful analytic engine that helped Pentagon officials consider various alternatives, but this was difficult to fully convey in the unclassified QDR report.²⁰ It is worth considering whether to classify certain sections of the report in order to provide Congress with the best possible integrated product. I believe this would also have a positive secondary effect at the Pentagon by obviating the need for policymakers to reargue elements of the unclassified QDR when drafting follow-on classified implementation guidance such as the Guidance for the Employment of the Force (GEF), and the relevant program guidance for the budget cycle following the QDR's release.

Require the QDR to be Resource-Informed: One of the bigger issues in recent years has been the argument that QDRs need to be totally unconstrained by budget pressure. It would be a mistake for QDRs to be entirely unconstrained, as that would surely exacerbate the gap between strategy and resources. This approach would ultimately result in QDRs skewing toward fantasy rather than reality.

²⁰ The best description of this can be found in Kathleen Hicks and Sam Brannen, "Force Planning in the 2010 QDR," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Issue 59, 4th quarter 2010).

At the same time the QDR cannot simply be a near-term budget drill. A reasonable approach would be for Congress to make clear that it expects the 2014 QDR to outline the size and shape of U.S. military forces required to execute the most stressing overlapping set of *plausible* scenarios under consideration. The QDR could then develop a set of budget-informed force structures that could then be tested in similar ways to determine which one best balances risk across the 20-year time period. Given the relatively advantageous position the United States is in today, it would be prudent to accept a modest degree of risk in the near-term to ensure that U.S. military forces are investing in the right capabilities and structure to operate effectively in the more challenging future security environment.

Conclusion

In closing, let me express my admiration to the Committee for its attention to this important issue. Quadrennial Defense Reviews are complicated processes with many dozens of important players—all with particular views on how to create and sustain the best defense strategy for the United States and the military forces required to succeed. I believe this particular QDR will be the most important since the 1993 Bottom-Up Review, as it comes at the end of a prolonged period of war, the rise of new powers, and the need to make tough, clear-headed choices in a constrained budget environment. I am confident that with the active support of Congress, the Department of Defense will rise to the occasion. Thank you.

Biography

Shawn Brimley

Vice President and Director of Studies, Center for a New American Security

Shawn Brimley is Vice President and Director of Studies at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) where he oversees the center's research and serves on the executive leadership team. Mr. Brimley rejoined CNAS after serving in the Obama Administration from February 2009 to October 2012 most recently as Director for Strategic Planning on the National Security Council staff at the White House. He also served as Special Advisor to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy at the Pentagon from 2009 to 2011, where he focused on the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, overseas basing and posture, and long-range strategy development. In 2012, he was awarded the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service and in 2010 he was awarded the Office of the Secretary of Defense Medal for Exceptional Public Service.

Mr. Brimley was a founding member of CNAS in 2007 and was the inaugural recipient of the 1Lt. Andrew Bacevich Jr. Memorial Fellowship. He has also worked at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Mr. Brimley has been published in a variety of venues, including the *New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy*. Educated at Queen's University and George Washington University, his research interests include U.S. national security strategy and defense policy, the impact of emerging technology on U.S. strategic choices, and the evolution of America's global defense posture. Mr. Brimley is a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He lives in Washington with his wife Marjorie and their two children, Claire and Austin.