

Oct 14, 2021

Department of Defense  
OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND SECURITY REVIEW

**OPENING STATEMENT OF SASHA BAKER**  
**NOMINEE FOR DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Inhofe, Members of this Committee.

It is an honor to be before you today as President Biden's nominee for the position of Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy. I'm grateful to the President, Secretary Austin, and Undersecretary Kahl for their trust and confidence in me.

I want to thank my husband Sam, who is here with me today and who shares my deep commitment to the values this nation was founded upon. I also want to acknowledge my mother, who came to this country as a refugee and who taught me the importance of giving back; and my father, who enlisted in the Army in 1969 and who always considered his military service to be the formative experience of his life. He passed away earlier this year, but it is my honor to continue our family tradition of service.

The job of the Department of Defense is to deter adversaries and to fight and win the nation's wars should deterrence fail – in short, to keep Americans safe. There is no more sacred mission.

Today, we have entered a new era of strategic competition, and we must update our policies, our operations, our capabilities, and our workforce to meet the moment. There is no time to waste.

China is the pacing challenge for the Department. As the President's Interim National Security Guidance states, it is the only competitor capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.

To meet this challenge, we will need to invest in capabilities relevant not to the last fight but to future ones. We will need creative and agile operational concepts and plans that rapidly assimilate and take advantage of technological advances. We will need a high-end, combat-capable, and ready force that is forward positioned, distributed, and resilient. We will need to operate seamlessly across all domains. And we will need increased interoperability with strong and capable partners and allies proficient in their warfighting roles. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to support these requirements.

As the NSC's Senior Director for Strategic Planning, I have been tasked with drafting the President's national security strategy and coordinating it with our departments and agencies, as well as with our closest partners and allies. At the same time, the Department has been updating the National Defense Strategy, building on the strong foundation of the 2018 NDS to reflect new developments in the strategic environment and new insights about the intentions and capabilities of our adversaries. If confirmed, my first priority will be to help implement this NDS, with a focus on better integrating Policy's work with other DOD components, with our interagency partners, and with our allies.

Beyond implementing the NDS, if confirmed, I will also seek to support the Undersecretary in executing his priorities. These include rising to the challenge China poses. It means defeating the COVID-19 pandemic, which remains the most immediate threat to U.S. national security and to the health, safety and readiness of our men and women in uniform. We also continue to face a growing cyber threat from both state and non-state actors, including to our critical infrastructure, and the Department will need to continue to defend forward to protect its networks, while building the resilience necessary to deny our adversaries' ability to threaten our nation in this domain. Climate change represents another Department-wide focus, given its potential to drastically change the operational environment, and its current impact on our bases and facilities around the world. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring that Policy is best positioned to advance these priorities.

We have the greatest military in the world, but at the end of the day it's about people – both servicemembers and civilian employees. Policy is the beating heart of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the place where deep expertise and longstanding regional relationships meet next-generation approaches that integrate new concepts, ideas, and warfighting capabilities. The Policy organization has been challenged in recent years, and if confirmed in this role, I will seek to assist the Undersecretary in leading and renewing the organization – breaking down silos, facilitating communication and cooperative approaches, and improving effectiveness. My commitment to the workforce will be to focus relentlessly on organizational health and morale, so that Policy is postured to provide a strong, constructive civilian voice in the Department for years to come.

As a former Senate staffer, I have a deep appreciation for the critical role this body plays. I want to express my gratitude to the committee for its many decades of bipartisan, cooperative focus on the defense of our nation and for your thoughtful oversight of our military. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in a spirit of partnership to continue that tradition.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to your questions.