



# **Eighth Annual National Security Conference**

## *Opening Remarks and Introductions*

**The Honorable Michèle Flournoy**  
**Chief Executive Officer, CNAS**

**June 11, 2014**  
**9:00 a.m.-9:10 a.m.**

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MICHELE FLOURNOY: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am Michèle Flournoy, the cofounder and now newly returned as CEO of the Center for a New American Security. And it's my great honor and privilege to welcome you to the eighth annual CNAS national security conference.

You know, the first time I stood up here was in June of 2007. Kurt Campbell and I had cofounded CNAS in February of that year. And about 7:00 in the morning, we were sitting up here biting our fingernails, asking ourselves whether anybody else would actually come. But, fortunately, we had our "Field of Dreams" moment. We built it and you all came. And since then this conference has been our signature event, getting bigger and better every year.

This year, we have a different problem. We have over 2,000 people who have signed up for this conference. So congratulations to you who've actually gotten a seat and we'll try not to alarm the fire marshal.

But I think the reason we have such a turnout this year is that we are convening at a really critical moment in our history – a critical and challenging and consequential time for the United States of America. Overseas, we are facing an increasingly challenging, complex, truly daunting international security environment. We see the rise of new powers like China displaying increasingly assertive behavior and challenging the rules-based international order that has kept stability in Asia-Pacific for many decades. We see the resurgence of a more assertive Russia willing to coerce and even invade its neighbors. We see ongoing change, turmoil, instability in the Middle East and the morphing of al Qaeda to affiliates from – metastasizing from Mali, to Somalia, to Yemen, now to Syria and back to Iraq. We see the continued proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and advanced technologies that mean that more and more lethal means of violence will be in the hands of non-state actors. We see an increasingly congested and contested global commons, particularly the domains of cyberspace and space. And I could go on and on.

And here at home, we're also facing very profound challenges. What was once the center of gravity in American politics – the pragmatic center – has now become a virtual desert, de-populated, on almost a no-man's land. We are suffering from an unprecedented period of political paralysis that is doing real damage to the United States both at home and abroad.

Here at home, it's preventing us from reaching the comprehensive budget deal that we all know is necessary to accelerate our economic recovery and growth, a comprehensive deal that would put everything on the table – entitlement reform, tax reform, investments in what will drive the future economic prosperity of this country, a deal that would create the predictable investment climate that would bring the billions of dollars that are sitting on the sidelines back into our economy.

Abroad, our political paralysis is also affecting perceptions of American strength, leadership and resolve among our allies and among potential adversaries. And this is contributing to a pernicious, although I believe erroneous, narrative of U.S. decline. So are you depressed yet?

But there are opportunities. And I believe we are all here today because we believe those opportunities are substantial and they are real. They are rooted in the fact that our foundations as a

nation and as a global leader remain remarkably strong. The U.S. economy remains the most innovative, entrepreneurial and dynamic in the world. It is the envy of the world. The American energy revolution will not only reduce our dependence on foreign supplies; it will also grow our economy, grow jobs, and if we're smart about it, it will give us new tools of statecraft and new influence.

Demographics – we have a growing population. We have a remarkable diversity that is a core strength of our society. We have a higher education system that attracts the best and brightest from around the world. Our military remains the best fighting force of the world – the highest quality people, the best technology, the best operational experience, the most capable. We have an unrivaled network of alliances and partnerships around the world and an unparalleled leadership role in international institutions. And lastly, our ideals and our values are an inspiration to peoples around the world and they animate the very rules-based international order that is embraced by all but a few.

So, in short, the good news is the United States fundamentally remains positioned – uniquely positioned – to lead in the world. No other country can catalyze collective action to solve common problems the way we can. So the question is: how should we lead? And that is what this conference is all about today. It's about beginning to rebuild, step by step, plank by plank, person by person, the bipartisan consensus that we need to support our national security and to support a strong American role in the world. It's about developing strong, pragmatic and principled national security and defense policies that will protect and advance American interests now and in the future. Since its founding, that has been the mission of CNAS.

Today, that is our mission. We aim to elevate and frame the debate about the most important national security challenges and opportunities that we are facing as a nation. So we have a great agenda for you today, including the keynote address by U.S. National Security Adviser Susan Rice and a speech this morning by Representative Paul Ryan.

Let me just say that none of this would be possible without the very generous support of a number of our conference sponsors. And I'd like to just acknowledge them here: Palantir, Shell, the Asia Group, Beacon Global Strategies, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Deloitte, DigiLink, Finmeccanica, Huntington Ingalls Industries, L3, Latham and Watkins, PSAV, and Rolls Royce North America. So please join me in thanking them for making this possible. (Applause.)

And now I'm going to get off the stage and get out of the way and let the proceedings begin. To do that, I'd like to introduce to you the head of the CNAS Strategy and Statecraft Program, Julianne Smith. Most recently, Julianne ran our Europe Office in the Office of the Secretary of Defense in the Obama administration. She then went on in 2012 and 2013 to be the deputy national security adviser to Vice President Biden.

Please welcome Julianne Smith. (Applause.)